



The Government's domestic policy on violence against women and girls is lagging behind its efforts abroad, says Human Rights Committee

We are publishing the full press release of the Joint Committee on Human Rights as we believe it needs to be read in full. Our organisation has serious concerns about the way austerity cuts are damaging specialist services working with women, children and men living with domestic and sexual violence and abuse. We believe that Universal Credit and an end to universal child benefit disproportionately effect women - women experiencing domestic violence and abuse, as well as those living in poverty as carers for children and members of the extended family who require supported care. This is without acknowledging the impact of the government's refusal to ensure that children receive adequate maintenance from non-residential parents - a policy which has increased the number of children living in poverty.

Whilst the Istanbul Convention is not a full guarantee to protect women and girls from violence, it is an important public step towards accountability. We know the government is failing women and girls in the UK with its refusal to ensure that all women and children, regardless of migrant status, have access to refuges and other services. This is despite years of important activism by the campaign coalition [No Recourse to Public Funds](#) involving [Southall Black Sisters](#) and [Eaves](#), amongst others.

Mandatory sex and relationships education, as outlined by the [End Violence Against Women Coalition](#), is absolutely necessary to protect children from violence. We know that teenage girls are currently the highest risk group for violence and yet we deny them access to appropriate, high quality education on healthy relationships.

The current government coalition has decimated services for women, men and children living with violence. As the press release below states, the media are also responsible in both their failure to hold the government accountable and their misrepresentations of domestic and sexual violence and abuse.

We are very pleased to see the Human Rights Committee make it clear that our government is failing women, children and men.

The Government's domestic policy on violence against women and girls is lagging behind its efforts abroad, says Human Rights Committee

In a Report published today, the Joint Committee on Human Rights warns that the Government could harm its international reputation by failing to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention). The Committee concludes that the Government's progressive work on tackling violence against women and girls abroad is not translating into its domestic policy, despite its Violence against Women and Girls Action Strategy and the Home Secretary's personal commitment to the issue.



The Committee warns that failure to provide adequate refuge spaces and specialist services for victims of violence against women and girls demonstrates the difficulty for the Government in fulfilling its international obligations under the Convention when decisions over commissioning of certain services has been devolved.

The Committee also expresses alarm at the prevalence of violence against women and girls across many cultures in the UK today, and heard troubling evidence from many minority groups that represent women with particular needs. The Committee was concerned at the failings of the Government to reach and protect these victims.

The Committee also:

argues that women in the asylum system face a culture of disbelief and double discrimination as asylum seekers and women. It expresses concern that current Home Office policies can leave them destitute and that this in itself leads to women being at greater risk of being a victim of violence;

says that, whilst the Government has undertaken good work to raise awareness in this area, schools should play a greater role and include issues of violence against women and girls within the PSHE curriculum;

has concerns that front line professionals, including the police and judiciary, are not proactively improving their cultural literacy in dealing with these crimes, in particular with regard to the nature of coercive control;

welcomes the steps the Government has taken to engage with the media and with public awareness campaigns to counteract the sexualised portrayal of women but, noting that the BBC declined invitations to give evidence to this inquiry, concludes that the media themselves are not doing as much as they should;

recommends a further investigation into the role of women, and equality between the sexes, across many cultures in the UK today;

recommends the Government look again at the payment of universal credit to couples because of its concerns that it could put women subject to domestic violence at risk.

Dr Hywel Francis MP, the Chair of the Committee, said:

“Barely a week goes by without a news story about domestic violence, rape, sexual abuse or some form of violence against women. We commend the Government for the commitment it has shown to tackling these crimes but emphasise that the work to prevent these crimes must not let up. We should not forget that when the police do not conduct proper risk assessments, or women are turned away from refuges due to lack of space, women’s lives can be in serious danger.

Gender inequality is prevalent across many cultures in the UK and this is a cause and



consequence of violence against women. The portrayal of women as victims of violence is deeply embedded in cultural stereotypes, in the depiction of women in the media and in how women are treated in the asylum system. This has to stop.

We recommend further work be carried out into equality between the sexes within cultures in the UK.”

THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ARE:

Dr Hywel Francis MP (Labour) (Chair)

Mr Robert Buckland MP (Conservative)

Sir Edward Garnier MP (Conservative)

Gareth Johnson MP (Conservative)

Mr Virendra Sharma MP (Labour)

Sarah Teather MP (Liberal Democrats)

Baroness Berridge (Conservative)

Baroness Buscombe (Conservative)

Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws (Labour)

Lord Lester of Herne Hill (Liberal Democrats)

Baroness Lister of Burtersett (Labour) Baroness O’Loan (Cross-bencher)