



NATIONAL POLICY FORUM 2021

Justice and
Home Affairs



Britain is at a fork in the road. This must now be a moment to think again about the country that we want to be.

We can either go back to the same insecure and unequal economy that's been so cruelly exposed by the virus. Or we can seize this moment, and go forward to a future that builds a more secure and prosperous economy.

This consultation, alongside the Policy Review led by our Party Chair Anneliese Dodds, presents us with an opportunity to set out a bold vision for a brighter future as we emerge from the pandemic.

This is a chance for us to address what matters most to people, and the eight consultation documents reflect this. From ensuring children are at the heart of our recovery from Covid-19, to making the green new deal work for all; from repairing the foundations of our economy, to ending violence against women and girls, this consultation is an opportunity for us to work out what it takes to make Britain the best place to grow up and grow old in.

Throughout the consultation there will be a number of online member events so that my colleagues in the Shadow Cabinet can directly hear your views on the eight consultation topics, and I encourage you to get involved. Whether you submit your views at an event or through Labour Policy Forum, whether as an individual or as part of a group, I look forward to hearing your insights. By connecting all parts of our Party in this discussion, together we can build a brighter future post-pandemic.

Keir Starmer
Leader of the Labour Party

Thank you for your involvement in the Labour Party's 2021 National Policy Forum (NPF) Consultation. Through this consultation we want to listen to our members, supporters and stakeholders on how the next Labour government can make the UK the best place to grow up, grow old and live in.

This paper is one of eight policy documents published by the Labour Party as part of the consultation this year. Each document will look at the current situation in the UK and the policy challenges we face, followed by a set of questions on the way forward. There is no need to answer every one of these questions, nor is there a specific way in which to answer them. We suggest using the questions to stimulate your thoughts on what you think the main issues are in the document's policy area.

You can write your response as an individual, or as a collective through your local party or organisation. Once you have drafted your response, please submit it to us through Labour Policy Forum: www.policyforum.labour.org.uk. For more information on how to make a submission, see www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/consultation-submission-guide.

On the website you can also find out more ways to get involved with the consultation, including full information on our programme of member e-roundtable events. You can also read the seven other consultation documents which might be of interest to you as well. While we are primarily asking for policy ideas related to the eight consultation topics this year, if you have an idea or issue on another topic please do submit this on the website too.

We look forward to hearing your policy ideas on how we can make Britain the best place to grow up, grow old and live in.

Want to know more about how Labour makes its policy?

You can learn more about the Labour Party's policy making process on our Resource Hub www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/resource-hub.

You can also follow us on Twitter [@labpolicyforum](https://twitter.com/labpolicyforum) for all of the latest policy development news and events.

Accessible Materials

The Labour Party is an inclusive member-based organisation that prides itself on being accessible to all who share its values. If you would like an accessible version of these documents, please email us at **policydevelopment@labour.org.uk** to discuss how we can best accommodate your requirements.

Ending violence against women and girls

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) has been an epidemic for decades but its true extent remained hidden. In recent years, the scale of this problem has become more apparent for a number of reasons. Improvements in recording practices by the police mean many more acts of violence against women are classified as crimes rather than merely 'incidents', as they were in the past.

Similarly, recognition in law of offences such as coercive control or stalking means these acts are now recorded as crimes when previously they would not have been. Through changes in how repeat victimisation is measured, the Crime Survey gives a more accurate estimate of domestic violence, while the police now specifically record if a crime is domestic abuse-related. As the criminal justice system and society in general have begun to recognise VAWG as a serious and widespread issue, there has also been greater willingness from victims to come forward and report their experiences.

Events over the last year have further emphasised why many women do not feel safe in their communities, workplaces, schools, colleges and universities, or even in their own homes. Reports of domestic abuse rose sharply last year, with both the police and support services noting a surge in victims coming forward at the end of the first lockdown even as most other crimes fell.

The death of Sarah Everard led many women around the country to share their personal experiences of harassment and abuse, and once again highlighted the extent to which women are at risk while simply going about their business in public.

And as thousands have come forward to recount their experience of misogynistic behaviour or sexual violence in schools, colleges and universities, the safety of girls and women in education has been put in the spotlight. These incidents emphasised the scale of the problem, but also spurred a renewed determination to ensure that future generations do not have to suffer from the levels of violence, abuse, and intimidation that women and girls face in our society today.

The challenges

After a decade of Tory mismanagement and underfunding, the criminal justice system has struggled to cope with the growing number of VAWG offences it has to deal with. As a result, while reports to the police have been increasing, there have been significant declines in referrals, charges, prosecutions and convictions for VAWG offences in recent years. Too few victims see their case go to court and, for those that do, the experience is often traumatic and unnecessarily drawn-out. This has a serious impact on victims' confidence in the criminal justice system and means perpetrators continue to get away with their crimes. If these trends continue, many victims may lose faith in the criminal justice system altogether, once again leaving the true scale of VAWG hidden from public view.

When the Government has attempted to address VAWG, its responses have been piecemeal and inadequate, lacking the urgency and ambition that the scale of the problem calls for. They still have not ratified the Council of Europe's Convention on Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (the "Istanbul Convention"), despite having signed up to it in June 2012. Ministers announced a review of how the criminal justice system deals with rape two years ago, but it is still has not reported. It has taken over two years for a review into how the criminal justice system deals with rape to conclude, all while outcomes for

victims continued to deteriorate. And while important concessions have been won, the Government is still refusing to include important measures to protect women, such as enhanced monitoring of serial offenders or removing barriers for migrant women from accessing support.

Similarly, the Tories are wasting a real opportunity with the upcoming Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Bill to address VAWG. In contrast, the Labour Government in Wales introduced its Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act in 2015.

The significant real-terms cuts to local authority funding have severely impacted the ability of councils to fund the specialist services that support survivors of domestic abuse. The Government's 2016 VAWG strategy set out new duties for local authorities on providing refuge services but did not back this up with adequate funding. Each year, around one fifth of women are turned away from refuges due to lack of space, and the number of bed spaces is 30 percent lower than the level recommended by the Council of Europe.

Many community-based support services are also oversubscribed, meaning survivors face unacceptable delays or may not be referred at all. Despite this, the Government has resisted calls to include a duty on local authorities in the Domestic Abuse Bill to provide support for victims accessing wider community-based services as well as those in accommodation.

It is also clear from the number of women who have come forward in recent years to share their experiences of violence and harassment that, as a society, we are still held back by deeply misogynist attitudes and practices. Education is crucial in challenging these harmful attitudes, but little support has been given to ensure every school, college, and university is equipped with the training and processes needed to protect every child and root out sexist attitudes before they are taken into adulthood. Beyond education, the Conservatives have been reluctant and slow to commit to decisive steps, such as treating misogyny as a hate crime, and have had to be pushed into taking action.

The way forward

If our country is to be the best place in the world to grow up and grow old in, women and girls must feel secure at home and in their communities. This is simply not the case for many in our country today. While important progress has been achieved, both in the criminal justice system and beyond, it is clear there is much more to be done if we are to put an end to VAWG.

Our criminal justice system must do more to command the confidence of women so that, when they come forward and report when they have been victims of violence, they are treated with respect by authorities, and perpetrators are brought to justice and punished.

Preventing VAWG happening in the first place must also be a higher priority, through challenging and changing attitudes, as well as equipping people to better identify and support those who are victims or are at risk of becoming victims. And it is clear that to end VAWG, we must ensure our education system teaches children how to respect each other and value themselves, as well as putting in place the necessary policies and resources to tackle the sexual harassment, violence, misogynistic language and stereotyping that remains prevalent in our education institutions.

Labour believes there must be a co-ordinated, cross-government response to VAWG, covering not just

the criminal justice system but also areas such as housing, education, healthcare, the immigration system, welfare reform, the family courts and support for children. After more than a decade in Government, the Conservatives have shown themselves to be unwilling or unable to provide such a co-ordinated response.

Labour is committed to ensuring a better approach, but the process cannot wait until after the next election to begin. That is why we published a VAWG green paper earlier this year, setting out a series of measures to address some of the most pressing deficiencies in current government policy, as well as outline how ministers can be properly held to account for their performance.

And it is why, this year, the Justice and Home Affairs Commission seeks to examine both immediate and long-term policies to improve how the criminal justice system deals with VAWG, rape, and sexual offences, as well as measures that could be adopted outside of criminal justice to reduce VAWG.

Questions:

1. What structural reforms are necessary to improve the criminal justice system's response to VAWG?
2. How can we ensure the public sector as a whole works in a coordinated way, both between public bodies and with outside organisations, to tackle VAWG?
3. What action is needed to effectively challenge the misogynistic attitudes which fuel VAWG?
4. What immediate steps can policing, the courts, and the wider criminal justice system take to address poor outcomes for VAWG offences?
5. Are there examples of best practice either at a local level or internationally that could be adopted by the Government?