



# Guidance for Commissioners

The Imkaan and Women's Aid Capacity Building Partnership has developed a National Quality Framework for services addressing violence against women and girls and a package of support for commissioners who wish to ensure that services addressing violence against women and girls, including intimate partner violence, forced marriage, honour based violence and female genital mutilation, are of sufficient quality to deliver long term improvements in their area<sup>1</sup>.

This guidance outlines the core minimum standards we recommend for the provision of services supporting women and children survivors of violence against women and girls. They have been developed in line with the Home Office strategy, 'A Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls'<sup>2</sup> and the Ministry of Justice 'Victims' Service Commissioning Framework'<sup>3</sup>.

In the 2009 cross-government consultation on the Home Office strategy, the Women's National Commission recommended that:



*Women's services that are independent of statutory provision and that specialise in responding to violence against women need to be available in every area. These services need to be accessible for the most marginalised and vulnerable women, and provide timely, safe services that respond to complex and multiple needs, which focus on women's safety and empowerment without labelling or judging women or limiting the service to times of crisis or high risk.<sup>4</sup>*

The standards below reflect this vision and are based on the Council of Europe Minimum Standards for Violence Against Women Support Services<sup>5</sup> and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)<sup>6</sup>.

- 1 As an Imkaan and Women's Aid resource, this National Quality Framework does not address the detail of commissioning sexual violence services outside of intimate partner relationships, although some summary information is included. When funding services to meet the needs of survivors of sexual violence, commissioners should seek the expertise of Rape Crisis England & Wales.
- 2 Home Office (2013) *A Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Action Plan 2013*. London.
- 3 Ministry of Justice (2013) *Victims' Services Commissioning Framework*, London.
- 4 Women's National Commission (2009) *Still we rise: Report from WNC Focus Groups to inform the Cross-Government Consultation "Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls"* WNC, London.
- 5 Council of Europe (2008), *Combating violence against women: minimum standards for support services*, Strasbourg.
- 6 Istanbul Convention (2011), Articles 22, 23, 24, 25.



## I. Funding

- ▶ National and local governments should have identified funding streams for violence against women and girls services.
- ▶ National and local governments should have identified funding streams for specialist services for the most marginalised groups, including BME women, disabled and lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, and identified funding streams for work with children and young people affected by domestic abuse.
- ▶ Provision should be funded on the basis of enabling survivors to access safety from perpetrators, regardless of local or regional boundaries, and should not restrict access on residence criteria.

## 2. Distribution of provision

The following are aspirational benchmarks based on the Council of Europe Minimum Standards for support services<sup>7</sup>. Women's Aid will be conducting research with services across England in 2014 and will issue specific evidence-based recommendations for England later in the year.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Refuge provision</b>                | At least one specialist violence against women refuge in every urban centre or region |
| <b>Family spaces in refuge</b>         | One per 10,000 women  |
| <b>Violence Against Women Helpline</b> | One helpline in every region  |
| <b>Rape Crisis Centre</b>              | One per 500,000 women   |
| <b>Sexual Assault Centre</b>           | One per 500,000 women   |

Where the need is identified, this should also include specialist services for victims of forced marriage, 'honour-based' violence and female genital mutilation.

<sup>7</sup> Council of Europe (2008), *Combating violence against women: minimum standards for support services*, Strasbourg



### 3. Nature of provision

- ▶ Services are independent of statutory provision.
- ▶ Services in women's refuges, outreach services, and sexual violence services to female service users should be provided by female staff.
- ▶ Services should ensure the safety of service users, staff and volunteers and offer secure women-only spaces.
- ▶ There should be 24 hour access to a phone referral line for all women who need help.
- ▶ Refuge service should not be restricted to service users from specific geographical areas but should allow survivors to travel the distance needed to be safe from their abusers in order to contribute to an effective national network of refuges.
- ▶ Specific tailored services should be provided to survivors of sexual violence. These are best provided by independent dedicated specialist sexual violence organisations.
- ▶ All services should be provided in comfortable environments with space available for confidential support.
- ▶ Specific tailored services should be provided for BME women and women with other additional needs.
- ▶ Services for BME women and other groups with specific additional needs should be led and managed by women from those groups or identities.
- ▶ Services should be holistic, and include
  - legal advice/advocacy;
  - practical support;
  - information and referral;
  - assistance with compensation.
- ▶ Service providers should be mindful of the needs of children of service users and their specific responsibilities with respect to girls and young women.
- ▶ The experiences and needs of male victims differ from those of female victims and are best met in dedicated specialist men's services, not by specialist services for women and children.

### 4. Training

Staff should be appropriately qualified and trained:

- ▶ Minimum initial training and minimum levels of ongoing training should be part of employment contracts.
- ▶ Initial training should include understanding of the gendered dynamics of violence, awareness of the different forms of violence against women, anti-discrimination and diversity, legal and welfare rights.
- ▶ This standard also applies to all relevant professionals in statutory and voluntary agencies. Specialist women's organisations working to address violence against women and girls should lead delivery of this training and be paid appropriately.