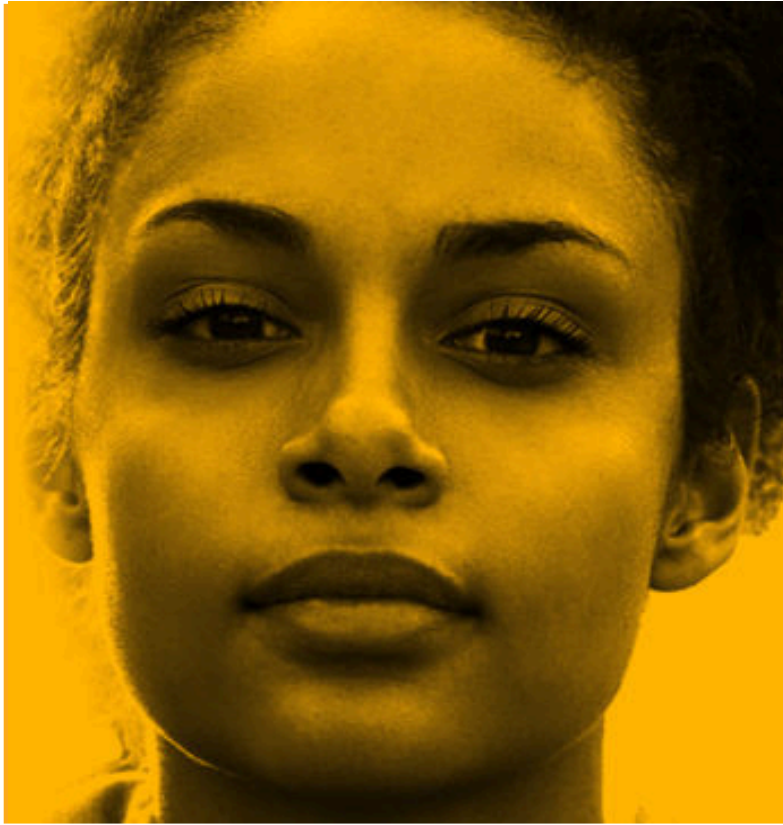


advance



A safe, just and equal world for women

General Election Manifesto 2024



Making a safe,
just, and equal
world for
women and
girls

A Message from the CEO

For too long, women and girls have suffered from the impacts of abuse and trauma. This General Election, we **must** see tangible plans to tackle the deep-rooted and systemic misogyny in our society.

The next government **must** build a long-term and sustainable plan for a safe, just, and equal world for women and girls, by providing support for:

- women in the criminal justice system
- survivors of domestic abuse
- girls and young women under the age of 25
- women's mental health.

We need an overhaul of the system.

Women who experience domestic abuse will often only receive short-term support which fails to meet the complexity of their needs. Society expects women to flee from their abusers, which is often impractical or impossible due to insurmountable barriers, made worse by the cost-of-living and housing crisis.

Women are expected to pursue a lengthy prosecution, which may collapse due to failings in the criminal justice system, often leaving women unprotected. Some of them will be killed by perpetrators already known to the criminal justice system.

Crisis-driven responses come too late to protect women and children affected by domestic abuse or those who have been criminalised. Providing earlier help reduces the need for crisis responses and eases systemic pressure on statutory services such as police, prisons, and healthcare.

We **demand** an end to this perpetual cycle of harm through drastic reform and real investment and prioritisation in the solutions that work.



Liz Mack
CEO

Too many women and girls face multiple disadvantages and systemic barriers.

Migrant women fear deportation, barring them from accessing the state support they need. Black and minoritised women disproportionately experience femicide and face barriers compounded by systemic racism. Women living with a disability will often experience abuse for longer.

7 in 10 of criminalised women we support have experienced domestic abuse. Women are very likely to serve a short sentence which disrupts their lives and the lives of their children, leads to the loss of their house and job, and severely impacts their mental health. And yet, because short sentences leave no time for rehabilitation, and due to the capacity crises within our prison and probation services, women are left without adequate support, meaning they become trapped in a cycle of offending.

Young women and girls under the age of 19 experience abuse at higher levels than any other age group, but do not receive the support they deserve. Girls should feel safe from sexism, misogyny, and violence, and should be encouraged, not stifled, to speak up when they face it. We are failing young women by not acting earlier to tackle the root causes of male violence.

Repeatedly, **women are being let down** and their human rights violated. We need a coordinated, cross-government response and a fundamental change in attitudes towards violence against women and girls.

Despite rising reports of domestic abuse, funding for specialist services has declined over the last decade, disproportionately affecting women and children. Short-term competitive commissioning pits expert organisations against each other, leading to a staffing crisis within women's services.

We desperately need long-term investment and better partnership working from the state, especially with organisations that are 'led by and for' marginalised communities. We must see a radical shift in investment towards safe, affordable housing and sufficient funding for mental health support. Anything less is **not good enough**.

Every community should have specialist independent advocacy services and safe women's centres offering trauma-informed, holistic support – with anything from mental health, to housing, to foodbanks – ensuring that the voices of women are never pushed aside.

We **cannot** go another year of women dying because of failures in our systems. **We need action**.

Foundation values

These values underpin all the measures in this manifesto. We call on the next government to:

1 Commit to working in a **whole system, Coordinated Community Response** to eliminate violence against women and girls.

- Recognise that violence against women and girls is a **gendered, human rights issue**.
- Work together to offer women **holistic, empowering, non-judgemental and unconditional support**, in the community, for as long as is needed.
- Enhance professionals' understanding and skills through funding and advocating for **co-located specialist services** in statutory agencies.
- Improve **communication** between agencies, through robust referral pathways and multi-agency conferences.
- Mandate **training** delivered by specialist organisations across all relevant sectors (including health, social services, criminal justice, and education).

2 Protect and maintain the importance of **independent, specialist women's community services**.

- Recognise the **cost-effectiveness** of holistic services which meet a woman's individual needs.
- Develop specific and appropriate responses for **Black, migrant, and/or other minoritised women**, recognising the structural racism and other forms of systemic bias and enable access to culturally competent 'by and for services'.
- End **short-term, competitive procurement** and offer more flexible grants for community-based services.
- Address the **urgent recruitment and retention crisis** in the women's sector by providing funding which enables fair and proper pay.

3 Prioritise **early intervention and prevention** work for women and girls facing trauma and abuse.

- Educate **children and young people** on how to have healthy relationships, including specific interventions for boys and young men, through public awareness campaigns and school-based interventions.
 - Understand the importance of **specialist services for girls and young women** under the age of 25 affected by domestic abuse and trauma.
 - **Divert women away from the criminal justice system** at the earliest opportunity as soon as she is identified by CJ agencies.
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Women in the criminal justice system (CJS)



Women in the CJS

We are calling on the next Government to:

Strategy

- Deliver on the commitments in the Ministry of Justice's 2018 **Female Offender Strategy and associated delivery plan**, and the cross-departmental **Concordat on Women** in or at risk of contact with the Criminal Justice System.
- Prioritise early intervention and **diversion services** for women in contact with the criminal justice system.

Funding

- Create a central investment pot of **£89.1 million for women's centre support** in England and Wales to ensure that women have access to safe women's spaces, wherever they are in the country. (1)
- Ensure that funding for women's Commissioned Rehabilitative Service provision matches the same level of **per person funding** provided for men's services and enables support for women to extend for as long as they need it.
- Increase flexible grant funding for **community-based specialist services for women in contact with the criminal justice system**.

Criminal justice system

- Introduce a **statutory duty on police forces to refer all women arrested for low-harm offending** to specialist early intervention and diversion services, with sufficient scrutiny and monitoring.
- **Invest in women's centres** as safe spaces to offer wraparound, holistic support to women in contact with the criminal justice system.
- Increase the **flexibility around conditional cautions** and provide **sufficient funding to specialist diversion services** to enable the successful national delivery of the reformed Out-of-Court Resolution two-tier framework.

1. <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WBG-15-Womens-Centres-Report-v4.pdf>;
<https://www.clinks.org/community/blog-posts/ensuring-distinct-approach-ministry-justice-launch-their-female-offender>; adjusted for inflation

- **Introduce a statutory duty on prison governors in both public and private prisons to ensure that thorough induction assessments are undertaken & support is in place for women in prison (e.g. accommodation; healthcare; children & dependents).**
- **Mandate training to all criminal justice professionals, delivered by specialist services, including police, prosecutors, judiciary and magistrates, prison, and probation officers, on the dynamics of abuse and impact of trauma on women.**

Housing and welfare

- **Invest in women's centres as alternatives to custody to enable women to remain in their homes and with their children, and to receive long-term support in the community.**
- **End the 'intentionally homeless' condition for women leaving prison.**
- **Redesign Community Accommodation Service and Approved Premises provision for women leaving prison and open to women on remand which is trauma-informed and gender-specific.**
- **Ensure women have access to the essentials that they need when leaving prison to enable them to apply for the relevant welfare options.**

Children & significant others

- **Invest in women's centres as a safe, trauma-informed space to enable women to rebuild their relationships with their children.**
- **End the imprisonment of pregnant and perinatal women and women with children under the age of 5.**
- **Mandate training for all social workers, delivered by specialist services, on the dynamics of abuse and trauma, and the impact this has on women's behaviour, including the drivers of offending.**
- **Improve data collection and monitoring processes for the number of mothers who are involved in the criminal justice system.**

Support for survivors of domestic abuse



Survivors of domestic abuse

We are calling on the next Government to:

- Amend legislation to introduce a statutory duty to provide all survivors of domestic abuse with access to specialist community-based support, backed up by an investment of £238m. (2) This must include ring-fenced funding for specialist ‘by and for’ services which support Black and minoritised women.

Criminal justice

- Deliver on the recommendations from Advance’s report, “Her Story, Her Justice”:
 - Amend legislation to introduce a **duty on Crown Prosecution Service and police to collaborate with each other and with specialist support services** to increase positive outcomes for victims/survivors.
 - Invest **£16m** nationally to embed **access to specialist Criminal Justice IDVAs in all police stations or court settings**, and to establish and accredit a national network of **Specialist Domestic Abuse Courts**.
 - Establish an inquiry and publish a **matrix of performance** to examine how all criminal justice territories across England and Wales respond to domestic abuse.
 - Prioritise tackling **court backlogs** which currently extend victims/survivors experience of trauma through lengthy and delayed proceedings.
- Reform the **homicide sentencing framework** to reflect the specific dynamics of domestic homicide, in line with Clare Wade KC’s recommendations.
- Extend **legal aid eligibility** to all survivors of abuse.
- Introduce penalties for police forces who fail to act on **breaches of protection orders**.

Immigration

- End the **No Recourse to Public Funds** condition.
- Amend legislation to **introduce a firewall between police and border enforcement** services to protect migrant survivors from the threat of deportation.
- Extend the **Indefinite Leave to Remain DV concession scheme** for survivors of domestic abuse.

2. https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Respublica_web.pdf

3. [Advance (2024) “Her Story, Her Justice”

Housing and welfare

- Enforce penalties on **local authorities that are failing to correctly apply social housing allocation legislation** which enables survivors of abuse to access safe accommodation.
- Increase **investment for safe and appropriate housing** to ensure that survivors of abuse can access adequate emergency, temporary, and long-term accommodation.
- Set out a **National Domestic Abuse Best Practice Standard for housing services**, monitored and implemented by the relevant regulator.
- Mandate regular **training for housing officers** delivered by specialist services, on the legal framework for social housing allocation, the dynamics of abuse and trauma, and the impact this has on women.
- Provide funding of **£189m** for refuges, including ring-fenced funding for specialist, high-needs placements.

Children and adults social care services

- Amend legislation to **ensure social services refer families** into specialist services as soon as domestic abuse has been identified.
- Set out a **National Domestic Abuse Best Practice Standard for social care services**, monitored and implemented by the Care Quality Commission and Ofsted.
- Provide **ring-fenced funding for domestic abuse services for children** who are victims of domestic abuse.
- Mandate **training for all-newly employed social workers**, delivered by specialist services, on the dynamics of abuse and the impact on women's behaviour, including **risk management and post-separation abuse**.
- Review current **social worker induction and training practices** in partnership with specialist domestic abuse and children's organisations.

Health services

- Provide funding for NHS England to **embed independent advocacy** into healthcare settings including A&E, primary care, sexual health, and maternity wards.
- Mandate **training for primary and secondary care professionals** from specialist services.

Supporting girls and young women under 25



Girls and young women under 25

We are calling on the next Government to:

Prevention

- Introduce a statutory duty on local authorities to commission specialist support to girls and young women under the age of 25 affected by or at risk of domestic abuse, or other forms of exploitation.

Education

- Allocate funding for all schools to enable access to co-located, pastoral specialist mentor from gender-specific organisations to identify the needs of girls experiencing abuse and trauma.
- Embed gender-specific, trauma-informed specialist services within Pupil Referral Units to enable early identification of additional support needed.
- Mandate training for teachers, school leaders, and school staff, delivered by specialist services, which recognises the impact of abuse and trauma on girls' behaviour.

Youth services and youth justice

- Deliver the promised Young Women's Strategy, prioritising early intervention and diversion to enable young women in contact with the criminal justice system to receive the support they need.
- Recruit dedicated female Youth Offending Workers who work specifically with girls.
- Create a youth Commissioned Rehabilitative Service pathway to ensure Youth Offending Teams can refer into gender-specific specialist services.

Children & families

- Mandate referrals from social workers to specialist girl and young women services as soon as abuse or trauma has been identified.
- Ensure that women-only accommodation is available in all local authorities for girls and young women leaving care.

Support for women's mental health



Women's mental health

We are calling on the next Government to:

Mental health services

- **Urgently reduce the waitlist for mental health support services and fast track referrals for women experiencing abuse and trauma.**
- **Increase availability of uncapped mental health support for women who have experienced domestic abuse and/or have had contact with the criminal justice system.**
- **Review the delivery of Department for Health and Social Care's 2022 Women's Health Strategy (4), the 2023 Suicide Prevention Strategy (5) and associated Action Plans, as relate to survivors of domestic abuse and trauma.**
- **Establish a review of women's deaths resulting from self-harm, including suicides and overdoses, who are in contact with statutory services, those who are survivors of domestic abuse and/or in contact with the criminal justice system.**
- **Urgently end the use of prisons as a 'place of safety' by delivering on the promised reform to the Mental Health Act.**
- **Collect disaggregated data on mental health outcomes by gender, age, and other protected characteristics to identify underlying issues.**
- **Establish a protocol between substance use and mental health services to ensure no woman is turned away from either service when she needs it.**
- **Mandate enhanced training, including the impact of VAWG and trauma on women, for all mental health professionals.**

4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/womens-health-strategy-for-england/womens-health-strategy-for-england#ministerial-foreword>

5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-strategy-for-england-2023-to-2028/suicide-prevention-strategy-action-plan>

advance

A safe, just and equal world for women

About Advance

Advance is an innovative charity that supports women and girls to lead safe, just and equal lives. We help women and girls who have experienced trauma through domestic abuse and the criminal justice system to rebuild their lives. We do this by providing practical and emotional support in their communities, in our women's centres, and in collaboration with diverse specialist partners. We use our expertise from 25 years of frontline work to advocate for women and girls. Find out more at advancecharity.org.uk

Where to find us

Follow us on X, Instagram, LinkedIn and Facebook. Your support will help us show all parties what the public wants from the next government for women and girls.



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