

Minutes of the APPG on Domestic Violence and Abuse meeting 'Leaving no one behind: can the VAWG Strategy deliver for all victim- survivors of domestic abuse?'

Tuesday 21st October 2025, 14:30 – 16:00

Hybrid Meeting

Chair: Apsana Begum MP

The Government is expected to soon be publishing its new violence against women and girls (VAWG) Strategy, outlining how it will tackle an epidemic that affects 1 in 4 women across the country. With one woman killed every week by a current or former partner, action to implement this Strategy could not be more urgent.

The Strategy, led by the Home Office and Ministry of Justice, follows a Labour manifesto commitment to halve VAWG and a new mission-led approach to tackling issues which draws on the expertise across departments. In light of the National Audit Office's and the Home Affairs Committee's shared concerns over the Home Office's ability to co-ordinate a cross-government effort, this APPG met to discuss the upcoming Strategy and to bring together key stakeholders and reflect on the opportunities to ensure that no one is left behind, including marginalised women and child survivors.

Over the past year, the Government has introduced several steps towards tackling VAWG, such as the introduction of Raneem's law, which will put a domestic abuse specialist in every 999 call room; promising reforms to sentencing practices, which will introduce new funding for probation services and 'flags' for tracking perpetrators of domestic abuse; and introducing several new pieces of legislation which will bring in new laws to improve outcomes for victim-survivors including the Victims & Courts Bill and the Crime and Policing Bill. However, with delays to the publication of the Strategy and no dedicated funding outlined in the Autumn Budget or the Multi-year Spending Review, this APPG discussion could not be more timely to help shape the first steps of this urgently needed new Strategy.

The meeting was chaired by Apsana Begum MP.

Links/citations to any research or briefings mentioned will be shared at the end of the minutes.

Apsana Begum MP, Chair of the APPG for Domestic Violence and Abuse

Apsana Begum MP welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apsana explained the purpose of the APPG, to bring together professionals and survivors with policy makers; and outlined the topic of the meeting, the Government's upcoming VAWG Strategy. Apsana expressed that there were previous expectations that the Strategy would be published in September. She added that delays are directly opposed to the Government's commitment to halving VAWG and she hopes to see the Strategy published soon, but noted that in lieu of the publication the APPG will continue to add pressure to the Home Office and Ministry of Justice to ensure that the Strategy leaves no one behind and addresses the needs of marginalised survivors.

Apsana introduced the panel of speakers as well as herself, as Chair of the APPG.

The panellists include:

- Dame Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner,
- Andrea Vukovic, Co-Director at Women for Refugee Women

Apsana introduced Nicole Jacobs.

Dame Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales

Nicole thanked Apsana and the APPG for the invitation to speak and for the groups' work to keep these issues on the political agenda. Nicole stressed that although there have been delays to the Strategy, now - in the months ahead of the publication - is the right time to be continuing to add pressure and to remind the government of the need for the upcoming Strategy to address the needs of marginalised survivors.

Nicole explained that as Domestic Abuse Commissioner her position is separate from Government but that she has been very involved in the development of the Strategy. She commented that while the Strategy is delayed, the sector wants a Strategy that is fully resourced and suggested that the delays are due to ensuring that the detail of resource allocation is ready for the Strategy.

Nicole explained that the Strategy will particularly focus on domestic abuse, sexual abuse and stalking; but this does not mean that the Strategy won't look wider at VAWG generally.

Nicole added that in order for the Strategy to be successful, there will need to be much more commitment from across departments than what has been seen before in other government strategies. She highlighted especially the need for commitments from the Department for Education. Nicole added that the level of cross departmental involvement is a new way of working for the government.

Nicole shared that a major concern of hers, tied to the delays in the publication of the Strategy, is the number of services in dangerous financial situations and no current clarity from the Government on what the commitments around funding will be. Nicole stated that these services need assurances in order to plan for the future.

Nicole expressed her office's findings that this year has been one of the most brutal years in terms of funding for these services and that this is completely out of sync with the ambition of the government; reiterating the essential need for these services in delivering the VAWG Strategy.

Nicole then highlighted some of her office's recent reports including the report on recognising children as victims in their own right, published in the summer; the review on domestic homicide reviews; and the recent report on the family courts. Nicole reflected that she is still waiting for the Government to respond to many of the recommendations made in these reports and suspects that this is for similar reasons that there are delays to the Strategy.

Nicole closed by reiterating the essential need for the Government to work closely with the expertise of front-line services before passing back to Apsana.

Apsana Begum MP

Thanked Nicole for her contributions and agreed that the focus needs to be on local services and local knowledge.

Apsana then introduced Andrea Vukovic from Women for Refugee Women.

Andrea Vukovic, Co-director, Women for Refugee Women

Andrea opened by introducing herself and Women for Refugee Women (WRW), explaining that WRW is a charity supporting women seeking safety in the UK and helps women navigate the asylum system and rebuild their lives. Andrea shared that many refugee women in the UK face domestic violence and abuse and can be particularly vulnerable to abuse because of the asylum system.

Andrea shared a quote from a survivor that WRW have worked with:

“When I was refused asylum, I became vulnerable to domestic violence. I had no right to support or to work, so I was pushed into a place where I had to stay with my ex-partner, who was so violent. The asylum system puts women in dangerous situations.”

Andrea shared that after a serious attack and time in hospital, this survivor gained refugee status and now volunteers with WRW.

Andrea explained that one of the reasons that women have increased vulnerability in the asylum system is that it is largely designed around men, ignoring women’s experiences. Despite research which shows 65–85% of women in the asylum system are survivors of sexual or gender-based violence, poor decision-making means women wait years for decisions on asylum claims, putting them at further risk. Andrea commented that survivors can find it hard to disclose abuse, and caseworkers often lack gender-awareness training which adds further delays, unfair refusals and repeats.

Andrea added that the without secure status, women have no right to work in the UK and no access to public support, further increasing their vulnerability. Research has shown that abusive partners will often threaten deportation as a means to control women. 6 in 10 women have been threatened with deportation by abusers (Step Up Migrant Women research). With no right to work and Government support at only £9.95 a week in catered accommodation, poverty furthers women’s risk for exploitation.

Women for Refugee Women’s report ‘Safety and Survival’ found that when women are denied a means to survive, they are pushed into dangerous, exploitative situations. The research showed that 38% stayed in or entered unwanted/abusive relationships and 8% turned to sex work to meet basic needs.

Speaking to the issue of housing asylum seekers in hotels, Andrea commented that these environments are highly dangerous and institutional settings like hotels replicate abusive dynamics. Andrea added that in these settings women face being monitored and controlled by hotel staff; sexual harassment and room intrusions; and threats of eviction. Nearly half of the women in WRW’s research said hotel conditions made them suicidal.

Andrea added that immigration detention also harms women and that most detained women are also survivors of violence and detention often leads to re-traumatisation. Andrea added that detention is also ineffective as 87% of detainees are released back into the community.

Andrea concluded by stating that women under immigration control are often treated as problems, not as survivors, and shared Women for Refugee Women's key recommendations to the Government. These included:

- Make fair asylum decisions the first time, with trained gender-sensitive caseworkers.
- Give people seeking asylum the right to work.
- Provide safe and supportive accommodation, not hotels.
- Replace detention with community-based alternatives for women.

Andrea closed by reflecting that public and political attitudes toward asylum seekers have become increasingly hostile and while politicians often avoid addressing these issues due to fear of losing votes, these changes need to happen for the protection of all women. Andrea called for leadership and moral clarity from the UK Government on this issue and to stop the two-tier system that too often reflects a culture that sees asylum seeking women and women from racialised backgrounds as less deserving of protection.

Apsana Begum MP

Apsana thanks Andrea for her contributions and invited other members of the APPG to respond and contribute.

Baroness Ruth Lister

Baroness Lister thanked the APPG panellists for their contributions and shared that she is currently involved with work on the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill. Baroness Lister also shared that she will be working on the Crime and Policing Bill and is engaged with the Domestic Abuse Commissioners' (Nicole's) office relating to amendments that will be particularly relevant to the points raised by Andrea, including introducing a firewall between the police and immigration offices so that women can report abuse without fear of deportation. Baroness Lister shared that similar amendments have been debated and won support in the Lords previously and she is hopeful that these amendments will be successful and that Labour will continue to support this work.

Baroness Lister added that she is also working with Southall Black Sisters on amendments relating to so called 'honour' based abuse, as well as amendments relating to self-harm in relation to abuse. Baroness Lister suggested that these will make up a group of amendments which highlight some of the issues faced by marginalised survivors and she hopes that delivering them as a package will give them the best chance of being discussed thoroughly in the house.

Baroness Lister ended by sharing her reflections on the importance of this subject for the APPG to cover and thanking Women for Refugee Women for their essential work. Baroness Lister suggested a future meeting dedicated to discussing issues faced by refugee women.

Baroness Gabby Bertin

Baroness Bertin added that she had attended a meeting recently where the amendments on so called 'honour' based abuse were discussed and that there was a lot of support for these amendments.

Baroness Bertin also added that she also has a strong investment in the Crime and Policing Bill, largely due to the recommendations made in the Pornography Review which she authored and published earlier this year. Baroness Bertin reiterated the importance of addressing online VAWG and pornography when it comes to the prevention of VAWG, especially for vulnerable groups. Baroness Bertin referenced the scale of content that is legal online that would not be legal offline and the need for parity on the seriousness of these issues.

Baroness Bertin said that, overall, the government has been supportive of the recommendations but the need for this to translate into real action is slow. Baroness Bertin added that she values the APPG as a space to meet with speakers such as Andrea and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner who can provide some context on the delays to the Strategy and the pace of work. She added that the delays have been frustrating and that it feels like VAWG has fallen down the Governments list of priorities; Baroness Bertin added that the commitment to halve VAWG was an ambitious task and that this group must continue to remind government of their commitments.

Baroness Bertin added that she will be putting forward specific amendments seeking to reduce the gap between what is legal online and what is legal offline, and spoke specifically on the need to address any content that promotes child sexual abuse and depictions of murder and rape. Baroness Bertin shared that she would appreciate support from the APPG on these amendments.

Apsana Begum MP

Apsana thanked the APPG members for their reflections and added that she is happy to support with all amendments where she can in the Commons as well as coordinating support and sharing information with the APPG membership.

Apsana then welcomed some invited contributors to the meeting. The APPG reached out to these organisations ahead of the meeting offering the opportunity to join the discussion.

Apsana introduced the first contributor, Angie Airlie from Stay Safe East.

Angie Airlie from Stay Safe East

Angie began by thanking the APPG for the discussion and the reflections from the Panellists. She then introduced Stay Safe East which is a user-led organisation run by disabled people, providing specialist and holistic advocacy and support services to disabled people from diverse communities in London who are victims/survivors of domestic or sexual violence, hate crime, harassment and other forms of abuse.

Angie began by explaining that refuges are funded generally through a mixture of local authority support contracts and Housing Benefit and that a significant issue with this model is that it means that certain groups are underserved, including disabled victim/survivors, migrant victim/survivors, working women and students.

Angie added that for the latter three groups the issue is that many victim/survivors in those categories are also not eligible for housing benefit and that for disabled victim/survivors there is an added complexity that the nature of the funding system means that refuges cannot afford to hold accessible spaces until such times as a disabled victim/survivor needs them. This can often mean that refuges may then let the space to someone without accessibility needs to ensure they are not holding a void for a prolonged period.

Angie referenced Routes to Support data provided by Women's Aid on the accessibility of Refuges working group showed that last year less than 1% of refuge vacancies were for fully accessible units. If services aren't able to hold these vacancies, then how can we at least maximise the chances of a refuge vacancy being available for a disabled victim survivor at the time it is needed?

Apsana Begum MP

Apsana thanks Angie for her contribution and introduced Melanie Goodway from IRISi.

Melanie Goodway, IRISi

Melanie began by introducing herself and IRISi, which is the only second tier specialist charity working across the UK to solely promote and improve the healthcare response to gender based violence, through evidence-based programmes of training and advocacy.

Melanie began by highlighting the context around the vital role healthcare plays in the VAWG response, adding that around 80% of women in abusive relationships turn to health services for help and this is often their first and only point of contact, while only one in five contact the police. Melanie added that IRISi know that the most vulnerable in society often find it hardest to access support and this includes racially minoritised and marginalised victims, LGBTQ+ people, those with disabilities, and younger (13-17) and older (61+) victims.

Melanie added that for many, a GP or sexual health clinic is the only safe place to disclose abuse and this clearly demonstrates the need for an approach which prioritises access to support outside the criminal justice system. Melanie added that IRISi programmes train healthcare professionals to recognise the signs, ask the right questions, and connect survivors to specialist services. Areas currently implementing IRISi programmes are 30 times more likely to identify and refer survivors, and the programmes are 4.5 times more cost-effective than the flu jab.

Melanie shared some of IRISi's most recent data from those accessing programmes which showed that:

- 70% had never accessed support before and hadn't known where to find support.
- One-third identified as Black or minoritised, and 15% were migrant survivors.
- Over half were caring for children.
- 25% of sexual health referrals were from the LGBTQ+ community, as well as younger patients or those with learning differences.
- Primary care saw higher referrals for the older population, aged up to 85.

Melanie added that survivors describe the IRISi programme's impact as life-changing but despite this, many areas of funding for healthcare-based domestic abuse work are being cut, and this will have a disproportionate impact on the most marginalised.

Melanie concluded by sharing recommendations from IRISi, which included:

- Recognising domestic abuse as a core health issue
- Embed domestic abuse training for medical students and allied health professionals.
- Sustainably commission evidence-based programmes like IRIS and ADVISE nationally.
- For recommendations to not only exist in policies and guidance but to be meaningfully and robustly supported, resourced and enacted.

Melanie then asked the APPG members and panellists to reflect on how the APPG discussions can support the health system's engagement with the VAWG agenda and ongoing partnership work to scale up programmes that are effective and have positive impacts for survivors and their families.

Apsana Begum MP

Apsana thanked Melanie for her contribution and invited Bella Daly from Women's Aid to speak.

Bella Daly, Women's Aid

Bella thanked Apsana for the introduction and outlined Women's Aid's campaign work to advocate for women and children who have experienced abuse to get the support they deserve. Bella noted that while the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right, which is a step in the right direction, research demonstrates that there are still gaps in understanding and supporting children who experience domestic abuse.

Bella shared examples from Women's Aid's research which estimates that only around one in ten children experiencing domestic abuse received support from a refuge or community-based support service; and that the proportion of organisations running Children and Young People's domestic abuse services in the community without dedicated funding doubled in the last year from 15.7% to 31.4%, so over a third of services.

Bella then asked the APPG to consider how the VAWG Strategy could address violence against children, as victims of domestic abuse in their own right, and ensure they can access the support they need.

Apsana Begum MP

Apsana thanked Bella for her contribution and invited Asmita Sood from Southall Black Sisters to share their contribution.

Asmita Sood, Southall Black Sisters.

Asmita thanked Apsana for the introduction and began by giving some context to the situation for migrant survivors of domestic abuse, stating that the much needed reforms have not progressed at pace. Asmita added that the delays and pace of change risks the exclusion of migrant survivors from the government's commitment to halve VAWG in a decade.

Asmita added that a significant barrier and risk for migrant women is that they still have No Recourse to Public Funds; Asmita stated that this makes migrant women three times more likely to experience VAWG. Asmita said that 60% of service users at Southall Black Sisters have No Recourse to Public Funds. She added that these structural barriers are compounded by an increasingly hostile environment where VAWG is weaponised to push racist, anti-immigrant agendas.

Asmita commented that the worsening hostile environment, both politically and publicly, and harsh immigration policies for migrants, such as lengthening the qualifying period to settlement, make it much harder for migrant victim-survivors to escape abuse.

Asmita then shared the calls from Southall Black Sisters, along with colleagues in the specialist 'by and for' Black, minoritised, and migrant women's organisations to consider the importance of this as part of the VAWG Strategy and asked the APPG to consider how it could help create momentum for those changes particularly in the context of a hostile environment.

Asmita shared that before entering government the then shadow Labour government had supported and committed to extending the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession, however those extensions have not been progressed. Asmita called for the extension of the combined Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession and Domestic Violence Indefinite Leave to Remain to all, regardless of immigration status, ensuring access to public funds while victim-survivors regularise their status.

Apsana Begum MP

Apsana thanked the contributors for their interventions and invited APPG members and panellists to reflect on any of the points made.

Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales

Nicole began the reflections by addressing Angies' points, particularly on Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act and the attached funding. Nicole commented that there has not been any oversight of how this funding has been distributed to the detriment of specialist services. Nicole agreed with Angie, that while there is not a unified way to conduct needs assessments, it has become hard to see a clear picture of what's needed. Nicole added that there is a new Minister for Housing, Alison McGovern MP, who Nicole understands has a strong interest in this area of work. Nicole added that currently there's an assumption that oversight of commissioning will be dealt with at the local level, but Nicole would welcome some more central direction and for the new Minister to provide guidance on how we can use Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act more effectively. Nicole added that she agrees there is a disconnect between refugee access

and housing benefit, often meaning survivors in work cannot access safe accommodation.

Nicole then responded to Melanie, expressing support for the strength of evidence that shows healthcare is an essential part of the response to domestic abuse and adding that in her view it must be a crucial part of the VAWG Strategy, with clear commitments from the Department of Health and Social Care. Nicole added that she believes the Strategy should be ambitious on its provisions for mental health support. Nicole mentioned the upcoming consultation on the duty to collaborate as a key moment to consult on this area of work and the significant role of services.

Nicole then responded to Bella and reflected on her office's own report on children as victims in their own right, agreeing with Bella's points. Nicole added that we don't have specialist services for children and spoke to the need for the Strategy to include a 'big ticket' such as this. Nicole also shared her concerns that the Strategy may not include sufficient commitments around domestic abuse services for children; she added that this will likely be because it is an area of work that the Department for Education has never approached HM Treasury about before.

Nicole concluded her responses by sharing her full support on the need to remove No Recourse to Public Funds; she added that the evidence, which Asmita touched on, could not be clearer. Nicole shared her concerns that she believes that this could be overlooked in the Strategy, and that we (the APPG and campaigners) should begin to think about what the next iteration of this campaigning will be.

Andrea Vukovic, Women for Refugee Women

Andrea responded to the points from Southall Black Sisters sharing that she absolutely supports the need to remove No Recourse to Public Funds, as well as to extend the Migrant Victim's Domestic Abuse Concession and discussed how these also apply broadly to all migrant survivors including asylum seeking women and women who are subject to hostile environment policies.

Andrea added that women often fall out of the asylum system, and when they are then also denied the right to work, they become even more vulnerable and this is often when they can get trapped in abusive relationships. Andrea shared Nicole's concern that the government could be ignoring the structural changes that are needed to address the needs of migrant survivors.

Andrea touched on the conversation around migrant's rights to be in the country, stating that it's most important that discussions are framed around everyone having the

right to safety and protection. Andrea called on the APPG to engage in discussions with the government that migrant rights must be considered alongside VAWG issues in order to ensure that all women have access to protection.

Baroness Gabby Bertin

Baroness Bertin responded to this expressing her support and adding that she thinks that we need to reframe the conversation and add some real stories to the conversation. She also added that all sides of the political spectrum should be engaged on this work, adding the importance of going to parties pushing dangerous narratives, such as Reform, and addressing the issues head on.

Apsana Begum MP

Apsana agreed with Baroness Bertin and added that the specialist led-by and for services have so far borne the brunt of this conversation and we have to put our support behind these organisations and cannot be politically neutral. Apsana added that it may be hard to create the spaces with groups like Reform given the circumstances and the realities where specialist organisations could be, reasonably, fearful of engagement.

Apsana also responded to Nicole's point on commissioning, sharing her support for a more central oversight mechanism to ensure fair commissioning. Baroness Bertin seconded her support on this.

Baroness Ruth Lister

Baroness Lister agreed that it feels like there is momentum on the rollback of migrant women's rights and proposed that the APPG have a meeting dedicated to this discussion and what practical things the group can do to create movement on this issue.

Baroness Lister agreed with Baroness Bertin's points on the use of far-right narratives which use the language of 'protecting women' and expressed that the group must be careful not to reinforce any of these ideas, although agreed with Baroness Bertin on the need to bring groups such as Reform into the conversation to directly counter dangerous and misleading narratives.

Baroness Gabby Bertin

Baroness Bertin responded in agreement and added that the APPG must be careful not to assume that all people in government understand the context for migrant survivors and perhaps there is a wider educational approach to take.

Asmita Sood, Southall Black Sisters

Asmita responded, acknowledging that the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's office has done a lot of research on migrant survivors; she added however that the best estimates of the number of women that need access to this support is likely much lower than the reality because of the barriers to reporting.

Asmita urged the group, and the government, to remember that while we wait for answers, women continue to be stuck in abuse relationships. Asmita added that not all migrant survivors are on spousal visas, and abusers sometimes bring women in on incorrect visas as a means of control. Asmita said that this supports the need for real change to the immigration system. Asmita also talked about the urgent need for meaningful consultation with the experts on this subject, specialist domestic abuse services, and shared that so far, the engagement on design of the VAWG Strategy has been insufficient.

Asmita shared Southall Black Sisters' concerns that the Strategy will not include any provisions for migrant survivors and urged colleagues to address and condemn this when the Strategy is published, if they are not included.

Apsana Begum MP

Apsana thanked Asmita for her reflection and asked if any of the other contributors would like to add anything further.

Angie Airlie, Stay Safe East

Angie responded to the points on a national commissioning model adding that this could go a long way in alleviating the problems that disabled and migrant women face. Angie reflected that ahead the Strategy could be a good time to go into more detail on this conversation; she also added her reflection that now is the time for the government to be bold in its solutions.

Dame Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales

Nicole seconded this point and added the need to consider led-by and for organisations in this thinking. She referred to research by her office that has demonstrated that too often it is the led-by and for organisations that lose out in commissioning and there needs to be better oversight of this nationally. Nicole added that there are huge gaps in the need for specialist provision and that there needs to be greater responsibility from government on this issue.

Nicole added that she would encourage the APPG and organisations to consider how the Strategy is governed once it is published and agreed with Asmita's point around the

need for more meaningful stakeholder engagement. She added that the expertise of the specialist VAWG sector must be central to the delivery of the Strategy.

Apsana Begum MP

Apsana thanked the APPG members, the panellists and the contributors for their thoughts and opened the meeting up to questions from the online audience. Apsana began by sharing the below questions:

Q1 - What about male victims of domestic violence? When will there be a violence against men and boys policy?

Q2 - How is the VAWG Strategy and commissioning aligned to survivors' priorities? Mental health and counselling is a number one priority needed for survivors as shown in the Domestic Abuse Commissioners Mapping Report, yet there is no prioritising of any funding of this in either the VAWG Strategy or other health strategies.

Q3 - What mechanisms are in place to ensure that ministerial and departmental guidance does not restrict survivors' freedom to choose the organisations and charities they trust to provide safety, advocacy and/or legal services?

Q4 - Rural survivors have been largely invisible in the previous VAWG Strategies, yet they face multiple intersecting barriers, from disproportionately underfunded health and mental health services to housing shortages and rising rural poverty. Do we know if and how the VAWG Strategy will ensure that rurality is treated as an intersecting factor, so these systemic inequalities don't keep rural women and children invisible and unsafe?

Dame Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales

Nicole began by responding to Q1 and sharing that her office is passionate about all survivors being represented. Nicole talked about the benefits and risks of separating men from women in the Strategy, but that ultimately anything that benefits female survivors will also benefit male survivors. Nicole reflected that there is no perfect answer, but she would expect the government to make clear in the strategy what also benefit male victims and how it will link with other government strategies that do speak more directly to male survivors.

Nicole then responded to Q2 and agreed that examining commissioning will need to be a part of the Strategy and that her office will look at where the gaps are in the Strategy on this.

Nicole then responded to Q4, sharing that she has met recently with a new organisation that works on domestic abuse in rural areas and that while she does believe that the government is making a huge amount of effort across all departments, she understands the challenges for rural survivors and will aim to keep raising these issues and get recognition of the challenges for rural survivors.

Nicole summarised by stating that she wants the Strategy to be truly comprehensive and not to feel like it was a 'tick box' exercise. She added that she hopes that there is not too much longer to wait for the publication and reiterated that now, in the months ahead, is the time for the sector to be assertive on the recommendations.

Apsana Begum MP

Apsana suggested that the APPG meets immediately after the Strategy and looks at what the gaps are and what the group can do to help mobilise on the work needed. Apsana took more questions from the online audience.

Q5 – While I understand the concern about harmful porn and strangulation I have lived experience of living with a lot of sexual abuse, being told I would die at the hands of him strangling me, having porn used as mind control. I worry that censorship alone won't address the real issue – consent and choice. When we silence or ban content rather than confronting how consent is distorted, we risk pushing violence further underground and making it harder for survivors to name and recognise abuse. How will the VAWG Strategy tackle the underlying problem – education around consent, agency and coercion – rather than relying on censorship that may cause more harm?

Q6 – Will the VAWG prevalence data in the Strategy also collect data on men and boys impacted by domestic abuse, sexual violence and stalking? If so, will it also be separated so the different impact on women and girls can be seen? Otherwise, the different approaches needed to understand the issues and provide support for women and girls, and men and boys, is unseen. Other demographics will be important to inform response too.

Q7 – Will training of mental health professionals around domestic abuse both in primary and secondary NHS care and in charities be part of the Strategy? I agree that trauma informed care is often in name only and often in practice in mental health services widely misunderstood and even misdiagnosed. Both require far more education for professionals I believe.

Baroness Gabby Bertin

Regarding Q5, Baroness Bertin reflected that she agrees that education around consent must be a key part of tackling VAWG. She added that the recommendations around age restrictions in the Pornography Review and wider work are not the only answer but should be thought of as helpful guard rails for safety in the same way that we would have restrictions in offline spaces. Baroness Bertin added that it should be careful not to be framed around censorship but around sending a legislative signal on safety.

Apsana asked Baroness Bertin if she has had much resistance to the recommendations in the Pornography Review from any particular groups.

Baroness Bertin reflected that Reform had expressed some push back to age verification and on the party's preference to abolish the Online Safety Act; but added that when she has explained the recommendations as getting parity between offline and online safety that there has generally been a lot of support. Baroness Bertin reflected that she expected more resistance than there has been, but the government has been supportive.

Dame Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales

Regarding Q6, Nicole reflected that we are still waiting on the metrics that the Strategy will be based upon. She would also like to see more reflections that prioritise what 'good' looks like.

Regarding Q7, Nicole added that survivors have said that mental health support is what they need most and so the Strategy should give a good example of what that provision of support should look like. Nicole added that she believes this government is interested in setting standards for disabled and marginalised survivors, particularly on commissioning.

Nicole shared that she is interested in how the duty to collaborate will be implemented and what the starting point will be for core guidance.

Apsana Begum MP

Apsana reiterated the need for the APPG to convene when the Strategy is published and to coordinate a response.

Apsana thanked the speakers and drew the meeting to a close.

Reports

Department for Science Innovation and Technology (2025) Independent Pornography Review [Creating a safer world: the challenge of regulating online pornography - GOV.UK](#)

Domestic Abuse Commissioners Office, Everyday Business: Addressing domestic abuse and continuing harm through a family court review and reporting mechanism - [Everyday-Business-full-report-web.pdf](#)

Domestic Abuse Commissioners Office, Learning from Loss: Ensuring the lessons from domestic homicide reviews lead to change <https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Learning-from-Loss.pdf>

Domestic Abuse Commissioners Office, Victims in their own right? Babies, children and young people's experiences of domestic abuse https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/dac_bryp_main-report_V6-DIGITAL.pdf

LAWRS/Step Up Migrant Women (2019) [LAWRS-The-Right-To-Be-Believed-Full-Report.pdf](#)

Women's Aid Annual Audit (2025) [Annual Audit 2025 - Women's Aid](#)

Women for Refugee Women (2024) Safety and Survival: How the Work Ban Fuels Violence Against Women Seeking Asylum [Women for Refugee Women : Safety and Survival: How the Work Ban Fuels Violence Against Women Seeking Asylum](#)