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Domestic abuse: Support for victims and survivors

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Summary

This paper explains the support available for victims and survivors of domestic abuse. This includes support from housing and social security agencies, and specialist domestic abuse support services such as Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) and refuges.

The paper primarily focuses on domestic abuse survivors in England. The Library has published a list of contact details for [organisations which assist victims of domestic abuse](#) across the UK. The paper does not cover support for victims and survivors during court proceedings or police procedures.

The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) received Royal Assent on 29 April 2021 but is not yet fully in force. It aims to “underpin a lasting culture change” leading to “[improved support for all victims of domestic abuse and the children who are affected by it](#)”.

Prevalence of domestic abuse

The [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) (CSEW) for the year ending March 2020 estimated that 5.5% of adults aged 16 to 74 had experienced domestic abuse in the last year. This equates to an estimated 7.3% of women and 3.6% of men aged 16 to 74.

20.8% of 16 to 74-year olds had experienced domestic abuse at some point since the age of 16 (27.6% of women and 13.8% of men).

[Galop](#), a LGBT+ anti-violence charity, emphasise that while domestic abuse disproportionately affects women, “it is nevertheless important to raise awareness and increase understanding that this is by no means the only circumstance in which it exists,” and support should be available for all victims and survivors.

General support for victims and survivors

Victims and survivors of domestic abuse may access support from multiple organisations. This could include housing authorities for temporary accommodation and help setting up a new home. Services provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) might also be relied upon to establish an independent income, alongside organisations offering financial support, including assistance with debt.

Local authorities and educational institutions are important for safeguarding and preventing abuse, and schools can provide support for child victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

Healthcare services respond to the physical and mental health impacts of domestic abuse and treat related issues, including substance misuse. Specialist domestic abuse support services are also increasingly provided in a healthcare setting, such as a hospital.

Specialist support for domestic abuse victims and survivors

Specialist domestic abuse support services provide tailored assistance to victims and survivors. These services are typically run by third sector organisations and include Independent Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence Advisers (IDVAs and ISVAs), refuges and helplines.

[Figures from the Office for National Statistics](#) show that the number of IDVAs and ISVAs has increased over the last decade in England. The number of domestic abuse helplines also increased during this time, while the number of refuges went down.

The availability of specialist support, such as IDVAs, varies across the country. In 2019, the domestic abuse charity SafeLives estimated that [London was the only region with the recommended number of IDVAs](#) for the population (108% coverage). Yorkshire and the Humber had the lowest percentage of coverage at 52%.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) will be brought into force in due course in line with the Government's [commencement schedule](#).

The [Domestic Abuse Commissioner](#), Nicole Jacobs, is tasked with helping to improve the quantity and quality of domestic abuse support services. The Commissioner is mapping the provision of services, a process expected to end by the end of 2021.

During the passage of the Domestic Abuse Bill, [the Domestic Abuse Commissioner supported an amendment](#) which would have placed a statutory duty on local authorities to provide community-based services as well as accommodation-based services. When explaining why the Government did not support the amendment, Baroness Williams said the Government was committed to consulting on the provision of community-based domestic abuse services in its planned consultation on a [new victims' law](#).

There are two Library papers on the Bill: [Domestic Abuse Bill 2019-21](#) (CBP8787) and [Domestic Abuse Bill 2019-21: Progress on the Bill](#) (CBP 8959).

Consultation on draft guidance

The Domestic Abuse Act requires local authorities to publish a [strategy for delivering support](#) in its area. To support this, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published [draft statutory guidance](#) on delivering support to victims in ‘safe accommodation’ in June 2021.

The consultation is currently open for submissions and states that [Tier One authorities](#) (county councils, metropolitan and unitary authorities and the Greater London Authority) should make clear how they plan to deliver services to meet the needs for all victims, based on their protected characteristics and “unique or complex needs... including sex, race, gender, language, religion, sexual orientation, age, state of health and disabilities.”

Expected strategies related to domestic abuse

In 2021, the Government is due to publish a new [Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2021-2024 \(VAWG\)](#), alongside a separate domestic abuse strategy. In response to a [Parliamentary Question](#), Victoria Atkins, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office, said “the two strategies will be complementary and work together to drive down VAWG”.

Related Library publications:

- [The role of healthcare services in addressing domestic abuse](#), May 2021
- [Domestic abuse and Covid-19: A year into the pandemic](#), May 2021
- [Support for victims of domestic abuse](#), April 2021
- [Domestic Abuse Bill 2019-21: Progress of the Bill](#), April 2021
- [Coronavirus: Domestic Abuse](#), April 2020

1 Introduction

The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) has introduced a statutory definition of domestic abuse for the first time. Behaviour of a person towards another is defined as domestic abuse if both people are aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and the behaviour is abusive.¹

- The definition encompasses people who have been in a relationship or are relatives.
- Abuse is defined as “physical or sexual abuse, violence or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse or psychological, emotional or other abuse.”
- Children are also defined as victims of domestic abuse if they “see, hear or experience the effects of abuse” and are either a relative of the adult subject to, or perpetrating, the abuse, or if one of the adults holds parental responsibility for the child. Abuse directed towards the child is defined as child abuse.

The [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) (CSEW) for the year ending March 2020 estimated that 5.5% of adults aged 16 to 74 had experienced domestic abuse in the last year. This equates to an estimated 7.3% of women and 3.6% of men aged 16 to 74. 20.8% of 16 to 74-year olds had experienced domestic abuse at some point since the age of 16 (27.6% of women and 13.8% of men).²

Victims and survivors of domestic abuse can access support from a variety of sources, including statutory agencies and specialist support services.

Domestic abuse support services can be categorised as ‘general’ and ‘specialist’ support services. General support services are offered by public authorities such as social services, health services and social security, which “provide long-term help and are not exclusively designed for the benefit of victims only but serve the public at large”.³

Specialist support services provide support and assistance tailored to the needs of victims and are not open to the public. They are often delivered by third sector organisations and examples include domestic abuse helplines and the provision of Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs).⁴

¹ [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#), section 1.

² On 19 July 2021 this was corrected to clarify the CSEW domestic abuse figures are population estimates and data are not published at respondent level as previously implied

³ Council of Europe, [Explanatory Report – CETS 210 – Violence against women and domestic violence](#), 2011, p23

⁴ [Ibid.](#)

The UK signed the '[Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#)', known as the Istanbul Convention, in 2012 and has been taking steps to ratify it, including the introduction of the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#).⁵

Parts of the Istanbul Convention are related to the provision of general and specialist support services. For example, Article 20 on general support services states:

- Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that victims have access to services facilitating their recovery from violence. These measures should include, when necessary, services such as legal and psychological counselling, financial assistance, housing, education, training and assistance in finding employment.
- Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that victims have access to health care and social services and that services are adequately resourced and professionals are trained to assist victims and refer them to the appropriate services.

Article 22 on specialist support services says:

- Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to provide or arrange for, in an adequate geographical distribution, immediate, short- and long-term specialist support services to any victim subjected to any of the acts of violence covered by the scope of this Convention.
- Parties shall provide or arrange for specialist women's support services to all women victims of violence and their children.

Article 23 of the convention relates to shelters and says parties should "provide for the setting-up of appropriate, easily accessible shelters in sufficient numbers to provide safe accommodation".

Article 24 sets out how 24/7 telephone helplines should be available free of charge to "provide advice to callers, confidentially or with due regard for their anonymity, in relation to all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention".

The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) received Royal Assent on 29 April 2021. The [impact assessment](#) said the legislation aims to "underpin a lasting culture change" leading to "improved support for all victims of domestic abuse and the children who are affected by it". The Act's provisions will be brought into force in "due course" in line with the Government's [commencement schedule](#).

⁵ HL Deb, [LGBT Community: Domestic Abuse](#), 24 November 2020, c131

When in force, the Domestic Abuse Act will introduce a new duty on Tier One authorities (county councils, metropolitan and unitary authorities, and the Greater London Authority) across England, relating to support for victims and their children within safe accommodation. The authorities will have to appoint a local partnership board, prepare and publish strategies based on a needs assessment and give effect to these strategies.⁶

It will also place a duty on Tier Two authorities (district, city and borough councils) to cooperate, “as far as reasonably practicable”, with their relevant Tier One authority.⁷

The [Domestic Abuse Commissioner](#), Nicole Jacobs, is tasked with helping to improve the quantity and quality of domestic abuse support services. The Commissioner is currently mapping the provision of services, a process which is expected to finish by the end of 2021.

During the passage of the Domestic Abuse Bill through Parliament, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner supported an amendment which would have placed a statutory duty on local authorities to provide community-based services.

In a [letter to the Prime Minister](#), Nicole Jacobs wrote that “around 70% of people experiencing domestic abuse” get support through community-based services, rather than through accommodation-based services such as refuges.⁸ The letter went on to say:

While the current duty in the Bill to provide a statutory underpinning for safe accommodation is extremely welcome, without a similar statutory underpinning in the Bill for the provision of specialist community-based services there is a risk that local commissioners may redistribute their funding simply to meet the statutory duty placed on them to provide accommodation-based services, deprioritising critical community-based services that can prevent a victim of abuse from being forced to flee to a refuge and undoing years of work to move towards prevention and early intervention.⁹

When explaining why the Government did not support the amendment, Baroness Williams said it was “premature” to legislate before the Commissioner had finished mapping services. However, she said the Government was committed to consulting on the provision of community-based domestic abuse services in its planned consultation on a [new victims’ law](#).¹⁰

⁶ MHCLG, [Domestic abuse safe accommodation funding allocation: consultation response](#), Last updated 12 February 2021

⁷ [Ibid.](#)

⁸ Domestic Abuse Commissioner, [Letter to the Prime Minister on the Domestic Abuse Bill and Community Based Services](#), 1 February 2021

⁹ [Ibid.](#)

¹⁰ HL Deb, [Domestic Abuse Bill](#), 10 March 2021, cc1628

Kit Malthouse, a Ministry of Justice Minister, gave further information on 16 June 2021 in response to a [Parliamentary Question](#). The Minister said:

[...] We will consult too on the provision of community-based domestic abuse and sexual violence services to set the expectations for the availability of support, as well as a statutory underpinning for the roles of independent sexual and domestic violence advisers to ensure that victims receive a high standard of care.¹¹

A new [Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2021-2024](#) is due to be published by the Government in 2021, alongside a separate domestic abuse strategy. In response to a [Parliamentary Question](#), Victoria Atkins, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office, said “the two strategies will be complementary and work together to drive down VAWG crimes and their impact on society”.

1.1

Support services and the impact of the pandemic

Surviving Economic Abuse, a UK charity, carried out a survey of victims and frontline professionals between June and August 2020 which found:

- 57% of women said their ability to seek help had been negatively impacted by lockdown and social distancing measures.
- 20% of victim-survivors reported that the support (for example, around domestic or economic abuse, legal matters, housing, mental health or money or debt advice) they were receiving before the outbreak had not continued, and 28% reported that it was at a reduced level.
- Over half of women intended to seek support from a domestic abuse service after lockdown.
- Nearly two-thirds of women were planning to seek support around child maintenance.
- A third of respondents were planning to seek support for money or debt advice.
- One in five women were planning to seek help around welfare benefits.

¹¹ PQ 14185, [Crime: Victims](#), Answered on 16 June 2021

- 71% of professionals said the number of victim-survivors of economic abuse coming to their organisation for help had increased since the start of the outbreak.¹²

The Government launched the #YouAreNotAlone awareness campaign in April 2020 to signpost to domestic abuse support services.¹³ In response to a [Parliamentary Question](#) on 11 June 2021, Home Office Minister, Victoria Atkins said “the campaign has reached over 30 million UK adults and has been seen by over 130 million followers on social media”.¹⁴

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) published a report on [technology and domestic abuse](#) (November 2020). It refers to an August 2020 survey by Women’s Aid that found 81% of domestic abuse service providers said they had experienced [an increase in demand for telephone support](#). 91% had experienced an increase in demand for online support during the pandemic.

The POST report also shows how technology can help victims of domestic abuse, including finding information, accessing support services, connecting with other victims, gathering evidence and protecting and alerting victims.

Funding for domestic abuse services during the pandemic

The Government announced additional funding for support services in England during the pandemic, including domestic abuse services. This included:

- **£76 million** in May 2020 to support survivors of domestic and sexual abuse, vulnerable children and their families, and victims of modern slavery through providing more safe spaces, accommodation and provision of services remotely.¹⁵ **£25 million** of this was awarded to domestic abuse services.
- **£11 million** for victim services, announced by the Ministry of Justice in November 2020. This includes helping services adapt to remote counselling methods during the pandemic and keep helplines open for longer.¹⁶

¹² Surviving Economic Abuse, [The cost of Covid-19: Economic abuse throughout the pandemic](#), April 2021, p8

¹³ Home Office, [Home Secretary announces support for domestic abuse victims](#), 11 April 2020

¹⁴ PQ 7999, [Domestic Abuse: Victims](#), Answered on 11 June 2021

¹⁵ MHCLG, HO, [Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, Emergency funding to support most vulnerable in society during the pandemic](#), 2 May 2020; MHCLG, [More domestic abuse charities to benefit from government funding boost](#), 16 September 2020

¹⁶ PQ 7999, [Domestic Abuse: Victims](#), Answered on 11 June 2021

- **£2 million** from the Home Office in April 2021 to “bolster the capacity of domestic abuse organisations affected by the pandemic”¹⁷
- **£151 million** to be provided by the Ministry of Justice for victim and witness support services in 2021/22. This includes an extra £51 million to increase support for rape and domestic abuse victims. Of this, £27 million will go towards creating more than 700 new posts for Independent Sexual Violence and Independent Domestic Abuse Advisers.¹⁸

¹⁷ PQ 7999, [Domestic Abuse: Victims](#), Answered on 11 June 2021

¹⁸ PQ 7999, [Domestic Abuse: Victims](#), Answered on 11 June 2021

2

Specialist domestic abuse support services

Specialist victim support services provide support tailored to the needs of victims and are mainly provided by third sector organisations such as Refuge, which runs the [National Domestic Abuse Helpline](#).

Types of specialist support services include shelters, telephone helplines, community-based support such as the provision of Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) and Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs) and sexual assault referral centres (SARCs).

[The Domestic Abuse Report 2021](#) published by Women's Aid defines the different types of specialist support services in Appendix 3.

The [Council of Europe guidance for mapping support services](#) outlines how different types of support are offered by specialist services, including crisis support, legal advice and advocacy, psychological counselling, outreach, case advocacy (including assisting victims to access housing, financial assistance and healthcare) and economic empowerment.¹⁹

2.1

Availability of specialist support

The ONS report [Domestic abuse victim services, England and Wales: November 2020](#) covers the availability of domestic abuse services, including refuge beds, the number of multi-agency risk assessment conferences (a meeting where information is shared on the highest-risk domestic abuse cases), and the number of independent domestic violence advisors. It also describes the characteristics of those accessing services.

The table below shows the number of domestic abuse services by type, in England and Wales, collected by Routes to Support:

¹⁹ Council of Europe, [Mapping Support Services for Victims of Violence against Women in Line with the Istanbul Convention Standards](#), November 2018, p10

Number of domestic abuse services in England and Wales, by service types^{1,2,3,4}

	2010	2015	2020
England			
Refuge	294	270	261
Floating support	139	102	84
Helpline	76	79	133
Outreach	189	172	191
Project based ⁵	138	127	:
Independent domestic violence advisors/Domestic abuse prevention advocate	82	111	133
Independent Sexual Violence Advisors	9	23	43
Children and Young People Services	238	186	218
Resettlement	268	210	205
Wales ⁶			
Refuge	:	:	34
Floating support	:	:	26
Helpline	:	:	18
Outreach	:	:	23
Project based	:	:	28
Independent domestic violence advisors/Domestic abuse prevention advocate	:	:	16
Independent Sexual Violence Advisors	:	:	7
Children and Young People Services	:	:	26
Resettlement	:	:	23

Source: Women's Aid Federation of England and Welsh Women's Aid - data from Routes to Support, the UK violence against women and girls service directory. Published in: ONS, *Domestic abuse victim services, England and Wales*, 25 November 2020, Appendix table 7

Notes:

1. Women's Aid Federation of England and Welsh Women's Aid data are not classified as official statistics.
 2. Information on service types and refuge spaces in England comes from snapshots taken in May each year. The data can be used to see net change only and not the number of services changing provider as part of the commissioning process as fluctuations in number during the year are not shown.
 3. Services available can vary greatly in terms of size of the service and the numbers and support needs of the survivors they can support.
 4. Women accessing refuge services travel from one part of the country to another and these vital services form a national network and this should be taken into account when looking at the numbers of services and spaces regionally or locally.
 5. Project based services for England are not available for 2018 onwards, as Women's Aid Federation of England now split this service type out as counselling, drop-in and support groups.
 6. Data for Wales are only available from 2017 onwards.
- : Denotes not applicable.

Between 2010 and 2020, in England only (data for Wales is only available from 2017 onwards), the number of refuge, floating support, children and young people services, and resettlement services fell, while the number of helpline, outreach and IDVA/domestic abuse prevention advocate services increased.

Data is only shown for 2010, 2015 and 2020 but further years' data can be found in [Appendix Table 7](#) of the ONS publication: [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2020](#).

2.2 Helplines

The Library has published a list of contact details for [organisations which assist victims of domestic abuse](#) across the UK, including specialist support organisations.

The Home Office have also published guidance '[Domestic abuse: How to get help](#)' which lists the free, confidential support and advice helplines available to victims and concerned family and friends, 24 hours a day:

- **England** [Refuge's National Domestic Abuse Helpline](#)
- **Scotland** [Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline](#)
- **Wales** [Live Fear Free](#)
- **Northern Ireland** [Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline](#)
- **UK-wide** [The Men's Advice Line](#) run by Respect

Hestia's [Respond to Abuse Advice Line](#) is also available to any business or organisation in the UK who requires free guidance and information regarding domestic abuse and how to support employees and colleagues.

Hestia provide the following summary:

The Respond to Abuse Advice Line is run by trained and qualified Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) who will respond to any calls or queries from employers, employees or others with respect and confidentiality.

IDVAs at the Advice Line can offer support, guidance and information to employers, managers and HR leads and others regarding issues relating to domestic violence and abuse.²⁰

The [Bright Sky App](#), launched by Hestia, the Vodafone Foundation and the Thames Valley Partnership, is a free mobile app which provides support and information to anyone experiencing domestic abuse or is concerned about someone they know. The app is available in 5 different languages (English, Urdu, Punjabi, Polish and Welsh) and "enables users to locate their nearest

²⁰ Hestia, [Respond to Abuse](#)

support services, with information on leaving an abusive relationship, helping someone you know and listing abusive behaviour”.²¹

2.3 Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs)

IDVAs are professionally qualified, specialist domestic abuse workers, who support high-risk victims of domestic abuse.²² IDVAs are often the main point of contact for victims of domestic abuse and “work to assess level of risk, discuss options and develop safety plans alongside the police.”²³

IDVAs can also help direct victims to support on other issues, such as housing, mental health or counselling.²⁴ SafeLives have a [National definition of IDVA work](#).

The latest SafeLives [Insights IDVA dataset 2019-20](#) found that on exit from the service, 42% of IDVA clients reported they had experienced no abuse since intake, with the majority reporting a reduction in abuse types.²⁵ 83% reported they felt safer, and 78% reported an improved sense of wellbeing.²⁶

SafeLives’ annual practitioner survey counts the number of IDVAs in England and Wales each year. According to the [2019 practitioner survey](#), there were 980 full-time equivalent IDVAs working in England and Wales, of which 833 (85%) were IDVAs for victims at high risk from domestic abuse.²⁷

The number of full-time equivalent IDVAs differs by region. The highest number of IDVAs was in the London region (187) and the lowest in the North East (41).²⁸

SafeLives also suggest a recommended number of IDVAs by region. Coverage against the number of IDVAs to support victims of high-risk abuse recommended by SafeLives was 74% for England and Wales but, as the chart below shows, this varied across regions.

²¹ Home Office, [Domestic abuse: How to get help](#), Last updated 28 May 2021

²² Office for National Statistics, [Domestic abuse victim services, England and Wales: November 2020](#), 25 November 2020

²³ SafeLives, [SafeLives’ 2019 survey of domestic abuse practitioners in England and Wales](#), 2019, p4

²⁴ SafeLives, [A Cry for Health: Why we must invest in domestic abuse services in hospitals](#), November 2016, p13

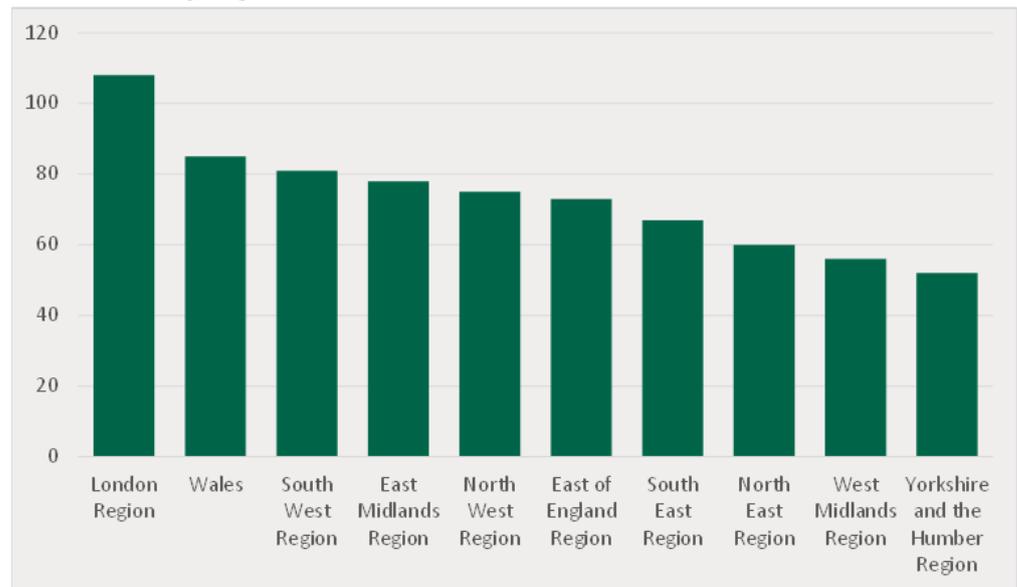
²⁵ SafeLives, [Insights IDVA dataset 2019-20](#), p21

²⁶ [Ibid.](#), p3

²⁷ Office for National Statistics, [Appendix tables: Domestic abuse victim services 2020](#), Table 2, 25 November 2020

²⁸ [Ibid.](#)

Coverage of Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) in England and Wales, by region, 2019



Source: SafeLives Practitioner Survey, 2019. Published in: ONS, *Domestic abuse victim services, England and Wales*, 25 November 2020, Appendix table 2

Notes:

1. SafeLives data are not classified as official statistics.
2. The SafeLives Practitioner Survey ran between 21 January and 29 March 2019, capturing provision at the end of the financial year 2018 - 2019.
3. Responses were received from 247 services who employed domestic abuse practitioners. Information about a further 49 services was collected from other sources including the Offices of Police and Crime Commissioners and SafeLives 2017 practitioner survey. The Practitioner Survey did not run in 2018 due to moving the timing of the survey from September to January, in order to better align the publication of results with other reporting periods. Whilst SafeLives did not receive a response from all domestic abuse services and did not contact all statutory bodies who may provide domestic abuse services, the survey provides the clearest picture of domestic abuse practitioner provision across England and Wales to date.

London was the only region where the recommended coverage was attained (108%). Yorkshire and the Humber had the lowest percentage coverage at 52%.²⁹

On 1 February 2021, the Government announced [£40 million of additional funding](#) would be made available to support victims of rape and domestic abuse. This includes:

£16 million to recruit more independent sexual violence and domestic abuse advisers – increasing their numbers by around 400 meaning more victims of all ages can access this vital support.³⁰

It was later announced that £151 million will be provided by the Ministry of Justice for victim and witness support services in 2021/22. This includes an extra £51 million to increase support for rape and domestic abuse victims. Of this, £27 million will go towards creating more than 700 new posts for Independent Sexual Violence and Independent Domestic Abuse Advisers.³¹

²⁹ [Ibid.](#)

³⁰ GOV.UK, [Extra £40m to help victims during pandemic and beyond](#), 1 February 2021

³¹ PQ 7999, [Domestic Abuse: Victims](#), Answered on 11 June 2021

The Government has said that it will consult on “a statutory underpinning for the roles of independent sexual and domestic violence advisers to ensure that victims receive a high standard of care” as part of the proposed victims’ law.³²

2.4

Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs)

ISVAs have been working across England and Wales since 2005.³³ An ISVA is an adviser who works with people who have experienced rape and sexual assault, irrespective of whether they have reported to the police.³⁴

The Home Office guidance [The role of the Independent Sexual Violence Adviser: Essential Elements](#) summarises the role of an ISVA:

ISVAs provide impartial information to the victim/survivor about all of their options, such as reporting to the police, accessing Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) services, and specialist support such as pre-trial therapy and sexual violence counselling. ISVAs also provide information on other services that victims/survivors may require, for example in relation to health and social care, housing, or benefits. [...]

The ISVA role is unique because of the continuity they provide for the victim/survivor by being a consistent point of contact for both the victim/survivor and other agencies who may be involved in the response to sexual violence.³⁵

ISVAs can be based within a variety of organisations, including specialist sexual violence and abuse organisations and Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs). Further information about SARCs can be found in the Library briefing [The role of healthcare services in addressing domestic abuse](#).

[Research](#) exploring the involvement of specialist sexual violence services, including ISVAs, in supporting survivors of rape and sexual abuse to engage with the criminal justice system concluded they played a “particularly crucial role”.³⁶ The authors concluded:

Specialist sexual violence services were crucial to the victims/survivors in providing a mix of specialist counselling (as an adult or young person), emotional support for court appearances,

³² PQ 14185, [Crime: Victims](#), Answered on 16 June 2021

³³ Home Office, [The role of the Independent Sexual Violence Adviser: Essential Elements](#), September 2017, p4

³⁴ [Ibid.](#), p5

³⁵ Home Office, [The role of the Independent Sexual Violence Adviser: Essential Elements](#), September 2017, p16

³⁶ International Review of Victimology, [More than support court: Rape victims and specialist sexual violence services](#), 24(3), 313-328, September 2018

practical help and linkage of individuals with other agencies. Crucially, the specialist services were able to provide a changing mixture of targeted support as and when the victim's/survivor's needs changed, for instance increasing counselling support when they were feeling more depressed or suicidal, and providing ISVAs to support them through the often drawn-out criminal justice process.³⁷

However, the article emphasised that the features of the ISVA role were similar regardless of whether the survivor chose to take the criminal justice route or not:

Key aspects of the ISVA role included: advising, advocating, educating, informing, liaising, facilitating, supporting, exploring, listening and communicating. Many features of the ISVA role were similar across the different agencies/settings, with a 'core' service of both emotional and practical support at the different stages of the victim/survivor's journey, whether or not they chose to take the criminal justice route.

Reflecting the findings from the UK audit ([Lea et al., 2015](#)), the ISVAs worked in slightly different ways depending on the agency within which they were based, with some focused on a particular aspect of the criminal justice process.³⁸

The [Home Office](#) notes that funding for ISVAs is provided by a number of local commissioners including Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), NHS England, local authorities and charitable trusts.³⁹

2.5

Refuges

Domestic abuse refuges are specialist forms of accommodation where trained staff are employed to provide a comprehensive package of support to survivors.⁴⁰

Women's Aid outline how refuge services are distinct from other types of emergency accommodation because residents receive a planned programme of therapeutic and practical support designed to facilitate recovery from experiences of domestic abuse.⁴¹

³⁷ [Ibid.](#)

³⁸ International Review of Victimology, [More than support court: Rape victims and specialist sexual violence services](#), 24(3), 313-328, September 2018

³⁹ Home Office, [The role of the Independent Sexual Violence Adviser: Essential Elements](#), September 2017, p4

⁴⁰ Inside Housing, [Urgent concerns' over exempt accommodation providers targeting domestic abuse survivors](#), 2 March 2021 [subscription required]

⁴¹ Women's Aid, [The Domestic Abuse Report 2021: The Annual Audit](#), p33

[Shelter provide a summary](#) of the support refuges provide and outline some of the rules that can be in place for survivors staying there. For example, Shelter highlight that most refuges are for women only and do not allow male children over a certain age.

Women's Aid's [The Domestic Abuse report 2021: The Annual Audit](#) estimates that in 2019/20, refuge services in England supported 10,592 women and 12,710 children.⁴²

The [Annual Audit 2021](#) includes the following:

- As of 1 May 2020, there were 263 refuge services operating in England.
- 62.5% of women in refuge services had children and 8.3% were pregnant.
- Of the service users who were not British nationals (3,262), only just over half (54.5%) were able to access public funds.
- 48.9% of refuge service users had support needs around their mental health.
- There has been an increase in the number of refuge spaces in England every year since 2010.
- In 2019/20, demand was higher than the provision available, with 57.2% of refuge referrals declined during the year – 18.1% of all referrals were turned down due to lack of capacity in the refuge
- Despite the increase in spaces, the number of spaces in refuge services in England fell short of the number recommended by the Council of Europe by 1,694 spaces, which represents a 30.1% shortfall.
- Temporary emergency funding due to the pandemic resulted in an increase of 361 refuge spaces to 4,251 between 1 May and 1 November 2020.
- Less than half of all vacancies posted on Routes to Support for England in 2019-20 were in rooms suitable for a woman with two children; only 4.0% could consider women who had no recourse to public funds.⁴³

The Women's Aid report [Fragile funding landscape](#) (2021) outlines how the costs of refuge services can be broken down into four main areas:

⁴² Women's Aid, [The Domestic Abuse report 2021: The Annual Audit](#), January 2021

⁴³ Women's Aid, [The Domestic Abuse report 2021: The Annual Audit](#), January 2021

- Housing costs (largely met by survivors' housing benefit)
- Support staff costs (staff salary costs for example)
- Activity costs (including accessibility costs and external contractors)
- Central costs (related to administration, governance and premises)⁴⁴

Rents in refuges are typically higher than standard as rent includes both housing and support costs. Women's Aid have suggested women in low-paid employment may need to quit their jobs in order to access benefits to cover the cost of staying in refuge.⁴⁵

No Woman Turned Away

The No Woman Turned Away (NWTa) project run by Women's Aid has been funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) since January 2016. It provides dedicated support to women who face barriers in accessing a refuge space.

Until October 2019, all referrals into the project were made via the National Domestic Violence Helpline. Since November 2019, the project received referrals from more organisations including Women's Aid members, violence against women and girls (VAWG) organisations, Victim Support and the British Red Cross.⁴⁶

The project received 423 referrals between January 2019 and January 2020, of which 262 went on to receive support from the service.⁴⁷ The five most common challenges for women seeking a refuge space over this period were: mental health support needs (40.7%), ties to their local area (38.7%), disabilities (28.0%), having no recourse to public funds (25.1%) and fleeing with four or more children (11.5%).⁴⁸

Women's Aid report that of the 243 women supported, most women (93) sofa-surfed whilst waiting for a refuge space, and 17 slept rough.

Rail to Refuge

Rail to Refuge is a joint initiative between rail companies and Women's Aid in which train operators cover the cost of train tickets for women, men and children escaping domestic abuse travelling to refuge accommodation.⁴⁹ To obtain a ticket, survivors must have a confirmed refuge place.

Rail to Refuge first launched with Southeastern and Great Western Rail in March 2020. It became a national scheme from April 2020 following a rise in

⁴⁴ Women's Aid, [Fragile funding landscape: The extent of local authority commissioning in the domestic abuse refuge sector in England 2020](#), 2021, p7

⁴⁵ Women's Aid, [The Domestic Abuse report 2021: The Annual Audit](#), January 2021

⁴⁶ Women's Aid, [Nowhere To Turn 2020](#), June 2020, p6

⁴⁷ [Ibid.](#), p7

⁴⁸ [Ibid.](#), p9

⁴⁹ Women's Aid, [Rail to Refuge](#), Accessed on 21 June 2021

domestic abuse during lockdown restrictions. In the first year (April 2020 to March 2021), the initiative reportedly helped get 1,348 survivors, including 362 children over five to safety.⁵⁰ Women’s Aid report that 62% of survivors that used the scheme would not have travelled if the journey was not paid for.⁵¹

2.6

Specialist support for children

The Government accepted amendments to the Domestic Abuse Bill to recognise children as victims of domestic abuse if they see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse and are related to the person being abused or the perpetrator.⁵²

This recognition means the statutory duty placed on local authorities by the 2021 Act to deliver specialist community-based services for victims will, when in force, also apply to children.

The Victims’ Commissioner’s report, [Sowing the Seeds: Children’s experience of domestic abuse and criminality](#) (April 2020) says that recognising a child as a victim of domestic abuse rather than a witness “could have several important effects”:

- Crucially, these victims would be granted entitlements through the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (the ‘Victims Code’).
- The child would be entitled to access services to cope with the effects of the abuse and recover as best they can. There would be a need for further guidance and support pathways and support services. Some stakeholders have questioned whether there would be capacity in funding support services to cope with the level of need if children in domestic abuse households were truly acknowledged as victims and all child victims of domestic abuse were provided this level of support. [...]
- An approach that recognises the victim status of these children would be a shift in the way society views domestic abuse overall. Currently interventions tend to be focused on the needs of the parents rather than the child. Stakeholders called for the focus to shift from the relationship between the abusing parent and non-abusing parent, to an appreciation of the effects of domestic abuse on families as a whole. [...]

⁵⁰ [Ibid.](#)

⁵¹ [Ibid.](#)

⁵² Victims Commissioner, [Recognition of children as victims of Domestic Abuse, and improved protections for victims in Family Courts announced](#), 30 June 2020

- Stakeholders and practitioners reported that very often the onus by statutory agencies is put onto the non-abusing parent to keep their child safe rather than on the abusing parent to desist from their abusive behaviour. [...] By recognising the child as a victim, the perpetrator is blamed for the harm to the child rather than blaming a non-abusing parent for not protecting the child.⁵³

Data on specialist support services for children

SafeLives publish 'Children's Insights' which provides information on specialist children's domestic abuse services. The [Children's Insights dataset 2019-20](#) includes data from 11 specialist domestic abuse services for children across England.

The report says the support provided relates to safety/understanding of safety, physical health, mental health, relationships with family members and relationships with others.⁵⁴ Interventions include developing safety plans, providing information on healthy relationships, and supporting access to health services including health visitors and GPs, and access to counselling and CAMHS.⁵⁵

Availability of support for children

Women's Aid's [Annual Audit 2021](#) states that on 1 May 2020 there were 222 domestic abuse service providers running 370 local services in England which included 222 dedicated children and young people's services.⁵⁶

The report says 32.3% of refuges employed a dedicated children and young people (CYP) worker, whose primary role is to engage young people, offer them emotional support and assist families with tasks such as school admission.⁵⁷ 20.5% of refuges offered play therapy.⁵⁸

The [Action for Children report](#) (2019) highlights that many children don't receive any specialist support following experience of domestic abuse, and that support for children is often a 'bolt-on' to existing domestic abuse services.⁵⁹

Following the onset of the pandemic, it appears support services for children have been particularly impacted. A SafeLives survey, [Domestic abuse frontline service COVID-19 survey results](#), from March 2020, found that 42% of services said they were not able to effectively support child victims of abuse

⁵³ Victims' Commissioner, [Sowing the Seeds: Children's experience of domestic abuse and criminality](#), April 2020, page 26

⁵⁴ SafeLives, [Children's Insights dataset 2019-20](#), p22

⁵⁵ SafeLives, [Children's Insights dataset 2019-20](#)

⁵⁶ Women's Aid, [The Domestic Abuse Report 2021: The Annual Audit](#), p28

⁵⁷ [Ibid.](#), p37

⁵⁸ [Ibid.](#)

⁵⁹ Action for Children, [Patchy, piecemeal and precarious: Support for children affected by domestic abuse](#), November 2019, p46

at that time (22% for adult victims).⁶⁰ 76% of respondents said they had to reduce service delivery, with 18% cancelling children's services.⁶¹

[Children & Young People Now](#) reported that while organisations supporting vulnerable children and young people have “widely welcomed” the passage of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, “some have warned that the success of the Act will depend on the availability of specialist support to help victims recover from the trauma they’ve experienced”.⁶²

Information on support available for children via schools can be found in section 11.1.

⁶⁰ SafeLives, [Domestic abuse frontline service COVID-19 survey results](#), March 2020

⁶¹ SafeLives, [Domestic abuse frontline service COVID-19 survey results](#), March 2020

⁶² Children & Young People Now, [Domestic Abuse Bill: Key measures for children and sector reaction](#), 29 April 2021

3 A new duty to assess support needs and publish strategies

3.1 New local authority duties

Part 4 of The Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which is not yet in force, places a duty on local authorities in England to:

- Assess the support needs of victims of domestic abuse, or their children, living in “relevant accommodation”;
- Prepare and publish a strategy for the delivery of this support within the area; and
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy.⁶³

The Home Office have said they expect the duty to come into effect in early September.⁶⁴

The draft [Domestic Abuse Support \(Relevant Accommodation\) Regulations 2021](#) set out the proposed definition of “relevant accommodation” (also referred to as ‘safe accommodation’) and list a number of types of accommodation, including refuges.

£125 million of new burdens funding has been allocated to local authorities to cover the costs of the new duty for 2021/22.⁶⁵

In a press release ‘[Domestic Abuse Bill receives Royal Assent](#)’, Refuge welcomed the Act but called for the new local authority duties to be accompanied with “adequate ring-fenced funding, which matches need” and argued the “£125 million pledged falls way short of the estimated £174 million pounds needed”.⁶⁶

The [draft statutory guidance](#) for the delivery of support to victims in safe accommodation states that domestic abuse support includes (emphasis added):

- **Overall management of services within safe accommodation** – including, the management of staff,

⁶³ [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#), section 57(1).

⁶⁴ Home Office, [Local authority support for victims of domestic abuse and their children within safe accommodation factsheet](#), Last updated 18 May 2021

⁶⁵ MHCLG, [Funding allocation methods: new domestic abuse duty](#), Last updated 12 February 2021

⁶⁶ Refuge, [Domestic Abuse Bill receives Royal Assent](#), 29 April 2021

payroll, financial management of services and maintaining relationships with the local authority (such functions will often be undertaken by a service manager).

- **Support with the day-to-day running of the service**, for example scheduling times for counselling sessions, group activities etc.
- **Advocacy support** – development of personal safety plans, liaison with other services (for example, GPs and social workers, welfare benefit providers).
- **Domestic abuse-prevention advice** – support to assist victims to recognise the signs of abusive relationships, to help them remain safe (including online) and to prevent re-victimisation.
- **Specialist support for victims with protected characteristics and / or complex needs**, for example, translators and interpreters, faith services, mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support, and immigration advice.
- **Children’s support** – including play therapy and child advocacy.
- **Housing-related support** – providing housing-related advice and support, for example, securing a permanent home and advice on how to live safely and independently.
- **Advice services**– including financial and legal support, including accessing benefits, support into work and establishing independent financial arrangements.
- **Counselling and therapy** for both adults and children.⁶⁷

The changes provided for by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 follow on from a consultation carried out by the MHCLG in 2019. Further information on the plans can be found in [MHCLG’s response to the consultation](#) (October 2019).

More detailed background information on these provisions is provided in section 8 of the Library Briefing, [Domestic Abuse Bill 2019-20](#).

⁶⁷ MHCLG, [Delivery of Support to Victims of Domestic Abuse, including Children, in Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Services: Draft for consultation](#), June 2021, p11

3.2 Other community-based support services

As set out above, The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 provides for local authorities to be under a duty to assess the support needs of domestic abuse victims living in safe accommodation. However, the charity SafeLives estimates that nearly 70% of victims/survivors seek help through community-based services, rather than those based in accommodation.⁶⁸

As the Domestic Abuse Bill progressed through Parliament, concerns were raised that the new duty may inadvertently create a ‘two-tier system’, with community-based services suffering in terms of funding and strategic focus.⁶⁹

In February 2021, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, the Children’s Commissioner and the Victims’ Commissioner called on the Government to include a statutory duty on authorities to fund community-based services in the Domestic Abuse Bill.⁷⁰ Barnardo’s and others also supported the proposal.⁷¹

The Domestic Abuse Commissioner is currently undertaking an exploration of community-based support, which is expected to conclude by the end of 2021.⁷² The Government has stated that it would be premature to legislate in this area before this mapping work is complete.⁷³

While reiterating the view that it was premature to introduce a parallel duty in respect of community-based support, the Government did, however, introduce amendments in this area during the Lords Report Stage of the Domestic Abuse Bill. The amendments, which were agreed:

- Require the Domestic Abuse Commissioner to publish a report on the need for community-based advice, advocacy or counselling services for victims of domestic abuse or their children in England, and the provision of such services. The report would have to be published within 12 months of the new clause taking effect.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ SafeLives, [Briefing for the second reading of the Domestic Abuse Bill](#), 28 April 2020, para 4.

⁶⁹ See for example the letter from the [Designate Domestic Abuse Commissioner Nicole Jacobs to the Public Bill Committee \(DAB63, June 2020\)](#), in which she set out her “very real concerns about Local Authorities redistributing their funding simply to meet the statutory duty.

⁷⁰ Children’s Commissioner, [Our joint call on the government to include a statutory duty on local authorities to fund community-based services in the Domestic Abuse Bill](#), 2 February 2021.

⁷¹ Barnardo’s, [House of Lords urges Boris Johnson to ensure community-based support services are included in the Domestic Abuse Bill](#), 2 February 2021.

⁷² PQ HL 8769 [[Domestic Abuse: Victim support schemes](#)], 5 October 2020.

⁷³ PQ HL10249 [[Domestic abuse: Victim support](#)], 11 November 2020.

⁷⁴ [Domestic Abuse Act 2021, section 20](#).

- Require a local authority that publishes a strategy on accommodation-based services to keep under review any effect of that strategy on the provision of community-based services.⁷⁵

During the passage of the Bill, the Government also committed to consulting on the provision of community-based domestic abuse services in its planned consultation on a new victims' law.⁷⁶

Further information is provided in section 5.1 of the Library Briefing, [Domestic Abuse Bill 2019-21: Progress of the Bill](#).

⁷⁵ [Ibid. section 57](#).

⁷⁶ [HL Deb 10 March 2021 cc1628](#). Proposals for a new 'Victims' Law' were included in the [December 2019 Queen's Speech](#) and the Government has indicated it will consult in the summer.

4 Local authority safeguarding duties

4.1 Safeguarding adults

Local authorities have statutory responsibility for adult safeguarding in England.

Under section 42 of the Care Act 2014 authorities have a duty to make enquiries if they believe that an adult in their area is experiencing, or is at risk of experiencing, abuse or neglect. The enquiries should establish whether any action needs to be taken to stop the abuse or neglect and if so, by whom. The duty applies to any adult who:

- has needs for care and support (whether or not the local authority is meeting any of those needs); and
- is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect; and
- as a result of their care and support needs is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of abuse or neglect.⁷⁷

Chapter 14 of the Department of Health and Social Care's (DHSC) [Care and Support Statutory Guidance \(CASS\)](#) provides guidance for local authorities on their duties under section 42 of the Care Act 2014.

The guidance provides an illustrative guide to the sorts of behaviour which could give rise to a safeguarding concern, including domestic violence.⁷⁸

Involvement of other agencies

Local authorities' duty to make enquiries supplements obligations on other organisations to look after people in their care effectively, and police-held responsibilities. Authorities should cooperate with relevant partners to protect adults in this position.⁷⁹ The statutory guidance states that those in a range of organisations should be "vigilant about adult safeguarding concerns":

Including, amongst others in health and social care, welfare, policing, banking, fire and rescue services and trading standards; leisure services, faith groups, and housing. GPs, in particular, are

⁷⁷ [Care Act 2014](#), section 42.

⁷⁸ DHSC, [Care and support statutory guidance](#), June 2020, paras 14.17 & 14.20.

⁷⁹ [Ibid.](#), paras 14.10 and 14.12; [Care Act 2014](#), section 6(3)

often well-placed to notice changes in an adult that may indicate they are being abused or neglected. Findings from serious case reviews have sometimes stated that if professionals or other staff had acted upon their concerns or sought more information, then death or serious harm might have been prevented.

[...]

Anyone can witness or become aware of information suggesting that abuse and neglect is occurring.⁸⁰

The CASS states that where criminal activity is suspected, early involvement of the police is likely to have benefits in many cases.⁸¹

The Local Government Association published [Adult safeguarding and domestic abuse](#) (2015) to guide practitioners and managers working with people needing care and support. Age UK's [Safeguarding older people from abuse and neglect](#) (2020) also summarises the law on safeguarding adults.

4.2 Safeguarding children

Children may also experience domestic abuse, either as a direct victim or due to the impact the abuse has on others (e.g. the non-abusive parent).

As previously noted, during the Commons Report Stage of the domestic Abuse Bill, the Government introduced an amendment to explicitly recognise children as victims of domestic abuse if they see, hear or experience the effects of the abuse.⁸² The amendment was agreed and became section 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Further information can be found in the Library Briefing on [progress of the Domestic Abuse Bill](#) pages 11-13.

Local authorities in England have a range of duties and powers relating to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. They are also the statutory point of referral for any concerns about children at risk of harm. Further information can be found in these Library Briefings:

- CBP8543, [Children's social care services in England](#).
- CBP6787, [Overview of child protection legislation in England](#).

⁸⁰ [Ibid.](#), paras 14.36-37

⁸¹ [Ibid.](#), para 14.83

⁸² [Domestic Abuse Act 2021, section 3](#).

5 Local authority programmes

5.1 Supporting Families Programme

The [Supporting Families Programme](#), previously known as the Troubled Families Programme (TFP), is a programme in England administered by the MHCLG via local authorities. The Library briefing on the [Troubled Families Programme](#) (CBP 7585) provides an overview of the programme.

The TFP conducted targeted interventions for families experiencing multiple problems, including crime, anti-social behaviour, truancy, unemployment, mental health problems and domestic abuse. As of January 2021, 401,709 families reported successful outcomes under the programme since 2015.⁸³

The [Annual Report of the Troubled Families Programme 2020-2021](#) notes that lockdown presented challenges for keyworkers in engaging with domestic abuse victims as it was harder to find a safe and private spaces for discussions. Some authorities reportedly used written communication as a work-around, including enclosing messages in food parcels.⁸⁴

In March 2021, the [MHCLG announced](#) the TFP programme would be renamed 'Supporting Families' to "better reflect the role that keyworkers play".⁸⁵

The [Supporting Families programme](#) "is backed by £165m and will retain many of the aims of the Troubled Families programme, including work to support people to leave abusive relationships".⁸⁶

The [Supporting Families Programme Guidance 2021-22](#) says a national evaluation of the TFP programme found significant variation in approaches in different local areas, and research will now focus on the most effective approaches. This includes testing different domestic abuse interventions as part of a "test and learn approach".⁸⁷

⁸³ MHCLG, [Annual Report of the Troubled Families Programme 2020-2021](#), March 2021, p6

⁸⁴ MHCLG, [Annual Report of the Troubled Families Programme 2020-2021](#), March 2021, p19

⁸⁵ MHCLG, [Next phase of £165 million programme for vulnerable families launched](#), 26 March 2021

⁸⁶ [Ibid.](#)

⁸⁷ MHCLG, [Supporting Families Programme Guidance 2021-22](#), April 2021, p8

5.2 Changing Futures Programme

The MHCLG programme, [Changing Futures](#), seeks to incentivise coordinated local support for families experiencing multiple disadvantages, in a similar approach to that of the Supporting Families programme. Disadvantages include homelessness, substance misuse, mental health issues, domestic abuse, and contact with the criminal justice system.⁸⁸

The Changing Futures programme brings together several local areas over an initial two-year period from 2021/22 to 2022/23. The MHCLG invited expressions of interest from authorities in December 2020.⁸⁹ As of March 2021, 21 areas had been shortlisted and were “developing more detailed delivery plans to inform the final area selection process”.⁹⁰

5.3 Reducing Parental Conflict Programme

The [Reducing Parental Conflict](#) (RPC) programme is aimed at conflict [below the threshold of domestic abuse](#) and aims to promote improved outcomes for children, with a focus on disadvantaged families. The [Parental Relationships Spectrum](#) provides an example of a tool to help practitioners understand whether a relationship is healthy, has conflict or is abusive.

The programme is led by the Department of Work and Pensions and was announced in April 2017 as part of ‘[Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families](#)’. The current phase of the RPC programme runs from April 2021 to March 2022 and has been allocated up to £11 million in funding.⁹¹

The programme helps local areas integrate support to reduce parental conflict. The [Reducing Parental Conflict Planning Tool](#) supports local authorities in the development of initiatives.

The [Reducing Parental Conflict programme evaluation: report on early implementation](#) (April 2021) found that it was common for local authorities to overlook parental conflict below the levels constituting domestic abuse before involvement in the RPC programme.⁹²

⁸⁸ MHCLG, [Launch of £46 million “Changing Futures” scheme to support vulnerable people](#), 10 December 2020

⁸⁹ MHCLG, [Changing futures: Changing systems to support adults experiencing multiple disadvantages](#), 15 December 2020

⁹⁰ MHCLG, [Changing Futures: changing systems to support adults experiencing multiple disadvantage](#), Last updated 19 March 2021

⁹¹ [Ibid.](#)

⁹² DWP, [Reducing Parental Conflict programme evaluation: report on early implementation](#), Last updated 28 April 2021

6 Family contact and child maintenance

6.1 Child contact and domestic abuse

A child arrangements order is a court order that regulates matters such with whom a child is to live, when they spend time with each parent, and when and what other types of contact take place (for example, phone calls).

Information on how the family courts address issues of domestic abuse in proceedings relating to child arrangements orders, including recent changes in this areas legislated for by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, is provided in Library Briefing, [Children: child arrangements orders – when agreement cannot be reached on contact and residence \(Great Britain\)](#) (CBP8761).

Occupation and non-molestation orders

There are two important civil law remedies for victims of domestic abuse under the Family Law Act 1996 (as amended by Part 1 of the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004):

- **Occupation orders:** a court order which governs the occupation of a family home. It can be used to temporarily exclude an abuser from the home and surrounding area and give the victim the right to enter or remain. In certain circumstances, the court may attach a power of arrest to the occupation order.
- **Non-molestation orders:** A non-molestation order is a court order which prohibits an abuser from molesting another person they are associated with. Molestation is not defined in the Act but has been interpreted to include violence, harassment and threatening behaviour. An order contains specific terms as to what conduct is prohibited and can last for however long is deemed appropriate by the court. Breach of a non-molestation order is a criminal offence.

Practical information about how to apply for court orders is available from the Women's Aid [Survivors Handbook](#) (see [Getting an Injunction](#)) and the Victim Support web pages on [Getting Legal Help for survivors of domestic abuse](#).

6.2

Child Maintenance

There are three forms of child maintenance: informal (agreed between parents); court-ordered, and statutory (organised by the Child Maintenance Service (CMS)). General information on how maintenance is arranged through the CMS is available in the Library Briefing: [Child maintenance: Calculations, variations and income \(UK\)](#) (CBP-7770).

A domestic abuse survivor is not required to make any contact with their child's other parent to arrange maintenance through the CMS. A page on Gov.uk explains:

If you're experiencing domestic abuse or controlling behaviour

[Tell the Child Maintenance Service](#). They can arrange payments with your child's other parent for you.

If you've changed your name, you can arrange child maintenance without the other parent knowing your new name.

If you do not want the other parent to know where you live, ask your bank to set up an account with a 'non-geographic' sort code. The Child Maintenance Service can give you a letter for your bank explaining why you need to set up this type of account.⁹³

The DWP has said that CMS staff should use the CMS Domestic Abuse Plan to guide them through appropriate actions to support victims (e.g. signposting to relevant services). The plan is not publicly available.⁹⁴

Further information is also provided in an article on the website of Gingerbread, a charity for single parents: [Domestic abuse and child maintenance](#).

Waiving the application fee

Individuals who apply to the CMS for it to calculate child maintenance must usually pay an application fee of £20. However, victims of domestic abuse are not required to pay this.⁹⁵

A full definition of domestic violence or abuse can be found in the [CMS guidance](#) but includes any "incident or pattern of incidents of":

Controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse towards the applicant, which is between persons aged 16 or over

⁹³ DWP, [Manage your CMS case: Making and getting payments](#)

⁹⁴ PQ 61273 [CMS], 19 June 2020

⁹⁵ [The Child Support Fees Regulations 2014 \(SI2014/612\)](#), Regulation 4(3)

who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.

This definition encompasses psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse. Coercive behaviour can include the applicant witnessing the abuse of their child by a current or previous partner, a member of their own family, or by the partner's family.

Those applying for a fee exemption are required to present evidence, either over the phone or in writing, that they meet this definition.⁹⁶

CMS [guidance](#) states that the person applying for maintenance must also have reported the abuse to "an appropriate person". This includes: courts, police, medical professionals, social services, a multi-agency risk assessment conference, a specialist domestic violence organisation (e.g. refuge), an employer, educational services, local authority, legal professional or a specialist support organisation (e.g. Citizens Advice).⁹⁷

Since May 2018 the CMS has asked parents directly if they have experienced domestic abuse.⁹⁸

Work and Pensions Committee report (2017) and DWP response

The Work and Pensions Committee's [CMS report](#) said that the service was particularly important to those experiencing domestic abuse, as the payment of child maintenance can be a means to exercise coercion. The Committee recommended that victims should be exempted from CMS Collect and Pay (C&P) fees.⁹⁹ On C&P, the CMS monitors when maintenance is not paid by the non-resident parent and can take collection or enforcement action.

The DWP in response said it believed there was no need for cases where there was a history of domestic abuse between parents to be moved automatically to C&P because its review of charging had "found that parents who had experienced domestic abuse were as least as likely to have an effective Direct Pay arrangement as other Direct Pay clients".¹⁰⁰

The [review](#) found that after three months with a Direct Pay arrangement, payments were made on time, in full and the receiving parent perceived the arrangement to be working well with 49% of "all receiving parents"

⁹⁶ DWP, [Child maintenance application fee: Exemption for victims of domestic violence](#), updated 1 August 2017

⁹⁷ DWP, [Guidance on regulation 4\(3\) of the Child Support Fees Regulations 2014: List of persons to whom an applicant must have reported domestic violence or abuse](#), updated 1 August 2017

⁹⁸ DWP, [National Tables: CMS statistics: Data to June 2020](#), September 2020, Table 2.

⁹⁹ Work and Pensions Committee, [CMS](#), HC 587, paras 36-44

¹⁰⁰ DWP, [CMS: Government response to the Committee's Fourteenth Report of Session 2016-2017](#), 12 September 2017

compared to 56% in the “domestic violence, frequent contact, unfriendly” group and 42% in the “domestic violence, no contact’ group”.¹⁰¹

The review also noted that the provision for anonymity may need to be better publicised, stating that “just two per cent of Receiving Parents whose Direct Pay payments had started reported using a bank account with a central or national sort code”.¹⁰²

Northern Ireland

A similar, but separate, child maintenance system operates in Northern Ireland.

There is no application fee—the Northern Ireland Executive said this was to “ensure that the child maintenance statutory service remains accessible to those who need it”.¹⁰³

NI Direct’s [CMS support in domestic abuse or violence](#) details steps to protect an individual’s identity and location when using the CMS.

¹⁰¹ Government Social Research and DWP, [Survey of CMS direct pay clients](#), December 2016, p60

¹⁰² [Ibid.](#), p29

¹⁰³ [AQW 31387/11-15](#), 6 March 2014

7 Housing

7.1 Sanctuary schemes to prevent homelessness

Sanctuary schemes have been promoted by Governments since 2005. They are a multi-agency initiative to install security measures in the home, with the intention of ensuring that households at risk of domestic violence can remain in their own accommodation if they choose to do so.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published [Sanctuary schemes for households at risk of domestic violence: guide for agencies](#) in August 2010.

The MHCLG states that the “use of sanctuary is not appropriate if the perpetrator lives at, or retains a legal right to enter the home, or if the victim continues to be at risk in the vicinity around the home.”¹⁰⁴

7.2 Homelessness assistance

Housing authorities are expected to have policies in place to identify and respond to domestic abuse as part of their approach to preventing homelessness. The [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities](#) says they are “key partners in local domestic violence partnerships and should be represented at their local multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC).”¹⁰⁵

Part 7 of the [Housing Act 1996](#), as amended, governs local authorities’ duties to homeless households. Applicants must be eligible for assistance.¹⁰⁶

Homeless or threatened with homelessness

In the first instance, authorities will assess whether someone seeking assistance is homeless or threatened with homelessness. The Housing Act 1996 provides that it is not reasonable for a person to continue to occupy accommodation if it is probable that this will lead to domestic violence against them by a person who normally resides with them as a member of

¹⁰⁴ MHCLG, [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities](#), paras 21.28

¹⁰⁵ [Ibid. para 21.10](#)

¹⁰⁶ Eligibility is determined by the applicant’s immigration status. Note that people with no recourse to public funds are not generally eligible but those fleeing domestic violence *may* obtain help under [Destitute Domestic Violence Concession](#).

their family, or any other person that might reasonably be expected to reside with that person.¹⁰⁷

In this context ‘violence’ means:

Violence from another person or threats of violence from another person which are likely to be carried out. ‘Domestic violence’ is violence or threats of violence which are likely to be carried out by a person who is associated with the victim. Domestic violence is not confined to instances within the home.¹⁰⁸

Section 78 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, when in force, will amend references in section 177 of the 1996 Act to “domestic violence or other violence” to “violence or domestic abuse.” The Act will also define domestic abuse with reference, when in force, to section 1 of the Domestic Abuse Act.

The [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities](#), to which they must have regard when assessing homeless applications, states that the current definition of violence should not be used restrictively:

The term ‘violence’ should not be given a restrictive meaning, and ‘domestic violence’ should be understood to include physical violence, threatening or intimidating behaviour, and any other form of abuse which directly or indirectly may give rise to harm; between persons who are, or have been, intimate partners, family members or members of the same household, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.¹⁰⁹

The code of guidance makes it clear that authorities should not have a blanket approach toward establishing whether domestic abuse has occurred, or is at risk of occurring, which requires the victim to obtain a police report or approach the alleged perpetrator.¹¹⁰

An applicant may be treated as eligible for assistance (referred to as the relief duty) if they are threatened with homelessness. The code of guidance provides the following example:

A person at risk of domestic violence or abuse may be threatened with homelessness because a perpetrator is soon to be released from custody (and so the person is likely to become homeless within 56 days); but would be actually homeless if the perpetrator was in the community and presented a risk to them at their home (and so it is not reasonable for the person to continue to occupy the accommodation).¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ [Housing Act 1996](#), section 177 (1)

¹⁰⁸ MHCLG, [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities](#), para 21.17

¹⁰⁹ [Ibid.](#), paras 21.3 and 21.19

¹¹⁰ [Ibid.](#), paras 21.10 – 21.15

¹¹¹ [Ibid.](#), para 21.25

A local housing authority make take several approaches to prevent or relieve homelessness for an eligible applicant:

[This] might include provision of sanctuary scheme or other security measures, assistance to find alternative accommodation, or help to access legal remedies such as injunctions where these might be effective. Single people might also be assisted to access supported housing, or helped to gain more support from family and friends through the intervention of the housing authority.¹¹²

Local authority landlords may seek to evict a perpetrator of domestic abuse from one of their tenancies to allow the victim to remain.¹¹³ This approach should only be used where it is judged safe:

...where there would be a probability of violence if the applicant continued to occupy their present accommodation, the housing authority must treat the applicant as homeless and should not expect them to remain in, or return to, the accommodation. In all cases involving violence the safety of the applicant and their household should be the primary consideration at all stages of decision making as to whether or not the applicant remains in their own home.¹¹⁴

Assessing priority need

Housing authorities have a duty to try and prevent or relieve homelessness for all applicants who are eligible for assistance, irrespective of whether they have a priority need for accommodation. However, a statutory duty to secure suitable accommodation arises only where an applicant is assessed as unintentionally homeless and in priority need where the authority has not been able to prevent or relieve homelessness within a given timeframe.

Section 189 of the [Housing Act 1996](#) sets out the priority need categories, including “People who are vulnerable because they are fleeing violence.”¹¹⁵

Paragraphs 21.31 to 21.34 of the [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities](#) provide guidance on assessing the vulnerability of people fleeing violence.

There are concerns that the vulnerability test is used by local authorities as a gatekeeping tool.¹¹⁶ In response, Section 78(5) of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, when in force, will mean that those fleeing domestic abuse and facing homelessness will be automatically treated as in priority need. Sub-section

¹¹² [Ibid](#), para 21.27

¹¹³ [Housing Act 1985](#), Schedule 2, ground 2A

¹¹⁴ MHCLG, [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities](#), para 21.31

¹¹⁵ Added by Article 6 of the [Homelessness \(Priority Need for Accommodation \(England\) Order 2002](#)

¹¹⁶ All-Party Parliamentary Group on Ending Homelessness (APPGEH), [Safe Home: Breaking the link between homelessness and domestic abuse](#), May 2019, pp20-32

78(5) of the Act will substitute the definition of priority need set out above with:

A person who is homeless as a result of that person being a victim of domestic abuse.¹¹⁷

The Home Office Minister, Victoria Atkins, committed to updating the code of guidance to make it clear that applications for assistance can be made through a variety of means:

We will take the opportunity to ensure that the guidance is clear about the need to ensure that victims are appropriately supported by local authorities to make this application. We will reinforce to all local authorities that all homeless applicants, including victims of domestic abuse, are able to be accompanied by a friend, family member or support worker, if they wish.¹¹⁸

Intentionality

As noted above, authorities only have a statutory duty to secure suitable housing for unintentionally homeless households who are in priority need. The MHCLG code of guidance states that applicants cannot be treated as intentionally homeless unless it would have been reasonable for them to have continued to occupy the accommodation, and goes on:

It will be necessary for the housing authority to give careful consideration to the circumstances of the applicant and the household, in each case, and with particular care in cases where violence and abuse has been alleged.¹¹⁹

A duty to refer

A range of public bodies are subject to a duty to refer service users whom they consider to be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days to a housing authority, with the service user's consent.

These bodies include social services, emergency departments, hospitals providing patient care, probation services and youth offending bodies.¹²⁰

7.3

Local authority housing registers

The allocation of council housing is governed by Part 6 of the [Housing Act 1996](#). New statutory guidance, [Allocation of accommodation: guidance for](#)

¹¹⁷ [Domestic Abuse Bill \(HL Bill 124\)](#), Clause 71(5).

¹¹⁸ Public Bill Committee, [Domestic Abuse Bill \(Ninth sitting\)](#), 16 June 2020, c298

¹¹⁹ MHCLG, [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities](#), para 9.22

¹²⁰ [Homelessness \(Review Procedure etc.\) Regulations 2018](#)

[local authorities](#) (December 2020), replaced previous guidance on social housing allocations.

Reasonable and additional preference

Local authorities have a great deal of discretion in framing their housing allocation schemes but they are required to give reasonable preference to certain categories of people.¹²¹ Section 166A(3) of the 1996 Act gives housing authorities power to frame their allocation schemes to give additional preference to particular descriptions of people who fall within the statutory reasonable preference categories and have urgent housing needs.

Statutory guidance says this could include those who are homeless as “a result of violence or threats of violence, including intimidated witnesses, and those escaping serious anti-social behaviour or domestic violence”.¹²²

Residency requirements

In 2013, the DCLG issued statutory guidance, [Providing social housing for local people](#), which encouraged authorities to adopt a two-year residence test as part of their qualification criteria.¹²³

The guidance advised authorities to retain flexibility in this requirement, to ensure they are “providing protection to people who need to move away from another area, to escape violence or harm”.¹²⁴

In 2018 the MHCLG published statutory guidance for local authorities on [Improving access to social housing for victims of domestic abuse](#). This went further than previous guidance to “ensure that those who need to move between local authority districts in order to escape domestic abuse are not disadvantaged by a residency or local connection test”.¹²⁵

Many people escaping domestic abuse may seek a place of safety in a refuge or other form of temporary accommodation before they apply for social housing, which may be in a different part of the country to their original home. [...] The Secretary of State therefore strongly encourages all local authorities to exempt from their residency requirements those who are living in a refuge or other form of safe temporary accommodation in their district having escaped domestic abuse in another local authority area.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Section 166A(3) of the 1996 Act

¹²² MHCLG, [Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local authorities](#), para 4.13

¹²³ See the Library’s [Allocating social housing \(England\)](#) for further detail.

¹²⁴ DCLG, [Providing social housing for local people: Statutory guidance](#), 2013, para 19

¹²⁵ MHCLG, [Improving access to social housing for victims of domestic abuse in refuges or other types of temporary accommodation: statutory guidance](#), 2018, para 24

¹²⁶ [Ibid.](#), para 19

The guidance also advises authorities to prioritise those in refuges to release space in this specialist accommodation for others:

It is also important that victims of domestic abuse who are provided with temporary protection in a refuge, or other form of temporary accommodation, are given appropriate priority under a local authority's allocation scheme, to enable them to move into more suitable settled accommodation, releasing valuable refuge spaces for others.¹²⁷

7.4 Social housing tenancies

Fixed-term tenancies

Measures included in the Housing and Planning Act 2016 were aimed at requiring local authorities in England to offer only fixed-term tenancies. On publication of the Social Housing Green Paper on 14 August 2018, [A new deal for social housing](#), the then-Government announced it would not implement these provisions “at this time”. Prior to this announcement, the [Secure Tenancies \(Victims of Domestic Abuse\) Act 2018](#) ensured that if this measure was brought into force, certain victims of domestic abuse would be exempt:

Lifetime tenants of social homes who are victims of domestic abuse are granted a further lifetime tenancy where either a) they need to leave or have left their home to escape domestic abuse and are being re-housed by a local authority, or b) where they are a joint tenant and wish to remain a tenant of their social home after the perpetrator has left or been removed and the local authority decides to grant them a further sole tenancy in their current home.¹²⁸

Following the announcement in August 2018, the 2018 Act has not been brought into force.

Measures in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, when in force, will require local authorities, when exercising discretion to introduce a fixed-term tenancy scheme, to provide that a ‘lifetime’ secure tenancy is offered to victims of domestic violence in certain circumstances.¹²⁹

Joint tenancies

In response to an amendment moved by Jess Phillips during consideration of the Domestic Abuse Bill 2019-21 to remove one joint tenant from a tenancy agreement where there has been domestic violence, the Government said MHCLG “are engaging with the domestic abuse sector and other relevant

¹²⁷ [Ibid.](#), para 24

¹²⁸ [Explanatory notes to the Secure Tenancies \(Victims of Domestic Abuse\) Act 2018](#), para 1

¹²⁹ Section 79 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021

stakeholders on these issues [...] with a view to arriving at a workable solution”.¹³⁰

7.5

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Scotland

In Scotland, local authorities have a duty to secure housing for all unintentionally homeless applicants—see, [Comparison of homelessness duties in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland](#).

The Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021 contains provisions which, when in force, will enable social landlords to take eviction action against tenants who engage in domestic abuse:

Part 2 of the Bill creates one new ground for recovery of possession by a landlord, namely that the tenant, who is a sole tenant, has engaged in behaviour which is abusive of a partner or ex-partner. This is to allow the landlord to enter into a new tenancy with the partner or ex-partner who is the victim of the abusive behaviour. It also allows a landlord to apply for an order terminating a tenant’s interest in a Scottish secure tenancy, where that tenant is a joint tenant with the partner or ex-partner, and has an engaged in behaviour which is abusive of the partner or ex-partner.¹³¹

Wales

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 governs the duties of local authorities to homeless people. Applicants who are “homeless as a result of being subject to domestic abuse” are automatically deemed to be in a priority need category.¹³² Domestic abuse is defined in section 58 of the Act. As in England, risk of domestic abuse is a factor that must be considered when determining whether it is reasonable for an applicant to continue to occupy their home.

The Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 contains provisions, which when in force, will assist victims of domestic abuse by enabling the landlord to terminate the occupation rights of the perpetrator where they occupy under a joint contract and are in breach of section 55 of the Act (anti-social behaviour and other prohibited conduct).¹³³

¹³⁰ Public Bill Committee, [Domestic Violence Bill 2019-21](#), 17 June 2020, cc451, 460

¹³¹ [Explanatory notes to the Domestic Abuse \(Protection\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#), SP Bill 84-EN (2020)

¹³² Section 70(1)(e) of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014

¹³³ Section 230 of the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016

Northern Ireland

The governing legislation for homelessness in Northern Ireland is the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 (as amended). Unlike the other three UK nations, housing is allocated by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), which covers the whole of Northern Ireland, rather than by local authorities.

An applicant for housing assistance is considered to have priority need if they are homeless and meet any of the criteria set out in the 1988 Order, including:

...a person without dependent children who satisfies the Executive that he has been subject to violence and is at risk of violent pursuit or, if he returns home, is at risk of further violence.

The NIHE allocates housing according to an applicant's points score on a waiting list. The full points schedule is published in the [Housing Selection Scheme Rules](#). The NIHE has conducted a review of social housing allocations, the [results of which were published in December 2020](#).¹³⁴ The original consultation had proposed the removal of 'intimidation points' from the scheme. The DfC said that this would not be taken forward:

This proposal will not proceed.

The Department is instead considering an alternative proposal and will commence work to investigate how to:

- strengthen the verification process to ensure that those who are genuinely being intimidated receive the priority they deserve and to prevent any abuse of the system; and
- address the current inconsistencies where other victims of trauma or violence, for example, victims of domestic abuse, do not currently receive intimidation points.

Protecting the most vulnerable in our society is central. Therefore, the immediate personal safety of those who have suffered intimidation will remain front and centre. Robust, clear and consistent processes are required and tightening of these will be considered.

Given the new exploratory work required for this amended proposal, it is anticipated that this will involve a long term timescale (24+ months from project commencement). The current system will remain in the interim but with improvements to the verification process as and when these are identified.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Department for Communities (DfC), [Consultation Outcome Report A Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations](#), December 2020

¹³⁵ [Ibid](#), p47

In July 2020, the Minister for Communities responded to a question on support available for men who suffer domestic violence and provided a [detailed response](#) including links to specific helplines.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ AQW 5389/17-22 [[Domestic abuse](#)], 30 July 2020

8 Financial support

8.1 Local welfare assistance schemes

Local welfare assistance schemes offer financial assistance to applicants in emergencies. Schemes vary by local authority, but can provide funds for essential household items, such as a bed or white goods, and food vouchers. [Research from The Children's Society](#) in October 2019 found 128 upper tier or 'Tier One' councils in England operated a local welfare assistance scheme. Information on the schemes and how to apply can be found on local authority websites.

In 2013 [Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants](#) were abolished and local authorities given the responsibility to administer schemes according to local needs. There is no statutory obligation for local authorities to provide a local welfare scheme and the funding is not ring fenced.

[The Children's Society's research](#) found that of the nominal funding allocation of £129 million for local welfare provision in 2018/19, local authorities only spent £40.8 million on local welfare schemes.¹³⁷ They also note that 1 in 7 local authority areas in England have no local welfare support scheme provided by the council.¹³⁸

The Children's Society have said crisis loans and community care grants were "essential sources of financial support" for victims of domestic abuse, and community care grants were used to enable survivors to establish a new home after a period in refuge accommodation.¹³⁹

A National Audit Office report '[Local welfare provision](#)' (2016) outlined how to manage and prioritise applications, councils have developed detailed eligibility criteria against which they assess applications and tend to prioritise "certain types of applicant" such as "those fleeing domestic abuse".¹⁴⁰

An amendment was tabled during the passage of the Domestic Abuse Bill that would have required every local authority in England to deliver a Local Welfare Provision scheme which provides financial assistance to victims of domestic abuse. The amendment was withdrawn.

¹³⁷ The Children's Society, [Leave No Family Behind: Strengthening Local Welfare Assistance during Covid-19](#), October 2020

¹³⁸ The Children's Society, [Leave No Family Behind: Strengthening Local Welfare Assistance during Covid-19](#), October 2020

¹³⁹ [Written evidence submitted by The Children's Society \(DAB49\)](#), May 2020

¹⁴⁰ NAO, [Local welfare provision](#), January 2016, p21

Responding to the amendment, the Home Office Minister Victoria Atkins said:

Local welfare assistance schemes enable support in such circumstances, such as support for victims of abuse in women’s refuges to become established in the community. The work that the domestic abuse commissioner will undertake to explore in depth the provision of community-based support is part of the economic picture as well. [...]

We are committed to working with the commissioner on community-based services and on the range of services and needs that she will address during her tenure. We believe that it would be a little premature to look at that before she has the chance to undertake that work.¹⁴¹

Financial assistance initiatives

In February 2021, NatWest and SafeLives announced ‘The Circle Fund’ was open for applications from frontline specialist services to distribute funds to victims of domestic abuse.

The SafeLives [press release](#) says that following a successful pilot across nine specialist frontline services, the fund will offer 150 services the opportunity to receive funding to distribute to those most in need. It notes “applications are strongly encouraged from smaller organisations supporting communities marginalised because of their race, LGBT+ identity or disability”.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Scotland

The Scottish Welfare Fund can provide a **Crisis Grant** to cover the costs of an emergency. This includes if “you’re a victim of domestic abuse and you need help with things like moving away from an abuser”.¹⁴²

Individuals can apply for the discretionary grant through their council and must be aged 16 or over, on a low income, and unable to get financial support from any other appropriate source.

Individuals subject to domestic abuse can also apply for a **Community Care Grant** via their local authority. They must have a low income and are “less likely” to receive the grant if they have savings of over £700 (or £1200 if they get a pension).¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ [Domestic Abuse Bill Deb](#), 16 June 2020, c349

¹⁴² Mygov.scot, [Help with living costs- Scottish welfare fund: Crisis grants](#), 5 February 2020

¹⁴³ Mygov.scot, [Help with living costs- Scottish welfare fund: Community Care Grants](#), 5 February 2020

Wales

Individuals may be eligible for payments from the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF). The DAF includes an Emergency Assistance Payment for help with essential costs if an individual is over 16, lives in Wales, is “in a crisis situation and in need of immediate financial support”, has no savings and is awaiting their first benefit payments.¹⁴⁴

Individuals can apply [online](#).

Northern Ireland

The Discretionary Support Fund, administered by the Department for Communities, includes provision for an unlimited number of awards to the victims of domestic abuse under its provision for disaster, subject to the person meeting the relevant eligibility criteria.¹⁴⁵

8.2 Help with housing costs

Housing benefit and Universal Credit: temporary absences from home

Where a victim of domestic violence is entitled to claim Housing Benefit (HB) towards the rent on their home, there is provision for them to receive HB on that home and towards the cost of temporary accommodation if they are temporarily absent from home due to fear of domestic violence:

If you intend to return to your former home, you can receive Housing Benefit for both a former permanent home and temporary accommodation. Your former home must not have been sublet and all accommodation must meet the [Housing Benefit conditions](#)

It will be paid:

- for up to 52 weeks within England, Scotland and Wales
- for up to 26 weeks outside England, Scotland and Wales

If you don't intend to return to your former home, you can receive Housing Benefit for up to 4 weeks if you have an unavoidable rental liability on the former home.¹⁴⁶

The housing element of Universal Credit (UC) has a similar provision:

¹⁴⁴ Welsh Government, [Discretionary Assistance Fund \(accessed 14 June 2021\)](#)

¹⁴⁵ AQW 7568/17-22 [[Discretionary Support Fund](#)], 7 October 2020

¹⁴⁶ HO and DWP, [Help available from the DWP for people who are victims of domestic violence and abuse](#), February 2019, accessed 26 January 2021.

There is special provision for the housing element of Universal Credit when you are temporarily absent from your home through fear of domestic violence and abuse.

If you intend to return to your former home, you can receive the housing element of Universal Credit for both a former permanent home and temporary accommodation. Your former home must not have been sublet and all accommodation must meet the [Universal Credit housing element conditions](#).

It will be paid:

- for up to 12 months within England, Scotland and Wales
- for up to 6 months outside England, Scotland and Wales.¹⁴⁷

Under-occupation deduction from HB/housing element of UC

Exempt accommodation

The under-occupation deduction, also referred to as the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and the Bedroom Tax, does not apply to claimants living in exempt accommodation. Exempt accommodation is supported accommodation provided by a non-metropolitan county council in England, a private registered provider of social housing, a charity, or voluntary organisation, where that organisation or someone acting on their behalf provides the claimant with care, support or supervision.¹⁴⁸ This might include refuges, hostels and other supported housing for victims of domestic abuse.

Panic/safe rooms

A claimant living in a home with a specially adapted panic room (installed due to risk of violence from a former partner) launched judicial review proceedings against the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in May 2013.

The case reached the European Court of Human Rights. In October 2019 in a 5/2 split decision the Court held that treating the panic/safe room as a bedroom for the purposes of regulation B13 of the Housing Benefit Regulations amounted to unjustified discrimination.¹⁴⁹

44 MPs wrote to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in March 2020 to “call on the Government to act now and create an exemption for this very vulnerable group.” The DWP said it was “carefully considering” the court’s decision and “in the meantime, for people in particular circumstances who

¹⁴⁷ [Ibid](#)

¹⁴⁸ Regulation A13(2)(d) Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 SI 2006/213

¹⁴⁹ [Case of J. D. and A. v United Kingdom 32949/17 34614/17](#). For an analysis of the case see [Nearly Legal](#), 27 October 2019

may require more support, Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are available.”¹⁵⁰

Discretionary Housing Payments

Where a claimant is eligible for HB or the housing element of UC, but experiences a shortfall between the rent due and their benefit entitlement (e.g. because they live in a property that is deemed to be too large for their needs, or the rent charged is higher than the Local Housing Allowance rate), they can apply to the local authority for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP).

There is no obligation on local authorities to pay DHPs and the method of allocation and decision-making process lies with authorities.

The DWP [guidance manual](#) (2021) states that one DHP scheme objective at the local level could be “ensuring that domestic abuse victims who are trying to move to a place of safety are supported.”¹⁵¹ Schemes could aim to help specific groups, such as the below, stay in their homes:

- People who have had to flee domestic abuse or have moved because of the threat of violence in another area
- People affected by domestic abuse who remain in a property which has been adapted under a sanctuary scheme.¹⁵²

Information on sanctuary schemes can be found in section 7.1, above.

The guidance manual states that authorities should seek to publicise DHPs to domestic abuse victims and ensure that those “trying to move to a place of safety through contact with external welfare organisations and refuges are supported”.¹⁵³ In circumstances where a victim of domestic abuse has moved from one local authority area to another to seek safety, the guidance states it “may be useful for respective LAs [local authorities] to collaborate and agree which authority will support which home.”¹⁵⁴

There is a Library briefing on [Discretionary Housing Payments](#) (SN6899).

Shared accommodation rate (SAR)

HB/Housing element of UC for most single, childless tenants aged under 35 years living in the private rented sector is limited to the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR), irrespective of the actual accommodation that

¹⁵⁰ [MPs oppose “bedroom tax” being applied to domestic abuse survivors](#), BBC News, 10 March 2020; PQ 26913 [[Housing benefit: Social rented housing](#)], 12 March 2020

¹⁵¹ DWP, [DHP: Guidance manual](#), updated February 2021, para 4.6

¹⁵² [Ibid.](#), para 6.15

¹⁵³ [Ibid.](#), para 4.8

¹⁵⁴ [Ibid.](#), para 4.25

the tenant occupies. Some categories of claimant are exempt from the SAR—see the Library’s [Housing benefit: Shared accommodation rate](#) (SN05889).

In the 2020 Spring Budget, the UK Government said that an exemption from the SAR would be extended to victims of domestic abuse.¹⁵⁵

The exemption is expected to be in place from October 2023. The MHCLG says the policy will require changes to legislation and IT systems before implementation.¹⁵⁶ Future legislation will set out the categories of people to whom the exemption will apply.¹⁵⁷

The benefit cap

The [benefit cap](#) was introduced in 2013. It limits the maximum amount in benefits a household can receive. Recipients of certain benefits (e.g. Carer’s Allowance or Disability Living Allowance) are exempt from the cap.

Housing support for exempt accommodation is excluded from the calculation of the benefit cap for victims of domestic abuse.¹⁵⁸

Section 1.4 of the Library briefing paper: [The benefit cap](#) (SN06294), provides further information.

8.3

Other social security assistance

Home Office and DWP guidance, [Help available from the DWP for people who are victims of domestic violence and abuse](#) (updated 22 February 2019) summarises a range of DWP measures designed to support victims.

Providing evidence

To access support, victims of domestic violence or abuse must provide written evidence from a person acting in an official capacity:

You will need written evidence from a person acting in an official capacity showing that:

- your circumstances are consistent with those of a person who has had domestic violence or abuse inflicted, or threatened, upon them, during the 6 months prior to you notifying DWP

¹⁵⁵ HM Treasury, [Budget 2020](#), HC 121, 11 March 2020, para 1.190

¹⁵⁶ PQ 27994 [[Shared Housing: Local Housing Allowance](#)], 11 March 2020

¹⁵⁷ PQ 67572 [[Local Housing Allowance](#)], 1 July 2020

¹⁵⁸ HO and DWP, [Help available from the DWP for people who are victims of domestic violence and abuse](#), 22 February 2019

- you have made contact with the person acting in an official capacity to tell them about any incidents that have occurred in the past 6 months

A person ‘acting in an official capacity’ means:

- a health care professional
- a police officer
- a registered social worker
- your employer or a representative of your trade union
- any public, voluntary or charitable body which has had direct contact with you about the domestic violence or abuse

You must provide your evidence to Jobcentre Plus as soon as possible but no later than one calendar month after you first told us about the domestic violence and abuse.¹⁵⁹

Jobcentre Plus

Individuals can contact a Work Coach at Jobcentre Plus about domestic violence and abuse to receive additional support and signposting towards services.¹⁶⁰ By the end of summer 2019, advocates for domestic abuse services were to be implemented in every Jobcentre to raise awareness of domestic abuse and to support staff.¹⁶¹

All Work Coaches, the Department said in 2019, “receive training on how to support claimants with complex needs, which includes a module on identifying, supporting and signposting victims of abuse”.¹⁶²

The primary form of communication between claimants and Work Coaches, the online journal, is visible to both members of a couple. However, individuals may also contact their named Case Manager or Work Coach through the free helpline or face-to-face in Jobcentres to receive support “without risk of the interaction being captured on the journal and viewed by the partner.”¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ HO and DWP, [Help available from the DWP for people who are victims of domestic violence and abuse](#), February 2019

¹⁶⁰ PQ 45230 [[UC: Coronavirus](#)], 11 May 2020

¹⁶¹ PQ 272899 [[Social security benefits: Females](#)], 3 July 2019

¹⁶² PQ 278514 [[Jobcentre Plus: Training](#)], 17 July 2019

¹⁶³ PQ HL8771 [[Universal Credit: Domestic Abuse](#)], 14 October 2020.

Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

Home Office and DWP [guidance](#) states that victims of domestic violence and abuse receiving JSA or ESA can “have a break from job seeking and work preparation requirements for up to 13 weeks to give [them] the space and time needed to stabilise [their] life”.¹⁶⁴

The ‘easement’ is split into two parts:

- An initial 4-week period starting on the day you tell Jobcentre Plus [in an interview with a Work Coach, either by phone or face to-face] that you have been threatened with or subject to domestic violence and abuse
- An extension from 4 to 13 weeks if you provide evidence during the initial 4 week period.

To be eligible for the initial 4-week break, the requirements are:

- The incident of domestic violence or abuse occurred in the last 26 weeks
- The incident must meet the [definition of domestic violence](#)
- You must not be living at the same address as the abuser
- You have not had another break due to domestic violence or abuse within the last 12 months

The Work Coach will inform the individual of the evidence needed to receive the full 13-week easement.

The 4 or 13 week easement, the DWP states, will “only be available once in any 12 month period and will run for 4 or 13 weeks consecutively whether or not you are entitled to JSA or ESA for the whole of that period”, though in “extreme cases” the length of the break may be extended by the Work Coach.¹⁶⁵

The DWP previously commissioned a report into the awareness, understanding and implementation of the Jobseeker's Allowance Domestic Violence (JSA DV) Easement and the Destitute Domestic Violence (DDV) Concession, which were introduced in 2012. The DWP said the report had

¹⁶⁴ HO and DWP, [Help available from the DWP for people who are victims of domestic violence and abuse](#), 22 February 2019

¹⁶⁵ [Ibid.](#)

informed service improvements, including refreshing guidance and communications.¹⁶⁶

Work and Health Programme (WHP)

The WHP seeks to help individuals find and retain work if they are unemployed. Additional support includes identifying employment needs, putting individuals in touch with employers, organising training, and managing health problems to reduce their impact on work.¹⁶⁷

The WHP is mandatory for JSA or UC claimants who have reached 24 months of unemployment, but is voluntary for others.

The WHP gives “priority” early access to victims of domestic abuse, amongst other groups.¹⁶⁸ Individuals can be referred by a Work Coach to the programme when the following criteria are met:

- That the claimant is able to achieve the goal of finding employment within one year;
- The [individual] can be helped by the offer;
- That Jobcentre Plus has already helped the individual with their core job search activity; and
- The [claimant] needs more support than can be provided within the standard Jobcentre Plus offer (or through other available services and provision).¹⁶⁹

Universal Credit (UC)

Protecting privacy

A response to a Parliamentary Question in October 2020 on preserving the privacy of the individual when discussing their experience and needs states:

All [UC] claimants have a named Case Manager or Work Coach which they can contact through the Freephone UC helpline or face to face in Jobcentres. These channels allow the Department to provide more immediate and bespoke support to the vulnerable partner without risk of the interaction being captured on the journal and viewed by the partner.

¹⁶⁶ DWP, [Domestic violence: Implementation of JSA DV easement and DDV concession- small scale qualitative research](#), RR 843, June 2013; PQ 168584 [[JSA: Domestic violence](#)], 12 September 2013

¹⁶⁷ Gov.UK, [Work and Health Programme](#), accessed 14 June 2021

¹⁶⁸ [Ibid.](#)

¹⁶⁹ PQ 137388 [[WHP](#)], 24 April 2018

All UC staff receive training on complex needs, including on identifying and supporting victims of abuse and signposting to expert partner organisations, such as Women's Aid.¹⁷⁰

“Switch off”/Easement of work-related requirements

In similar provisions to JSA and ESA claimants, individuals who state that they have been a victim of domestic violence and abuse are eligible to have their work-related requirements “switched off” for 13 weeks if:

- The domestic violence and abuse occurred within the previous 6 months;
- The incident meets the definition of domestic violence;
- They are not living at the same address as the abuser;
- They have not had a 13-week break from work-related requirements as a result of previous domestic violence within the last 12 months; and
- They can provide written evidence within one month of the date you discussed the matter with a work coach.

The break starts on the date they notify UC. Evidence must come from a person acting in an official capacity (e.g. a healthcare professional or a registered social worker) stating that the individual has experienced domestic violence in the previous six months.¹⁷¹

The duration of the easement may be extended for carers of a child:

- all claimants in any conditionality regime:
 - must not have work-related requirements imposed for up to 13 weeks
 - any requirements undertaken must be on a voluntary basis and no sanction will apply within this 26-week period if a claimant does not undertake any work-related requirement
- a responsible carer of a child, in the Intensive Work Search regime:
 - must not have work search and availability requirements imposed for a further 13 weeks (bringing the total up to 26 weeks)
 - after the first 13 weeks, claimants must be offered voluntary review to see whether they want to take up the offer of work-related support on voluntary basis

¹⁷⁰ PQ HL8771 [[UC: Domestic abuse](#)], 5 October 2020

¹⁷¹ [DEP2021-Q359/51/49, Domestic violence and abuse, v. 18.Q](#), April 2021, pp6-7

- a responsible carer of a child in any other conditionality regime:
 - must not have any work-related requirements imposed for 26 weeks ¹⁷²

Child distress and work-related requirements.

A person who is the main carer of a child up to 16 years of age, who is in considerable distress due to domestic violence and abuse, may also be eligible for a temporary break from work-related requirements. ¹⁷³

The DWP guidance describes the easement's duration and frequency:

If the claimant has not had their work-related requirements switched-off for any other reason, they can be switched-off for one month if they are responsible for a child who is in considerable distress.

This can be applied once every 6 months for a total period of 2 years after the incident that triggered the child's distress (a maximum of 4 one month periods) ¹⁷⁴

This easement can be in addition to the domestic abuse easement:

If the claimant has had their work-related requirements switched-off because of domestic violence and abuse (and they are the main carer for a child switch-off as long as they have not had a previous domestic violence and abuse switch-off period within the last 12 months). A claimant can have their requirements switched-off for additional periods of 1 month if their child is in distress. These additional periods can be applied once every 6 months over the next 18 months, a two-year period in total. ¹⁷⁵

Alternative Payment Arrangements (e.g. split payments)

In Great Britain, UC is by default paid as a single, monthly payment covering all the household's needs, into a bank or other account. ¹⁷⁶

[Alternative Payment Arrangements](#) (APAs) may be made if claimants cannot manage with single monthly payments and there is a risk of financial harm to

¹⁷² [ibid](#), pp8-9

¹⁷³ [ibid](#), p9

¹⁷⁴ [DEP2020-0646/24, Child in considerable distress, v. 4.0](#), April 2021, pp3-4

¹⁷⁵ [ibid](#) p4

¹⁷⁶ The situation is different in Northern Ireland, where UC is by default paid twice monthly, and the housing costs element is paid direct to the landlord, although claimants can opt out of either arrangement. See Nidirect, [Universal Credit payments and advance payments](#) for information on payment flexibilities including the possibility of split payments between members of a couple

them and/or their family.¹⁷⁷ APAs can be considered at any point during the UC claim.¹⁷⁸

APAs can include:

- Housing costs being paid directly to a claimant's landlord;
- Receiving twice monthly instead of monthly payments;
- Allocating a higher percentage to the person with primary caring responsibilities
- Having the UC award split between two members of a couple.¹⁷⁹

Regarding split payments, the DWP states this can be requested in multiple ways:

Both members of a couple do not need to be present to arrange a split payment and consent is not required from the other partner to authorise a split payment. Claimants can request a split payment during a face to face meeting, a phone call, or online via their journal and do not have to provide evidence of abuse in order to be granted a split payment.¹⁸⁰

In January 2019, then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Amber Rudd, committed to enabling main carers to receive household payments:

I am committed to ensuring that household payments go directly to the main carer – which is usually, but not always, the woman.

For those couples currently claiming UC, around 60% of payments already go to the woman's bank account. However, I am looking at what more we can do to enable the main carer to receive the UC payment, and we will begin to make those changes later this year.¹⁸¹

In response to the Joint Committee's recommendations on the Domestic Abuse Bill in 2019, the DWP committed to review the effectiveness of new features to encourage payments of UC to the main carer.¹⁸²

The [Revenuebenefits website notes](#) that since August 2019, "when a new household registers for UC, DWP tells the claimant(s) that the payments should be directed to the bank account of the main carer."

¹⁷⁷ APAs are available throughout Great Britain, but UC claimants in Scotland can also request twice-monthly payments and/or payment of the housing costs element to their landlord on request, without satisfying eligibility rules in APAs, under rules known as [Scottish Choices](#).

¹⁷⁸ HO and DWP, [Help available from the DWP for people who are victims of domestic violence and abuse](#), February 2019; DWP, [Alternative payment arrangements](#), updated 13 May 2020

¹⁷⁹ [Ibid](#) and PQ HL9478 [UC], 22 October 2020

¹⁸⁰ PQ 253650 [UC], 13 May 2019

¹⁸¹ DWP and The Rt Hon Amber Rudd, [Speech: Universal Credit: personal welfare](#), 11 January 2019

¹⁸² PQ 278516 [UC: Domestic abuse], 17 July 2019;

Work and Pensions Committee on split payments and UK Government's response

The Work and Pensions Committee report, [UC and domestic abuse](#) (2018), argued the DWP could “learn from the Scottish experience” in the planned automatic use of split payments.¹⁸³

Whilst stating that accountability for abuse remains with the perpetrator, the Committee argued the DWP had a “moral duty to ensure the benefit system does not in any way facilitate abuse”:

We have heard evidence that, for a minority of claimants, single household payments as default make it easier for perpetrators to abuse and control their victims. At one stroke, perpetrators can take charge of potentially the entire household budget, leaving survivors and their children dependent on the abusive partner for all of their basic needs.

Split payments cannot prevent financial abuse. Some abusers will find a way to control their partner's finances, whatever systems the DWP puts in place. Nevertheless, the Department must give serious consideration to any changes which might offer some protection, albeit limited, to survivors of abuse.¹⁸⁴

The DWP “noted” the recommendation to observe the implementation of split payments in Scotland as a “policy [that] will be applied to a sufficiently large area for us to obtain strong data, allowing us to explore both the potential advantages of such a policy, as well as any previously unidentified challenges.”¹⁸⁵

In 2020, Neil Couling, Change Director General and Senior Responsible Owner for UC at the DWP, told the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee's inquiry on [Universal Credit isn't working: proposals for reform](#) (July 2020), that he had doubts over the usefulness of split payments, saying that domestic abuse is a “criminal act [and] [...] a benefit system cannot fix that problem”.¹⁸⁶

The Government, in their response to the committee, did not agree that policy on split payments needed review.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Work and Pensions Committee, [UC and domestic abuse](#), HC 1166, 18 July 2018, p4, pars 58-60, 67

¹⁸⁴ [Ibid.](#), paras 52-3

¹⁸⁵ DWP, [UC and domestic abuse: Government response to the Committee's seventeenth report](#), 28 September 2018, para 32

¹⁸⁶ House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, [Universal Credit isn't working: Proposals for reform](#), HL 105, 31 July 2020, p84

¹⁸⁷ House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, [Government response to the report, Universal Credit isn't working: proposals for reform](#), 13 October 2020, p2

The two-child limit

Families receiving UC do not receive an additional amount for a third or subsequent child born on or after 6 April 2017, unless [special circumstances apply](#).¹⁸⁸ The same applies to Child Tax Credit (CTC).¹⁸⁹

Circumstances exempting individuals from this rule, allowing them to receive UC or CTC for a third or subsequent children in their household, include if the child is likely to have been conceived as a result of rape, or in a controlling or coercive relationship (a “non-consensual conception”).¹⁹⁰ A “controlling or coercive” relationship is one where the victim feared that violence would be used against them on at least two occasions, or experienced serious alarm or distress that had a substantial adverse effect on their day-to-day activities.

Unless there has been conviction or compensation award for rape or for controlling or coercive behaviour, an individual must complete a [non-consensual conception form](#) with the help of a third-party professional (e.g. a health professional, a specialist support worker from an approved organisation, or a registered social worker):¹⁹¹

- Tell DWP if you want to apply for this exception either by phone or using your Universal Credit online account.
- If you contact us by phone or using your online account, and you don't already have any supporting documents, you'll be asked to download the [support for a child conceived without your consent form](#). If you don't have internet access you can collect the form from your work coach.
- You'll need to complete the form along with your chosen [third party professional](#).
- In order to apply for this exception you must no longer be living with the other biological parent of the child.

The guidance states that DWP staff “won't question you about the incident other than to take the claim and receive the supporting documents”.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ HO and DWP, [Help available from the DWP for people who are victims of domestic violence and abuse](#), 22 February 2019; HM Treasury, [Summer Budget 2015](#), HC 264, July 2015, para 1.146.

¹⁸⁹ See Commons Library briefing CBP-7935, [The two child limit in tax credits and Universal Credit](#), 10 April 2017

¹⁹⁰ Schedule 12, para 5 of the [Universal Credit Regulations 2013](#), SI 2013/376, as amended

¹⁹¹ These are listed in full at DWP and HMRC guidance, [Approved third party professionals who can complete these forms](#), updated 30 October 2019

¹⁹² DWP, [Guidance: UC: support for maximum of 2 children: information for claimants](#), updated 22 July 2020

Work and Pensions Committee on the two-child limit and Government response, 2019

The [Work and Pensions Committee](#) in 2019 argued that a “disproportionate burden” of the two-child limit is “likely to fall on survivors of rape and domestic abuse”:¹⁹³

Only a minority of third children result from planned pregnancies. Some are conceived as a result of rape or coercive control—and with only 510 survivors receiving the exemption for such cases, it is inevitable that some are being affected by the two-child limit, despite the Government’s stated intentions.¹⁹⁴

The DWP’s [response](#) in December 2020 said that the “the exception will be delivered in the most effective, compassionate way, with the right safeguards in place”. The DWP recognised “the sensitivities surrounding disclosure” and had implemented a process to allow third-party confirmation of a claimant’s circumstances:

Claimants in this situation will be able to contact a third party professional, which includes GPs and other health care professionals they are likely to already be in contact with, as well as registered social workers and more specialist organisations who may be able to provide or signpost to further support. [...] The claimant will not need to produce any evidence to support their claim to the third party professional. [...] Once confirmation is received from the third party, the Department will apply the exception.¹⁹⁵

UC advances

New UC claimants can request a repayable UC advance worth 100% of their estimated award as soon as they claim.¹⁹⁶

House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee on the ‘five-week wait’, 2020

The House of Lords [Economic Affairs Committee](#) in 2020 raised concerns that the ‘five-week wait’ for the first payment of UC has a detrimental impact on those experiencing domestic abuse:

The five-week wait can make it difficult for an individual to leave an abusive relationship and can entrench poverty amongst those who have suffered from financial and domestic abuse. Refuge, a charity,

¹⁹³ Work and Pensions Committee, [The two-child limit](#), HC 51, 3 November 2019, p3

¹⁹⁴ [Ibid.](#), para 41

¹⁹⁵ Work and Pensions Committee, [Government response to the two-child Limit](#), HC 1079, 14 December 2020, p3

¹⁹⁶ DWP, [Guidance: UC advances](#), updated 19 April 2020

said that the five-week wait typically coincides with the point at which people flee from abuse.¹⁹⁷

The Committee recommended a non-repayable, two-week initial grant to all claimants and initially administer the grant as an advanced payment.¹⁹⁸

The DWP's [response](#) said support was already available in the form of rapid advances and the extension of the repayment period.¹⁹⁹

Individuals who have left an abusive relationship, the DWP states, can be helped by their Work Coach to claim a “rapid advance” of their monthly entitlement. A decision can be reached on the same day this is requested.²⁰⁰ In answer to a April 2019 PQ, the DWP Minister, Will Quince, said that access to funds can be achieved in “2-3 hours” for those fleeing domestic abuse arriving in a Jobcentre and opening a new claim with a rapid advance.²⁰¹

If a UC claimant has “been forced into claiming an advance through domestic abuse”, the DWP advises the individual to contact them and that some discretion may be possible:

If the advance was taken whilst part of a couple claim, 50% of the outstanding balance would be apportioned upon pursuing a single claim. Additionally, the Department offers deferrals of advance repayments by up to 3 months in exceptional circumstances and will apply discretion wherever possible with the rates of repaying other government debts.²⁰²

Before April 2021, advances usually had to be paid back within 12 months after first UC payment is received, though in “exceptional” circumstances this could be delayed for up to 3 months.²⁰³ For advances claimed after 12 April 2021, the maximum recovery period was extended to 24 months.²⁰⁴

Migrant partner support

Individuals who have come to the UK on a family visa as a spouse, civil partner or unmarried partner and need to leave home through fear of domestic violence and abuse, can apply for a [Destitution Domestic Violence \(DDV\) concession](#).

¹⁹⁷ Economic Affairs Committee, [Universal Credit isn't working: Proposals for reform](#), HL 105, 31 July 2020, para 65

¹⁹⁸ [Ibid.](#), paras 72-4

¹⁹⁹ DWP, [Memorandum to the Economic Affairs Committee. Government response to \[the report on\] the Economics of UC](#), 15 October 2020, p2

²⁰⁰ [“Already Claimed: 7. Domestic abuse”](#) from UnderstandingUniversalCredit.gov.uk; PQ 253650 [UC], 13 May 2019

²⁰¹ PQ 220205 [UC: Domestic abuse], 18 April 2019

²⁰² PQ 100279 [UC: Domestic abuse], 7 October 2020

²⁰³ DWP, [Guidance: UC advances](#), updated 19 April 2021

²⁰⁴ HM Treasury, [Budget 2020](#), HC 121, March 2020, para 2.9

This will allow them to claim benefits for up to 3 months while UK Visas and Immigration considers their application to settle in the UK.²⁰⁵

8.4 Assistance with debt

Women's Aid outline how "research and practical experience provides conclusive evidence that living with domestic violence and abuse often has a direct impact on the financial circumstances of the victim/survivor and her children".²⁰⁶

Women's Aid published [Domestic Abuse and Money Education: Guidance for Professionals Supporting Survivors with Financial Issues](#) in 2012. The guidance was developed following the 'Domestic Abuse, Money and Education' project (DAME), a three-year project undertaken by Women's Aid and Money Advice Plus working in partnership with the Nationwide Foundation. The DAME project aimed to increase the knowledge and confidence of professionals working in money and debt advice services when assisting survivors who are experiencing financial difficulties.

Money Advice Plus, in partnership with Surviving Economic Abuse, run a [Financial Support Line](#) for victims of domestic abuse. They are funded by the Home Office to provide short term advice and guidance to victims of domestic abuse in England and Wales.²⁰⁷ They also run a debt casework service for victims of domestic abuse. It is possible for victims to be referred by a specialist domestic abuse service, or via self-referral.²⁰⁸

Economic abuse

Economic abuse is a form of coercive control through which domestic abuse perpetrators seek to reinforce or create economic dependency and/or instability.

Refuge and the Co-operative Bank launched the [My Money, My Life](#) campaign in December 2015 which called for industry-wide agreement to support people experiencing this type of abuse. They published a follow-up report [Know Economic Abuse](#) in 2020. The 2020 report estimates the prevalence of economic abuse based on the results of a survey:

Economic abuse is potentially more widespread than previously thought. 1 in 6 (16%) of adults surveyed said that they had experienced economic abuse from a current or previous partner.

²⁰⁵ HO, [DDV concession, v.1.0](#), 5 February 2018; HO, [Apply for a DDV concession](#), 14 October 2019

²⁰⁶ Women's Aid, [Domestic Abuse and Money Education](#), Accessed on 21 June 2021

²⁰⁷ Money Advice Plus, [The financial support line for victims of domestic abuse](#), Accessed on 21 June 2021

²⁰⁸ [Ibid.](#)

However, 39% of respondents to the survey reported that they had experienced economic abuse behaviours, for example not being allowed access to a joint bank account, or their partner instilling fear in order to put debt in their name. This suggests many more people than the 16% who self-identified as experiencing economic abuse, have experienced economic abuse, but do not recognise it as such.²⁰⁹

The report goes on to outline the link between economic abuse and debt. The survey results revealed that 57% of those who had experienced economic abuse said that they were in, or had been, in debt because of it. 27% of those who experienced economic abuse reported they were struggling financially, and 21% said they had debts they did not know how to repay.

On average, people who had been economically abused were £3,272 in debt, and the report estimates this is the equivalent to £14.4 billion of economic abuse-related debt in the UK.

The [Know Economic Abuse](#) report puts forward a five-point plan to build on the voluntary Code of Practice, which includes the creation of a preferential “credit rating repair system” to be implemented by banks and credit reference agencies.

The Financial Conduct Authority’s [Guidance for firms on the fair treatment of vulnerable customers](#) published in February 2021, says “it is important that relevant staff are aware of how perpetrators of abuse can use financial services in their abuse and recognise how to safely provide victims with the support they need”.²¹⁰

Surviving Economic Abuse, a UK economic abuse charity, published a report [The cost of Covid-19: Economic abuse throughout the pandemic](#) in April 2021. The report is based on a survey of survivors and frontline professionals carried out between June and August 2020. The report included the following recommendations in relation to finances:

- The Government must ensure that essential services (including supermarkets) accept cash as payment so that victim-survivors reliant on it for safety and/or budgeting are able to continue using it.
- Bank staff and creditors must be trained in domestic abuse, including economic abuse, so that they can effectively respond to victim-survivors’ needs.
- Banks and creditors must ensure that victim-survivors have safe and reliable ways through which to contact them.

²⁰⁹ Refuge and the Co-operative Bank, [Know Economic Abuse](#), p11

²¹⁰ Financial Conduct Authority, [Guidance for firms on the fair treatment of vulnerable customers](#), February 2021, p17

- Banks and creditors must ensure that policies and processes account for the needs of customers experiencing domestic abuse, including economic abuse, and reflect specific needs arising during particular contexts.
- The Government must reform consumer law so that coerced debt is recognised, victims can seek redress and perpetrators are held accountable.
- Government funding must be provided to local authorities so that they can provide local hardship funds and emergency grant schemes to victim-survivors and promote these to residents and frontline professionals.
- Local authorities must ensure that any emergency grant or hardship fund schemes they provide are flexible to meet the needs of victim-survivors of economic abuse.²¹¹

Other organisations have published resources to help victims of financial abuse, including the [Money Advice Service](#), and [Refuge](#).UK Finance, a trade association for the UK banking and financial services sector, published a voluntary [Financial Abuse Code of Practice](#) in August 2018. The Code aims to give victims “enhanced support to regain control of their finances and greater consistency” in support received across providers.²¹²

Coerced debt

Research by Surviving Economic Abuse has found 60% of economic abuse survivors are coerced into debt.²¹³ Its report, [The cost of Covid-19: Economic abuse throughout the pandemic](#) notes that:

41% reported that victim-survivors had raised concerns with them [professionals] about the perpetrator taking out credit or loans during the pandemic without their knowledge, and 38% said that victim-survivors had raised being pressured into taking out loans or credit.²¹⁴

The report goes on to say:

Coerced debt is not recognised in consumer law, so unless the debt arises from fraud, there are currently no formal mechanisms available through which to address it. SEA has been working in

²¹¹ Surviving Economic Abuse, [The cost of Covid-19: Economic abuse throughout the pandemic](#), April 2021, p11

²¹² UK Finance, [Financial services industry commits to new code of practice to support victims of financial abuse](#), August 2018

²¹³ Surviving Economic Abuse, [The cost of Covid-19: Economic abuse throughout the pandemic](#), April 2021

²¹⁴ Surviving Economic Abuse, [The cost of Covid-19: Economic abuse throughout the pandemic](#), April 2021, p32

partnership with Money Advice Plus to appeal to the goodwill of creditors to write off debt that has been coerced and, whilst positive steps are being taken by some here, responses can be inconsistent within and across firms. Only one in four cases are resolved in this way.²¹⁵

Surviving Economic Abuse also carried out the [Economic Justice Project](#) between 2017 and 2020. The project aimed to help women who had been coerced into debt by calling for debt write-offs.²¹⁶ The [final evaluation](#) of the project was published in September 2020.

²¹⁵ Surviving Economic Abuse, [The cost of Covid-19: Economic abuse throughout the pandemic](#), April 2021, p92

²¹⁶ Surviving Economic Abuse, [Recognising and responding to the scale of coerced debt](#), September 2020, p4

9

Workplace support

An [international study from KPMG commissioned by Vodafone](#) estimated the direct cost of domestic abuse to business' bottom line as £316 million a year due to decreased productivity, time off work, lost wages and sick pay.²¹⁷

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) published [Workplace support for victims of domestic abuse](#) in January 2021. The report details the key findings from a review by BEIS into how victims of domestic abuse can be supported in the workplace and covers three main themes:

- Raising awareness and understanding of the impacts that domestic abuse can have on individuals and employers.
- Building and sharing best practice among employers.
- The role of employment rights.

The report says that further measures are needed so all victims of domestic abuse can feel confident in their employers' response. The Government committed to establishing a working group of Government, employers, representatives of domestic abuse victims and trade unions to "convene regularly to establish practical solutions and to drive culture change and best practice". The group will consider:

- how to develop safe and inclusive workplace environments, where victims can feel confident to disclose domestic abuse;
- how to support victims in a variety of situations, for example, where domestic abuse impacts on safety in the workplace, leads to performance issues, and where the victim works with the perpetrator;
- how to best support employers, for example, by developing specific products such as model policies, guidance as well as through education and training; and
- how to reach large and small employers nationally, regionally and locally.²¹⁸

The report says that "flexibility can be helpful to enable victims to access the support they need" but there are barriers to this, including variation in the provision of special leave for domestic abuse between employers. In

²¹⁷ [Ibid.](#)

²¹⁸ BEIS, [Workplace support for victims of domestic abuse](#), January 2021, p24

response, the Government said it would consult to take forward the Government’s manifesto commitment to “encourage flexible working and consult on making it the default unless employers have good reasons not to”.²¹⁹

Following the publication of the report, Business Minister Paul Scully wrote an [open letter to employers](#) on how they could best support survivors of domestic abuse.

Public Health England and Business in the Community published [Domestic abuse: A toolkit for employers](#) in June 2021. It highlights how employers have an important role to play in society’s response to domestic abuse:

Never more so than in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic which has seen an exponential shift to working from home. For those experiencing abuse, the workplace often offers a safe space and a respite away from their abuser. Colleagues and managers can often be the only other people outside the home that survivors talk to each day and are therefore uniquely placed to help spot signs of abuse.²²⁰

The toolkit outlines how employers have a [legal responsibility](#) to provide a safe and effective work environment, and have a duty of care to employees:

Helping to support and protect employees who are experiencing domestic abuse is part of that responsibility, although, the law does not require business to provide benefits such as paid time off, or special leave. These are discretionary, although good practice. Providing paid special leave is likely to help a survivor, and the 2020 report from the [2020 CIPD and Equality and Human Rights Commission report](#) advocates for this.²²¹

The toolkit says that 86% of companies believe they have a duty of care towards domestic abuse victims but only 5% have introduced a specific policy or guideline on the issue.²²²

Initiatives

- The [Employers’ Initiative on Domestic Abuse](#) (EIDA) is a network of over 470 public and private employers which “aims to enable employers to take action on domestic abuse, by raising awareness among all employees, supporting those facing domestic abuse, and providing access to services to help perpetrators to stop”.²²³

²¹⁹ [Ibid.](#) p27

²²⁰ PHE and Business in the Community, [Domestic abuse: A toolkit for employers](#), June 2021, p3

²²¹ PHE and Business in the Community, [Domestic abuse: A toolkit for employers](#), June 2021, p14

²²² [Ibid.](#)

²²³ BEIS, [Workplace support for victims of domestic abuse: review report](#), 14 January 2021

- The [Employer Domestic Abuse Covenant](#) (EDAC) was launched in December 2020 and is supported by the DWP. The EDAC is a pledge by businesses to support women affected by abuse to enter or re-enter the workplace. Employers are “invited to sign the covenant and identify opportunities within their businesses for women seeking sustainable employment opportunities”.²²⁴

²²⁴ Employers Domestic Abuse Covenant, [What is EDAC?](#) Accessed on 25 June 2021

10

Health services

The Library briefing paper [The role of healthcare services in addressing domestic abuse](#) sets out information for England.

The paper includes information on how healthcare services respond to the physical and mental health impacts of domestic abuse and provide treatment for related issues, including substance misuse.

Healthcare services may provide support to survivors of domestic abuse in many ways. In some instances, healthcare service involvement will be limited to identifying the signs of abuse and directing victims to relevant specialist support following a disclosure. Specialist victim support services are increasingly provided in a healthcare setting, such as a hospital, and healthcare services can play an active role in supporting victims through the treatment of physical and mental harms caused by domestic abuse. NHS England is also the lead commissioner of Sexual Assault Referral Centres.

It has been suggested that health services could play a key role in reaching survivors of domestic abuse who may not engage with other services. SafeLives state that health settings “encourage higher rates of disclosure including from groups who face additional barriers to getting support such as BAME, disabled, older and LGBT+ communities”.²²⁵

Research has found that around 30% of domestic abuse begins during pregnancy.²²⁶ It has also been estimated that between 40-60% of women experiencing domestic abuse are abused during pregnancy.²²⁷

Despite the key role healthcare services have in identifying and responding to domestic abuse, research published in the [British Journal of Nursing](#) in July 2020 identified potential barriers preventing health professionals from screening women for domestic abuse and identified “lack of training and education” as the most prevalent barriers.²²⁸

²²⁵ SafeLives, [SafeLives' 2019 survey of domestic abuse practitioners in England and Wales](#), 2019, p15

²²⁶ SafeLives, [A Cry for Health: Why we must invest in domestic abuse services in hospitals](#), November 2016, p36

²²⁷ [Ibid.](#), p36

²²⁸ British Journal of Nursing, [What barriers prevent health professionals screening women for domestic abuse? A literature review](#), Vol.29, No.13, 10 July 2020

10.1

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Scotland

In 2008, the Chief Executive of NHS Scotland published a [Gender-based Violence Action Plan](#). The document set out expectations for health boards to implement routine enquiry in six priority areas of service delivery: maternity, community nursing, substance misuse services, mental health, sexual health and emergency departments. All women accessing these services were to be asked about their experience of domestic abuse. Men were also to be asked when using substance misuse and mental health services.²²⁹

Further information on routine enquiry can be found on the Public Health Scotland webpage [Routine enquiry of domestic abuse training](#).

In 2017, the Scottish Government convened a [Task Force for the Improvement of Services for Victims of Rape and Sexual Assault](#), chaired by the Chief Medical Officer. The Force's vision, to be delivered by 2022, is:

Consistent, person-centred, trauma-informed healthcare and forensic medical services and access to recovery, for anyone who has experienced rape or sexual assault in Scotland.²³⁰

The Scottish Government published [Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls](#) in 2014 and it was subsequently updated. The [Delivery Plan](#) runs until 2021.

A [report](#) was published in November 2020 outlining the progress to date and outlines a number of health service examples. For example, the report highlights that the ASPEN project has been developed in Dundee, which it describes as "an innovative collaboration between NHS Tayside and the third sector".²³¹ The project has funded a clinical psychologist to be based within Dundee Women's Aid in order to offer psychological assessment and treatment interventions.²³²

The report also notes the following health related priorities will be taken forward over 2020/21:

Progress legislation through the Scottish Parliament on domestic abuse protection orders and forensic medical services [...]

²²⁹ Scottish Government, [Healthcare Policy and Strategy Directorate, Gender-based Violence Action Plan](#), 29 September 2008

²³⁰ NHS Ayrshire & Arran, [Gender Based Violence – NHS Ayrshire & Arran Action Plan 2018-21](#), 31 July 2018

²³¹ Scottish Government, [Equally Safe: Final report](#), Key achievements: Priority Three, 24 November 2020

²³² [Ibid](#)

Progress a review of the funding and commissioning of front-line specialist services, with an initial twin focus on domestic abuse and sexual violence [...]

Continue, through the CMO Rape and Sexual Assault Taskforce, to create a Scottish Sexual Assault Response Coordination (SSARC) service in each territorial Health Board supported by Scottish Government funding towards infrastructure and workforce.²³³

Public Health Scotland have published guidance [Gender based violence, Domestic abuse – What health workers need to know](#). The guidance highlights some of the main sources of support for survivors of domestic abuse. This includes Independent Domestic Abuse Advisers (IDAAs) and [ASSIST](#).

Wales

[Domestic Violence: A Resource Manual for Health Care Professionals in Wales](#) was published in 2001.

The [Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) requires local health boards to work alongside local authorities to prepare a strategy for tackling violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

The Welsh Government has an agreement in place with NICE covering the Institute's guidelines. The [Good Practice Framework for Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence and Substance Misuse](#), published by the Welsh Government, highlights the NICE guidance and quality standards related to domestic abuse and states:

There is an expectation that NHS bodies in Wales take full account of the recommendations made by the Institute when commissioning and delivering services to patients.²³⁴

The Welsh Government published guidance in June 2019 '[Impact on children of experiencing domestic abuse](#)' which includes information on the health impact.

Northern Ireland

The Department of Health published the [Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland Strategy](#) alongside the Department of Justice. The [Year 5 Action Plan](#) covers 2020/21 and sets out priorities. This includes actions related to health interventions:

²³³ [Ibid](#)

²³⁴ Welsh Government, [Good Practice Framework for Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence and Substance Misuse](#), June 2018, p10

Complete and evaluate the Identification and Referral to Improve Safety ('IRIS') pilot in East Belfast and Newry/Down GP Federations and consider findings to inform wider advocacy support [...]

Pilot a Domestic Violence and Abuse Worker within a Southern HSC Trust Acute Emergency Department to enable victims to receive immediate advice/support and be signposted/referred to relevant services, as well as consider findings to inform wider advocacy support.²³⁵

[Progress under the Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy's Year Four Action Plan 2019/20](#) summarises progress in 2019/20.

²³⁵ Department of Health Northern Ireland, [Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy: Year 5 Action Plan](#), Last updated 27 November 2020

11

Education

11.1

Schools and children

The Government accepted amendments to the Domestic Abuse Bill to recognise children as victims of domestic abuse if they see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse and are related to the person being abused or the perpetrator.²³⁶

Analysis by the Children’s Commissioner found that approximately 788,700 children in England were living in households where there was domestic abuse in 2019/20.²³⁷ It has previously been estimated that as many as one in five children in the UK are exposed to domestic abuse during childhood.²³⁸

The closure of schools and social distancing measures limiting time spent outside the home are likely to have increased the number of children exposed to domestic abuse. The NSPCC reported in June 2020 that contacts to the helpline about the impact of domestic abuse on children increased by 32% since the start of lockdown, to an average of one an hour.²³⁹

There are examples of schools and police working together to provide emotional and practical support to children affected by domestic abuse through [Operation Encompass](#).

Operation Encompass “aims to ensure all children experiencing domestic abuse receive timely support in school” by facilitating increased information sharing between the police and schools, training staff and publishing resources such as the [Operation Encompass Handbook](#).²⁴⁰

Operation Encompass [Resources for schools](#) details “simple factors to consider about how to support a child” including:

- If a child enters school agitated and anxious, they need to engage in activities that will enable them to become calm before we start to consider academic learning

²³⁶ Victims Commissioner, [Recognition of children as victims of Domestic Abuse, and improved protections for victims in Family Courts announced](#), 30 June 2020

²³⁷ Children’s Commissioner, [National picture of childhood vulnerability in England](#), Estimated prevalence of underlying needs among children, Modelled prevalence of children in households where parent suffering domestic abuse, Accessed on 7 February 2021

²³⁸ Home Office, [Children affected by domestic abuse to benefit from £8 million fund](#), 21 July 2018

²³⁹ NSPCC, [Calls about domestic abuse highest on record following lockdown increase](#), 10 June 2020

²⁴⁰ Operation Encompass, [Home](#), Accessed on 21 June 2021

- Ensure that basic needs are met (‘Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs’); they may be tired or hungry (and therefore have great difficulty concentrating in school) [...]
- Consider the tone of voice that you use and the impact that this may have upon a child living with domestic abuse [...]
- Prepare children for any changes to the normal day and carefully handle transitions during the day.²⁴¹

The Home Office has provided funding to roll out Operation Encompass nationally, and it currently operates in all 43 police forces across England and Wales, “ensuring vital early intervention in all local areas”.²⁴²

Safeguarding responsibilities

The Department for Education has published statutory guidance on safeguarding, [Keeping children safe in education](#) (September 2020). This states that schools and colleges should be “particularly alert” to the “potential need to provide early help for a child” in a family where domestic abuse is occurring.²⁴³

The Library paper, [Safeguarding in English schools](#) (CBP8023) provides further detail.

Local authorities are under general duties to safeguard children—relevant briefings and documents are listed in section 2.3 of this paper.

Relationships and Sex Education

Section 34 of the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) provides for relationships and sex education to be taught in all schools in England. These changes have been compulsory since September 2020. However, schools have been permitted to [delay the introduction](#) of the new requirements until summer 2021, if their preparations were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.²⁴⁴

Following the reforms, all primary schools in England teach “Relationships Education”, and secondary schools teach “Relationships and Sex Education”.

Statutory guidance has been issued as [Relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education](#) (updated June 2020).

²⁴¹ Operation Encompass, [Supporting children experiencing domestic abuse: A practical handbook for your school](#), Accessed on 21 June 2021

²⁴² HL 583, [Domestic Abuse: Local Government services](#), Answered on 11 June 2021

²⁴³ DfE, [Keeping children safe in education](#), September 2020, para 18

²⁴⁴ DfE, [Implementation of relationships education, relationships and sex education and health education 2020 to 2021](#), updated 9 July 2020

The guidance states that by the end of primary school, children should know (amongst other areas):

- How to recognise if family relationships are making them feel unhappy or unsafe, and how to seek help or advice from others if needed.
- How to recognise and report feelings of being unsafe or feeling bad about any adult.
- How to ask for advice or help for themselves or others, and to keep trying until they are heard.
- How to report concerns or abuse, and the vocabulary and confidence needed to do so.²⁴⁵

By the end of secondary school, children should also know:

- That some types of behaviour within relationships are criminal, including violent behaviour and coercive control.
- What constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence and why these are always unacceptable.
- The concepts of, and laws relating to, sexual consent, sexual exploitation, abuse, grooming, coercion, harassment, rape, domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour-based violence and FGM, and how these can affect current and future relationships.²⁴⁶

There are parental rights to withdraw children from sex education in England – this does not apply to relationships education.²⁴⁷

Library briefings on [Relationships and Sex Education in Schools \(England\)](#) and [Personal, social, health and economic education in schools \(England\)](#) provide further information.

School admissions

The Joint Committee's [report on the draft Domestic Abuse Bill](#) of June 2019 primarily focused on an analysis of the Bill's provisions. The Committee argued that there was a need to find school places for the children of domestic abuse survivors more quickly.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ DfE, [Relationships education, relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education](#), updated June 2020, pp20-2

²⁴⁶ [Ibid.](#), pp27-9

²⁴⁷ [Ibid.](#), paras 45-7

²⁴⁸ Joint Committee on the Draft Domestic Abuse Bill, [Draft Domestic Abuse Bill, HL 378/HC 2075](#), 11 June 2019, para 231

In response, the Government said it would take forward changes to the School Admissions Code to “strengthen and improve the Fair Access Protocols, and as a minimum, ensure these can be used to admit children in refuges”, following the [Review of children in need](#) (June 2019).²⁴⁹

In June 2020, the Department for Education [launched a consultation](#) prompted by the children in need review. The consultation, which ran until October 2020, proposed a process for managing in-year school admissions and also reforms to Fair Access Protocols, which aim to ensure that children without a school place, especially the most vulnerable, are found and offered a place quickly.

The [consultation response](#) was published in May 2021. The Department confirmed that it planned to go ahead with the changes and that it would lay a revised School Admissions Code before Parliament. If approved, the new Code would come into force in September 2021.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Scotland

Current statutory guidance on [Relationships, sexual health and parenthood education](#) (RHSP) states children should be provided with “knowledge and understanding of healthy, safer, respectful and loving relationships” and that schools should be mindful of the needs of children who have experienced abuse.

Wales

All maintained Welsh secondary schools are currently required to include [sex education as part of their curriculum](#), whilst it is discretionary in primary schools. The Welsh Government has also published a framework for [Personal and social education for 7 to 19 year olds](#).

A new [Welsh curriculum](#) will be introduced from 2022, in which Relationships and sexuality education will be mandatory.²⁵⁰

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has published guidance on [Relationships and Sexuality Education](#), for which all grant-aided schools are required to develop a teaching policy. At post-primary level, this says pupils can “explore sensitive

²⁴⁹ HO, [The Government response to the report from the Joint Committee on the Draft Domestic Abuse Bill](#), CP 137, July 2019, para 133, 136, paras 137, 138

²⁵⁰ Welsh Government, [Children in Wales will have universal access to the full curriculum](#), 21 January 2020

issues such as domestic violence and sexual abuse in an age-appropriate way, and develop appropriate behaviour to protect themselves”.²⁵¹

11.2 Higher Education

A report by the ONS, [Domestic Abuse victim characteristics for England and Wales: Year ending March 2020](#) (November 2020) assessed CSEW data on domestic abuse amongst students— the report estimated that of full-time students in the 16-74 age group, 10.5% of female students experienced domestic violence in the previous year compared to 4.8% of full-time male students.

A report from the University of Bath, [What Is To Be Done About Sexual and Domestic Abuse at UK Universities?](#) (2019) discussed the issue of domestic abuse and sexual violence among students and said “no study has investigated domestic abuse specifically at UK universities, but there are indicators that it occurs amongst students and staff.”

Universities should have policies and practices in place to support staff and students who are experiencing domestic violence and abuse, as examples see: University of Leeds policy [Domestic Abuse: Protecting and Supporting Staff and Students](#) and University of Nottingham webpage [Domestic violence and unhealthy relationships](#).

The following articles discuss support for students affected by domestic abuse during the pandemic:

- Wonkhe, [Covid-19, domestic abuse and what universities can do for students](#), 29 July 2020
- The Guardian, [“My place wasn't safe': the universities sheltering women from domestic abuse”](#), 12 October 2020

Universities UK (UUK) Guidance, 2020

In April 2020 UUK, the representative organisation for the UK's universities, published [Beginning the Conversation](#), responding to domestic violence and abuse in higher education communities during the Covid-19 pandemic. The publication said that universities should be aware that students were at greater risk of domestic abuse during the pandemic. The guidance acknowledged that the nature and level of support for students was a decision for individual universities, but said that they could consider the following areas:

²⁵¹ CCEA, [Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance: An Update for Primary Schools](#), October 2019, pp2, 37

- Providing safe spaces and accommodation support for those not eligible, or able to access, a refuge.
- Appointing a local domestic abuse champion to provide signposting advice.
- Participating in local multi agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC). These are meetings where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of different organisations with the intention of safeguarding the victim.²⁵²

UUK published a second briefing, [Continuing the conversation](#), in October 2020. This made additional recommendations, including partnering with local domestic abuse charities or domestic abuse services, raising awareness of online harms, and designing preventive policies.²⁵³

This second report noted that Covid-19 had impacted on the way universities could support those experiencing domestic abuse:

Changes to student living arrangements have also occurred with some students returning to their parental home and others such as international students, care leavers or estranged students remaining in, or moving into university accommodation. Alongside these developments, we have seen significant increases in the levels of domestic and technology-mediated abuse in society.²⁵⁴

Speaking to UUK, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales, Nicole Jacobs, reported an increase in domestic abuse incidents, including “relating to people of university age such as LGBT+ students moving home and experiencing multiple forms of abuse”.²⁵⁵

Previously, in 2014, the National Union of Students published [Hidden Marks: A study of women students’ experiences of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault](#).

Student finance changes for some victims of domestic abuse

In the Spring Budget 2020 the Government announced that from 2020/21 they would remove the three-year ordinary residence requirement for student finance for individuals granted Indefinite Leave to Remain as victims of domestic abuse.²⁵⁶

²⁵² UUK, [Beginning the conversation: Responding to domestic violence and abuse in HE communities during covid-19 pandemic](#), April 2020, pp7-9.

²⁵³ UUK, [Continuing the conversation: Responding to domestic violence and technology mediated abuse in HE communities during the Covid-19 pandemic](#), October 2020, p10

²⁵⁴ [Ibid](#), p4

²⁵⁵ [Ibid](#), p9

²⁵⁶ HM Treasury, [Budget 2020](#), HC 121, 11 March 2020, para 2.56

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