

# Building Capacity, Influence, and Change Together: A Workshop For ‘By and For’ VAWG/DVA Organisations

## Executive Summary

On 5 March 2026, IDVRM hosted a workshop bringing together 17 organisations from across the domestic violence and abuse (DVA) and violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector to discuss the challenges and priorities facing service providers, particularly ‘by and for’ organisations. Participants included representatives from ‘by and for’ organisations as well as generalist domestic abuse services and organisations working at the intersection of migration, faith, and community advocacy.

The workshop created a space for these organisations to reflect on shared challenges, exchange frontline experiences and identify priorities for strengthening sector responses to survivors from minoritised and migrant communities.

Discussions during the workshop revealed several persistent structural barriers within the sector - findings which strongly echoed themes raised during the [Project dIdI/ᄁᄁᄁᄁ Annual Conference in 2024](#), highlighting that many of these challenges remain unresolved.

### Four key insights emerged from the workshop:

1. Continued lack of cultural and religious sensitivity within statutory services, shaped by wider structural inequalities, which can create barriers for survivors and increase the advocacy burden on frontline organisations.
2. A need for more comprehensive cultural, religious and interfaith training across the DVA and VAWG sector.
3. A shortage of ‘by and for’ specialist organisations outside major urban areas, limiting access to culturally responsive support.
4. Funding pressures and resource constraints that limit organisations’ ability to contribute to policy, advocacy and sector learning.

Addressing these issues will require stronger collaboration, sustainable funding models and greater recognition of the expertise held by grassroots and specialist organisations.

## Workshop Aims

The main objectives of the workshop were to:

1. **Facilitate** knowledge exchange between organisations working across the sector
2. **Identify** persistent structural challenges affecting survivors and service providers
3. **Explore** opportunities for strengthening collaboration and sector capacity
4. **Consolidate** a convening space for organisations across the DVA and VAWG sector to share and discuss experiences and insights

## Workshop Participants

The workshop brought together 25 participants representing a diverse range of organisations across the DVA and VAWG sector.

Participants included:

- 'By and for' organisations supporting women from minoritised communities
- Domestic abuse and VAWG service providers
- Organisations working with migrant women and refugees
- Organisations working within faith and community settings
- Practitioners and advocates working at the intersection of domestic abuse, migration, and cultural or religious identity

This diversity of perspectives enabled a rich discussion about the complex realities facing survivors and the organisations supporting them.

## Key Findings

### 1. LACK OF CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS SENSITIVITY IN STATUTORY SERVICES

Participants identified an ongoing lack of cultural and religious sensitivity within statutory services as a major challenge affecting survivors from minoritised and faith communities. This was understood to be shaped by wider structural inequalities, including systemic forms of racism, which influence how services are designed, delivered, and experienced.

Many survivors engage with systems that do not adequately recognise the importance of cultural, religious and community contexts in shaping their experiences of abuse and their decisions about seeking support.

Participants noted that this can result in:

- Survivors feeling misunderstood or unsupported by services;
- Responses that unintentionally re-traumatise survivors;
- Increased advocacy responsibilities placed on specialist organisations supporting survivors.

Frontline organisations often play a critical role in bridging these gaps by advocating for survivors within statutory systems and helping practitioners understand culturally specific contexts.

## **2. NEED FOR SECTOR-WIDE CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS AND INTERFAITH TRAINING**

Participants highlighted a significant gap in specialist cultural, religious, and interfaith training across the DVA and VAWG sector, which affects organisations' ability to effectively support survivors from migrant, ethnic, and religiously diverse communities.

Key points raised during the workshop included:

- The need for more structured training opportunities focused on cultural and religious competency, particularly in relation to migrant and minoritised communities;
- Limited interfaith literacy and training, making it difficult for practitioners to respond to survivors from diverse religious backgrounds;
- Practitioners often lack the knowledge, tools, and confidence to navigate faith-related dynamics within cases of domestic abuse;
- Even within some 'by and for' organisations, there remains a gap in opportunities for interfaith learning and exchange;

Participants emphasised that expanding access to specialist training would strengthen organisations' ability to provide more culturally and religiously responsive support to survivors.

## **3. LIMITED ACCESS TO 'BY AND FOR' SPECIALIST ORGANISATIONS**

Another key challenge identified during the workshop was the limited availability of 'by and for' organisations outside major urban areas, specifically outside of London. Participants described how this lack of geographic coverage creates significant barriers for survivors seeking culturally appropriate support.

This issue creates several challenges:

- Survivors may struggle to access services that understand their cultural or community context;
- Organisations may find it difficult to make appropriate referrals;
- Survivors may disengage from services due to lack of specialist support.

This creates a "postcode lottery" for culturally responsive services, where access to appropriate and specialist support depends heavily on location. Strengthening and sustaining 'by and for' organisations across different regions of the UK would help improve equitable access to culturally appropriate support for survivors.

## **4. FUNDING CONSTRAINTS AND ADVOCACY CAPACITY**

Participants also highlighted significant funding and institutional pressures across the sector, particularly for grassroots and specialist organisations.

Many organisations are currently managing:

- Increasing demand for services
- Limited staffing and resources
- Short-term or competitive funding environments

These pressures not only affect service delivery but also limit organisations' ability to contribute to policy discussions, advocacy work, and sector learning.

Frontline organisations hold valuable knowledge about survivors' experiences and systemic barriers. Participants noted, however, that limited capacity prevents those organisations from translating this expertise into policy engagement or research outputs. Participants highlighted the importance of dedicated funding streams that support organisations to share their frontline insights and contribute to policy development.

## Key Priorities for the Sector

Based on workshop discussions, several priorities were identified for strengthening sector responses to DVA and VAWG:

- Improving cultural and religious sensitivity within statutory services
- Expanding training and knowledge-sharing across the sector
- Strengthening collaboration between generalist and 'by and for' organisations
- Addressing geographic gaps in access to specialist services
- Supporting grassroots organisations to contribute to policy and advocacy work

Addressing these priorities will require collaboration between service providers, policymakers, funders, and research organisations.

## Concluding Remarks

The March 2026 workshop provided an important opportunity for organisations across the DVA and VAWG sector to share experiences and reflect on ongoing challenges.

The findings demonstrate that many of the barriers identified during earlier sector discussions remain present, particularly in relation to cultural competency, access to specialist services and sustainable funding for frontline organisations.

By strengthening collaboration, investing in specialist expertise and creating greater opportunities for frontline organisations to contribute to policy and research, the sector can move toward more inclusive and effective responses that reflect the diverse experiences of survivors across the UK.

**IDVRM remains committed to advancing these efforts through research, knowledge exchange, capacity building, and collaboration with organisations across the sector, strengthening collective responses to domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.**

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