

Women's Aid's Labour Party Conference Fringe Event: 'Halving VAWG in a decade – what does it look like and how do we get there?'

Briefing for Jess Phillips MP

**12:30-13.30, Monday 9th October
Meeting Room 4, Leonardo's Hotel, Liverpool**

Key contact: Sophie Francis-Cansfield, Head of External Affairs
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Chair: Farah Nazeer, CEO, Women's Aid

Panellists: Jess Phillips MP, Shadow Minister for Domestic Violence and Safeguarding
Cllr Athwal, Executive Member for Community Safety and Violence against Women and
Girls, London Councils

Tom McNeil, Assistant Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands

Jasmine Mohammad, Director, Safety4Sisters

Alice Liveing, Women's Aid Ambassador

About this event

Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. We are a federation of nearly 170 organisations which provide just under 300 local lifesaving services to women and children across the country. We empower survivors by keeping their voices at the heart of our work, working with and for women and children by listening to them and responding to their needs.

Ahead of the upcoming general election next year, the Labour Party has set out 5 missions that will form the backbone of their manifesto and, if elected, will drive forward the next Labour Government. One of these missions is to 'Make Britain's Streets Safe', which includes a commitment to halve the level of violence against women and girls (VAWG) within a decade of coming into power.

Women's Aid warmly welcomes this commitment as with 1.7 million women experiencing domestic abuse every year (that we know of), and three women being killed a fortnight by a current or ex-partner, it is clear that tackling VAWG must be an urgent national priority.

This panel discussion is an opportunity to hear from experts in the sector on how Labour can achieve their commitment of halving VAWG within a decade and what this would look like in practice if properly informed by specialist services and the needs of survivors.

Please tweet or post about the event on social media, tagging @WomensAid and using our 'Come Together' campaign hashtag #EndAbuseTogether.

Please see below suggested tweets to share:

1.

Looking forward to @WomensAid event at #LAB23 today where we will be discussing how @UKLabour can achieve their commitment to halve VAWG within a decade of coming into power through a whole-system approach. Let's #EndAbuseTogether

2.

Looking forward to @WomensAid event at #LAB23 today where we will be discussing @UKLabour commitment to halve VAWG within a decade of coming into power. This must be done through a whole-system approach. Let's #EndAbuseTogether

3.

@WomenAid event today at #LAB23 demonstrated that it is vital for @UKLabour to adopt a whole-system approach to achieve their commitment to halving VAWG within a decade.

This is outlined in their #GeneralElection24 manifesto

bit.ly/womensaidmanifesto

4.

@Womensaid #GeneralElection24 manifesto has three pillars which @UKLabour must commit to:

- ☒ Invest to Save
- ☒ Support survivors
- ☒ Prevent abuse

We can #EndAbuseTogether

bit.ly/womensaidmanifesto

Agenda

12:20	Please arrive at least 10 minutes before start time
12.30-12:37	Welcome and introductions: Farah Nazeer
12:37 -12:46	Speaker contributions: Jess Phillips MP <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>What would Labour's approach be to achieve their commitment of halving VAWG in a decade?</i><i>How would Labour work with the VAWG sector to achieve this ambition?</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How would Labour overcome the funding and commissioning challenges faced by the specialist VAWG sector?</i> • <i>How would Labour improve the family courts to ensure that the safety of survivors and children is prioritised?</i> <p>Please keep your contribution to 5 minutes to allow 2 minutes for Farah to pose a question.</p>
12:46-12:53	Speaker contributions: Tom McNeil
12:53-13:01	Speaker contributions: Jasmine Mohammad
13:01 – 13:08	Speaker contributions: Councillor Jas Athwal
13:08 – 13:15	Speaker contributions: Alice Liveing
13:15-13:27	Q&A including any questions from the audience, chaired by: Farah Nazeer
13.27-13.30	Closing remarks: Farah Nazeer

Background Information

Tackling domestic abuse through a whole-system approach must be a national priority for the next general election and government. Too many women, like Nicole Smallman, Bibaa Henry, Sarah Everard, Ellie Gould, Alice Ruggles and so many more, have suffered the most devastating of consequences through failure to take the necessary action. Furthermore, women's specialist domestic abuse services have been depleted by chronic under-funding and poor-commissioning practices which favour larger, generic services that don't meet the needs of survivors. Ultimately, leaving women and children fleeing abuse unable to access the support they need. This must change.

Domestic abuse is endemic in our society. Despite one in five crimes recorded by the police being domestic abuse related, only 18% of survivors report to the police. Yet still every hour the police service across England and Wales receives over 100 calls pertaining to domestic abuse.

There are many barriers in place that prevent survivors from reporting to the police, including structural discrimination and inequality, as well as lack of faith in the criminal justice system. This has been compounded by recent high-profile cases of police perpetrated VAWG which has diminished women's trust in the police and brought about further challenges in the criminal justice response to domestic abuse.

However, domestic abuse is not just a criminal justice issue. At its heart, domestic abuse is about power – and abusers seek control over all spheres of a survivor's life, including relationships, housing, finances, employment, children and involvement with public services. For this reason, the only adequate response to domestic abuse is a whole-system approach that includes all government departments, public sectors agencies, and commissioners.

A whole-system approach is where different sectors work together to increase the safety and freedom of survivors and their children. It relies on organisations being equipped to recognise domestic abuse and respond compassionately and effectively.

The Labour Party's 5 Missions and commitment to halving VAWG

With the next general election on the horizon, the Labour Party set out 5 missions that would inform the Labour Government if elected. One of these missions is to make Britain's streets safe by reforming the police and justice system to prevent crime, tackling violence against women, and stopping criminals from getting away without punishment.

In setting out their commitment to halve VAWG, the Labour Party acknowledge that a whole-society approach is required and committed to looking beyond just reform of policing and criminal justice, to the education system, online regulation, media and community services. They also emphasised a need to focus on early prevention, saying that young men and boys need an understanding of what makes a healthy relationship, the impact of misogyny and the sources of gender-based violence.

The Party set out that their starting point will be the survey work done by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which estimates the number of women who are victims of domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking and related crimes. Although they acknowledged that this measure alone would not be sufficient and stated that it would need to be supplemented by analysis of repeat abuse as they said that some of the most serious violence that needs to be addressed is escalating and repeated domestic abuse where early intervention saves lives.

On data, the Party said that if elected, they will establish an appropriate and effective measure of incidents based on data provided by the ONS. They also would aim to work with forces to guarantee the integrity of any crime data informing this mission.

As a first step the Labour Party said they will:

- **Put specialists into the court system including:**
 - Specialist support for rape and domestic abuse victims, ending the postcode lottery currently facing victims and ensuring every victim gets the best possible chance at justice;
 - Specialist rape courts, to end the unacceptable waits some victims face before

justice.

- **Put specialists into the policing system including:**
 - Specialist domestic abuse workers in the control rooms of every police force, responding to 999 calls and supporting victims of abuse;
 - Specialist rape units in every police force, to make sure every victim has access to specialist support and investigators who are rigorously trained to solve these complex crimes.
- **Tackle misogyny as the root cause of VAWG** by ending the promotion and hosting of content which is harmful online, and making tackling misogyny a key part of school accountability.
- **Give domestic abusers no place to hide by introducing a new Domestic Abuse Register** to track offenders and help protect victims.

Women's Aid's General Election Manifesto

Women's Aid's manifesto for the 2024 general election, calls for the national prioritisation of domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG, and for political parties to pledge their commitment to the much-needed actions under our three key pillars:

1. **Invest to save** - fund specialist women's services to save lives and money
2. **Support survivors** - deliver the right response the first time
3. **Prevent abuse** - transform societal attitudes and understanding

1. **INVEST to save:** fund specialist women's services to save lives and money

In February 2023, Women's Aid published their 'Invest to Save' report with ResPublica, an economic case for investing in specialist domestic abuse services.

Key findings:

- Inefficient spending on tackling domestic abuse means that survivors' needs are not being met, especially Black and minoritised survivors and specialist women's domestic abuse services are facing a funding crisis.
- **In 2022, the economic and social costs of domestic abuse in England were just under £78 billion**, with the estimated yearly cost £2.7 billion to the NHS, £1.4 billion to the police and £89 million to victim services.
- **Adequate provision of specialist support services would cost £427 million a year.** This equates to 0.6% - a small fraction - of the combined government expenditure (MoJ, DLUHC, HO) on domestic abuse support during 2021-22.
- By adequately investing £427 million into domestic abuse support, **the domestic abuse sector could save the public purse as much as £23 billion a year, for every £1 invested, there's a £9 saving.**

Given the current economic climate and overstretched statutory services, adequate investment in specialist VAWG service provision will not only save the lives of women and children but will also save taxpayers money and alleviate pressure on vital public services including the NHS.

Women's Aid's priority recommendation:

- **Funding:** To commit to the funding needs highlighted through Women's Aid's 'Investing to save' research of a minimum investment of £427 million per year to fund specialist domestic abuse services for women and their children across England.

2. SUPPORT survivors: deliver the right response the first time

Even before the start of a survivor's journey to safety, survivors need to know that no matter where they turn, they will be supported and protected – whether that be, for example, with their mental health, supporting their children's wellbeing, accessing emergency funds, or securing housing.

Women's Aid's priority recommendations:

- **Family Justice:** To commit in the Labour Party manifesto to the full implementation of the Harm Panel's recommendations.
- **Criminal Justice:**
 - To commit to establishing a firewall so that migrant survivors can report abuse to the police without this data being shared with Immigration Enforcement.
 - To commit to increasing action and accountability around the police response to VAWG, including through sufficient funding and powers, specialist training, and more robust recruitment, vetting, whistleblowing and misconduct policies.
- **Migrant women:** To commit to expanding the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession eligibility criteria to include all migrant women with NRPF, thereby ensuring that women who are not on a spousal/partner visa can access specialist refuges.

3. PREVENT abuse: transform societal attitudes and understanding

Attitudes which enable and excuse domestic abuse are still worryingly prevalent in the United Kingdom. To end domestic abuse, it is vital that we raise awareness and improve understanding of the causes, and to change attitudes to ensure we achieve a world where domestic abuse is no longer tolerated.

Women's Aid's priority recommendations:

- **Require all public sector agencies undertake training delivered by specialist domestic abuse services** to ensure professionals provide the right response to survivors the first time.

- **Invest in responses that effectively challenge perpetrator behaviour**, such as the Make a Change programme, and deliver change across all systems.
- **Universal delivery of a 'whole school approach' to tackling VAWG across educational settings**, which includes improving relationship, sex and health education (RSHE) in consultation with the specialist VAWG sector.
- **Nationally roll out expert resources like Women's Aid's Expect Respect Healthy Relationship Toolkit** to encourage conversations on the root causes that lead to violence, as well as educating children and young people on gender-based violence.

We are clear that the following foundations must underpin these pillars:

- **A gendered approach** – recognising that while anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse, it is disproportionately committed by men against women and is a form of VAWG.
- **Women's rights are human rights** – a rights-based approach, which protects and supports all women, including those facing additional forms of inequality.
- **A whole-system response** – recognising that all government departments and the public sector – including health, social care, criminal and family justice, education, housing - need to play their part in ending domestic abuse.
- **Government accountability** – including through the creation a dedicated ministerial lead for VAWG who attends Cabinet to drive forward action and hold all government departments, statutory agencies and local commissioners accountable for progress.

Speaker Biographies

Farah Nazeer, CEO, Women's Aid



Farah ([@FarahNazeer](#)) has been the CEO of Women's Aid since 2021 and has over 20 years of professional executive management experience in the voluntary sector, including five directorships.

Much of Farah's work has been on women's rights, focusing on policy and public campaigning at local, national and international levels.

She previously served on the senior leadership team at Action Aid UK as the Deputy Director of Advocacy, working to end gender-based violence and ensure women's economic rights, and was a local authority councillor for almost a decade working on local service provision, health, environment and accountability.

Cllr Athwal, Executive Member for Community Safety and Violence against Women and Girls, London Councils



Councillor Jas Athwal ([@Jas_Athwal](#)) is the Leader of Redbridge London Borough Council and the Executive Member for Community Safety and Violence Against Women and Girls at London Councils.

In the 2014, Cllr Athwal led the Redbridge Labour Party to win its first ever majority on Redbridge Council, and was elected to serve as the council's first-ever Labour majority Leader. In October 2022, Athwal was selected as the Labour prospective parliamentary candidate (PPC) for the Ilford South constituency at the next election.

Tom McNeil, Assistant Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands



Tom McNeil ([@mcneil_tom](#)) previously a charity lawyer, is now the Assistant Police & Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands. He is particularly passionate about early years, family support and pastoral care within education. He is also the strategic lead for one of the UK's first problem solving courts for women.

Tom has held roles on a number of national and regional not-for-profit and public sector boards, with expertise on social policy, inequalities and economics. He is also a Policy Fellow at the University of Cambridge's Centre for Science & Policy.

Alice Liveing, Women's Aid Ambassador, personal trainer, author and influencer



Alice Liveing ([@Aliceliveing](#)) is a personal trainer, best selling author, podcast host and influencer. Having gone through her own journey with her mental and physical health, Alice has amassed a following of over 700k across all platforms and released three books; The Body Bible, Eat Well Every Day and Everyday Fitness.

Alice is a full qualified coach who works from London gym Third Space where she has coached the likes of Jodie Comer, Suranne Jones and Maya Jama. Her passion is in helping women to embrace resistance training and to get everyone to enjoy movement and exercise rather than seeing it as a punishment.

Alice has released three sellout collections with her fitness wear range at Primark as well as working with brands including Dyson, River Island, Sweaty Betty, Volvo and Samsung. Her global reach has seen her appear on leading publications globally, including the NY Post and 3x Women's Health UK cover star.

Alice hosts her podcast 'Give Me Strength' which focuses on those who have found an inner resilience through finding physical strength. Guests range from athletes to those who have just found a passion in exercise.

Jasmine Mohammad, Director, Safety4Sisters



Jasmine Mohammad ([@Safety4Sisters](#)) is the Director of Safety4Sisters, a specialist Black and minoritised by and for women's organisation based in Manchester. Safety4Sisters is dedicated to upholding the rights of Black and minoritised migrant women with no resource to public funds, who have experienced a spectrum of gendered violence and face multiple forms of oppression and discrimination.

Prior to this role, Jasmine worked as the VAWG Services Manager at the Angelou Centre, a specialist by and for service in Newcastle. Jasmine is the chair and co-chair of two specialist by and for northern women's organisations:

Ubuntu Women's Shelter and Humraaz.

Jasmine is committed to highlighting the regional differences that Black and minoritised women and children experience in the North and retains a critical eye on the intersecting oppression that Black and minoritised women face at personal, community and institutional levels. Jasmine also works nationally to influence policy change, ensuring that the safety, representation, and voices of migrant women are considered.