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Guidance and Resources Toolkit

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Needs Assessment Tool

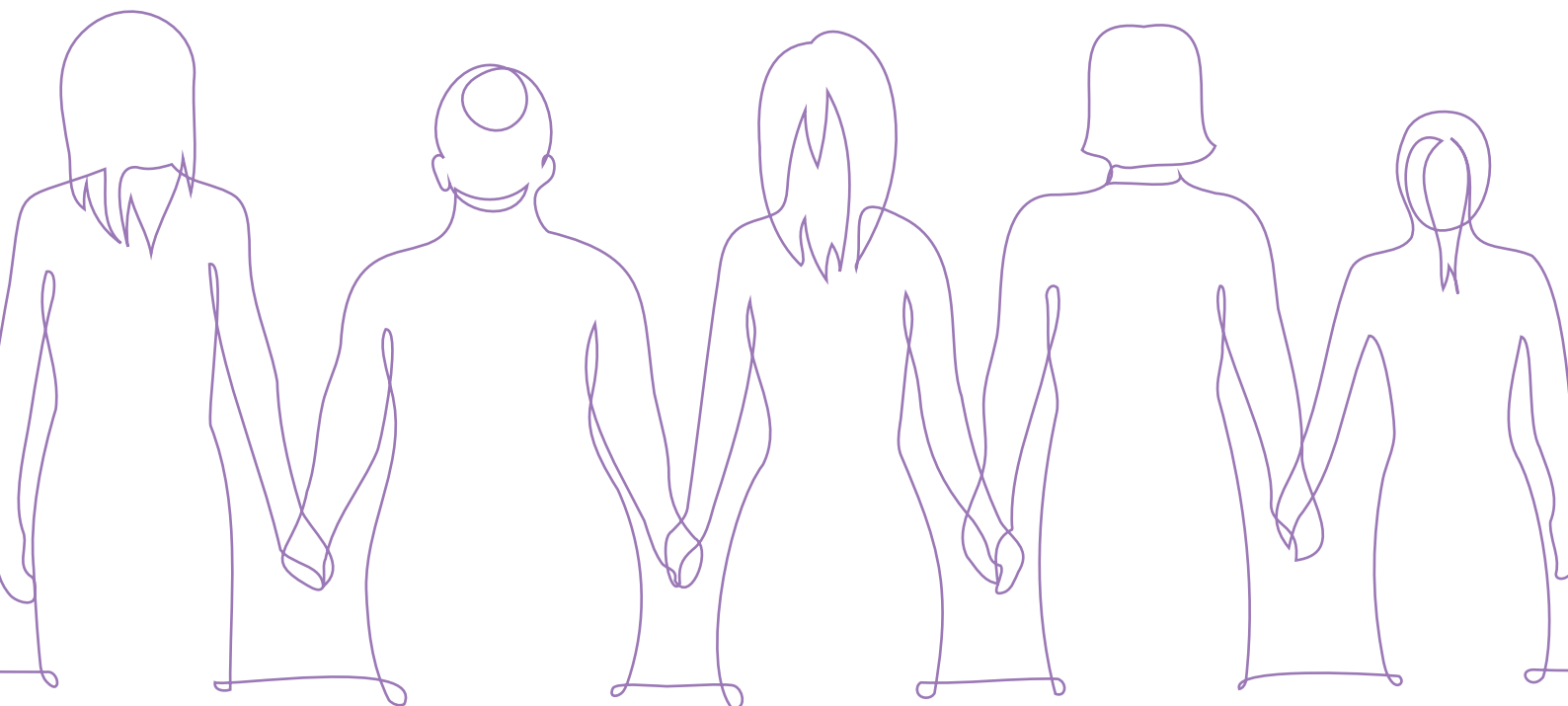
A practical tool to help partnerships build a shared understanding of local need and turn it into actionable priorities for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls



Acknowledgement

This toolkit has been developed in partnership with the initial testing areas Angus, Clackmannanshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Dundee, East Ayrshire, Fife, North Lanarkshire, Orkney, Perth and Kinross and West Dunbartonshire and integrates resources created by a range of consultants and third sector and public sector partner organisations.

We want to thank all those who supported the test phase and shared resources, expertise and insight in the creation of this toolkit.



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Introduction

Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls sets out the Scottish Government and COSLA's joint vision for a strong and flourishing Scotland where all individuals are equally safe and respected, and where women and girls live free from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation – and the attitudes that help perpetuate it. Achieving this depends on collaborative working across the many public and third sector partners who have a role in ensuring women, children and young people receive the support they need, when they need it.

This VAWG Needs Assessment Tool helps bring those partners together. By making the best use of the collective knowledge, data and learning that exists locally and nationally, it raises awareness of everyone's role and helps identify opportunities to prevent violence and maximise the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people.

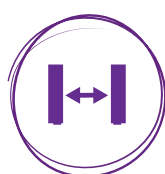
The tool helps partnerships to:



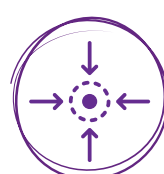
Develop a shared understanding of need



Identify and build on good practice



Identify and respond to gaps and unmet need



Maximise the use and impact of collective resources

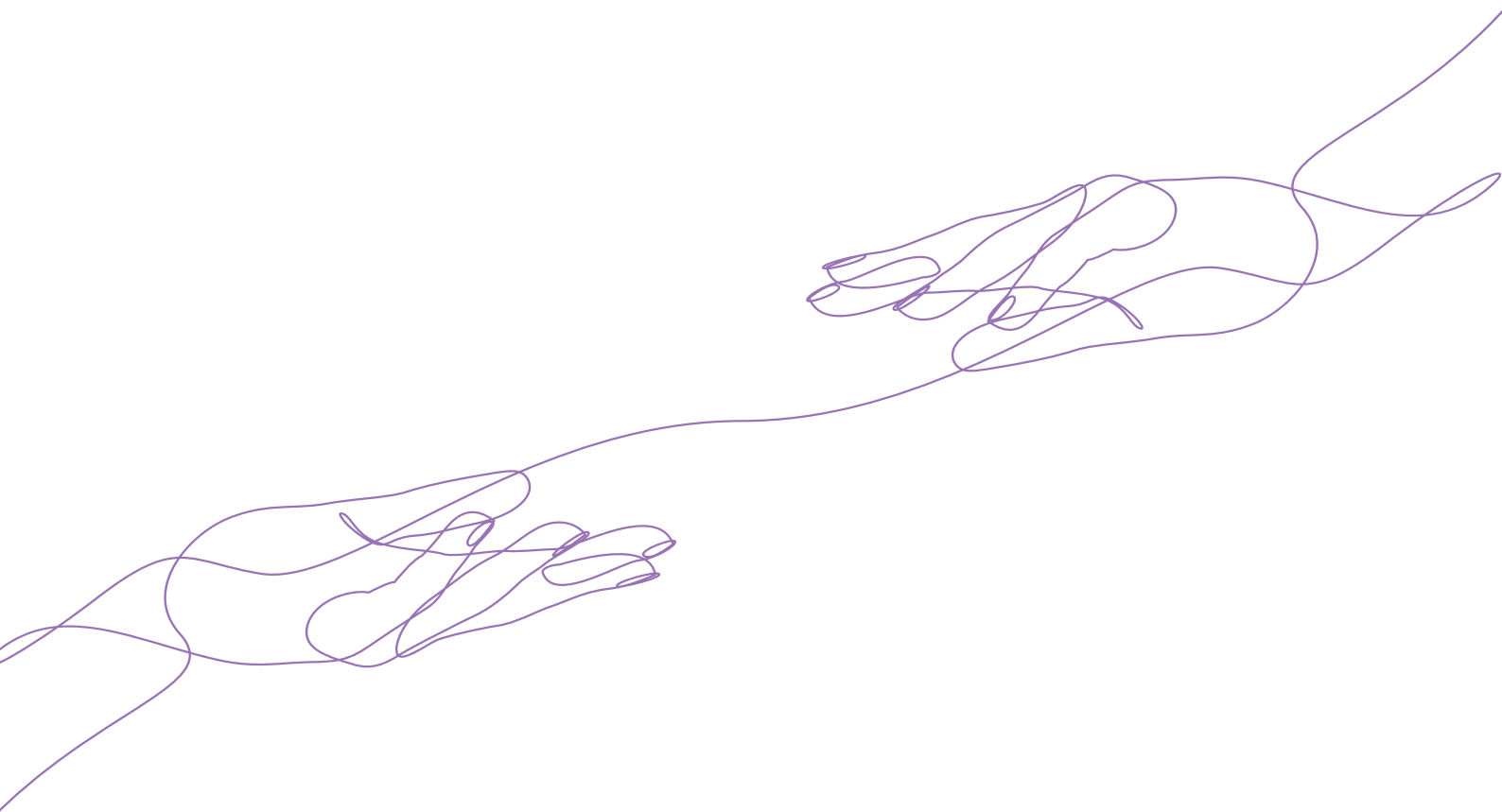
How to use this tool

The needs assessment is iterative and developmental. It is not expected that every question is answered at once, or by a single organisation. Partners are encouraged to work collaboratively, use the tool flexibly, and focus on the priority areas of greatest need or opportunity. Workshops, focused discussions and thematic deep-dives can help progress different sections, and findings can be reviewed and updated as new evidence emerges.

Some themes cut across sections. Focus on the primary purpose of each section, avoid duplication where possible, and use cross-referencing to reflect the connections between themes.

Outputs from the VAWG Needs Assessment can be used to:

- Identify key priorities for action
- Inform local strategic planning and commissioning
- Strengthen multi-agency collaboration and shared accountability



Definition of VAWG

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) describes violent and abusive behaviour directed at women and girls because they are women and girls. Carried out predominantly by men, it is an abuse of power rooted in systemic, deep-seated gender inequality. It limits women’s and girls’ freedom and potential and is a fundamental violation of human rights.

Under Equally Safe, VAWG includes the actual and threatened occurrence of physical, sexual, psychological, emotional and financial abuse in the family, the community and institutions, across both physical and digital spaces including:



Partnerships should consider that women, children and young people may experience multiple forms of VAWG simultaneously, and at different points across their lives.

Guiding approaches

A gendered approach

The tool is underpinned by a gendered understanding of VAWG, recognising that it cannot be understood in isolation from wider gender inequality. A gendered approach acknowledges that:

- VAWG is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality
- Women and girls experience violence, abuse and exploitation in ways shaped by unequal social, economic and cultural power
- Societal norms, expectations and gender roles influence both the risk of VAWG and how it is experienced and responded to

Intersecting forms of inequality shape women's experiences of VAWG and it is therefore vital, where possible, to identify groups experiencing multiple disadvantage and understand how systems respond to their differing needs.

Alongside the gendered approach, it is helpful to keep the following approaches and frameworks in view, in line with Equally Safe and the wider Scottish policy landscape:

- **Public health approach**
Focus on the population-level impact of VAWG, prioritising addressing root causes, risk factors and supporting long-term prevention
- **Intersectionality and equity**
Examine how overlapping factors such as race, disability, age, sexuality and socio-economic status create unique barriers to safety and support
- **Trauma-informed practice**
Ensure all stages, particularly engagement, prioritise safety, trust, choice and empowerment to avoid re-traumatisation
- **Participatory working**
Involve survivors and frontline workers as collaborative partners in developing a needs assessment rather than treating people as data points
- **Mixed-methods evidence**
Blend robust quantitative data with qualitative insight to build a holistic local picture
- **Human rights-based approach**
Frame freedom from VAWG as a fundamental human right

Who should be involved

A mixed-method approach to answering the Needs Assessment questions was used by all 10 Test Areas, allowing both quantitative and qualitative data to be captured. A wide range of engagement tools and approaches were used throughout the Test Phase to gather input from different stakeholders, including professionals, victims and survivors and wider members of the community. As shown in the tables below, the most common approaches to stakeholder engagement were surveys, one-to-one interviews and focus groups, with engagement with both “lived experience” and “learned experience” stakeholders being prioritised to ensure that the Needs Assessment reflected both service user and professional insight and expertise.

Undertake in collaboration with members of:



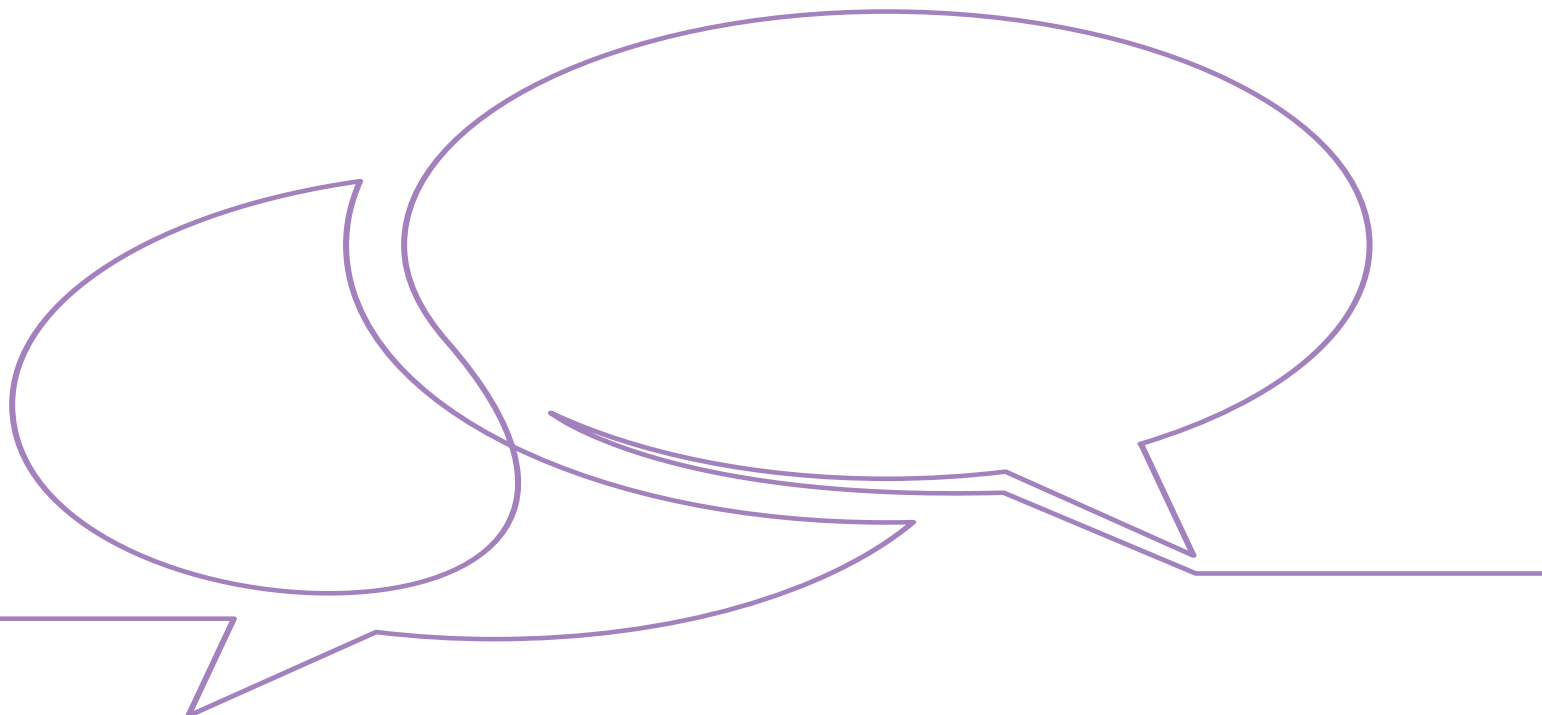
Suggested additional stakeholders are listed with each of the five questions later in this toolkit.

Lived Experience

Ensure women, children and young people with lived and living experience have safe, meaningful, trauma-informed opportunities to feed in.

- Make full use of existing data and learning first, to avoid re-traumatisation and duplication
- Where new engagement takes place, follow trauma-informed guidance (for example, the Authentic Voice project and the Women's Aid Research Integrity Framework) and be guided by local specialist services.

Finally, to help ensure that the learning from the VAWG Needs Assessment can help to support wider strategic decisions on how to best prevent and reduce harm to women, children and young people, it is recommended that the Needs Assessment process is also undertaken under the leadership of, and in close discussion with, local Public Protection Chief Officer Groups (COGs).



What the assessment can, and can't, tell us

The hidden nature of VAWG, and significant barriers to data collection, availability and disaggregation, make it very challenging to understand the true prevalence of VAWG and the needs of those affected. The Equally Safe: delivery plan recognises that developing a robust understanding of the prevalence of VAWG in Scotland and the needs of women, children and young people affected by VAWG is very challenging. This is especially true of less visible forms such as commercial sexual exploitation and honour-based abuse, and of groups who face additional barriers to support, such as minority ethnic women and girls and women and girls with learning disabilities.

Within these limits, the tool helps partners consider what learning and data (including qualitative data) is available locally and nationally, and how it can be used to reduce risk and improve outcomes.

The absence of data is not automatically the absence of need. Challenge yourselves and each other to consider what the available data isn't telling you and what actions could address the gaps in your knowledge.

Consider what forms of violence, abuse or exploitation may be under-represented in the available data, and which groups may be less visible in current evidence. This may include commercial sexual exploitation, honour-based abuse, technology-facilitated abuse and economic abuse, and the experiences of women facing additional barriers to accessing support.

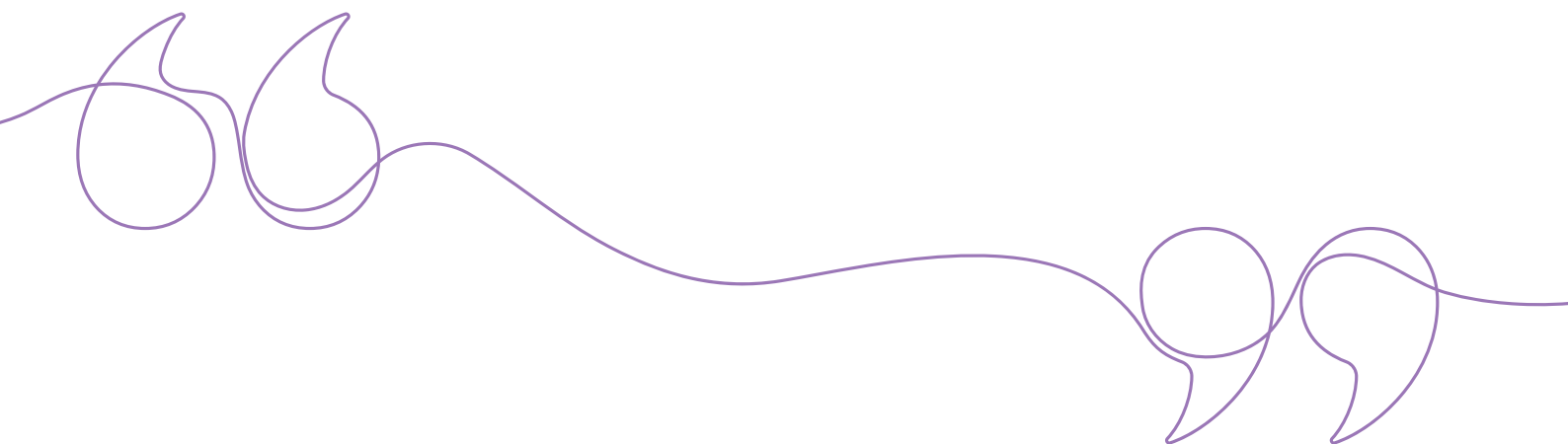
Continuous Learning from the VAWG Needs Assessment Process

The Needs Assessment is a live, iterative process that supports ongoing learning, collaboration and improvement in preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls. Partnerships are encouraged to reflect on how the process went, the enablers, challenges and any gaps in data, engagement or understanding and use this to:

- Strengthen future use of the VAWG Needs Assessment
- Improve local data collection, analysis and partnership working
- Inform strategic planning and service development

This tool has been shaped by learning from the VAWG Needs Assessment Tool Test Phase, captured in the Improvement Service Test Phase Learning Report, which offers insight into partnerships' approaches, the challenges they met, and good

practice to support wider implementation. The Improvement Service will continue to support the tool's development by coordinating national learning and sharing emerging practice, keeping the process responsive, collaborative and informed by both local experience and national insight.



The Five Questions

When undertaking the needs assessment, partners use their collective data and learning to answer five core questions:

Q1	Who are we? What does our local landscape look like in terms of population, demographics and socio-economic outcomes?
Q2	What are the key issues and challenges being experienced by women, children and young people affected by VAWG?
Q3	What systems and services are currently in place locally to prevent and eradicate VAWG and respond to need?
Q4	To what extent do local systems and services currently meet women, children and young people's needs?
Q5	What are the collective resources currently available to partners to meet need?

Support Available to Answer the Questions

The VAWG Needs Assessment Tool is accompanied by a wider resource pack the contents of which are detailed in the final pages of this document. The toolkit provides additional guidance on interpreting findings, examples of outputs and formats that can be used locally, and case studies demonstrating how findings from the VAWG Needs Assessment test phase have informed planning and decision-making in practice. Together, the tool and supporting resources are intended to ensure that the VAWG Needs Assessment process leads to meaningful, evidence informed action.

For further support and advice with undertaking the VAWG Needs Assessment, please contact the Improvement Service at vaw@improvementservice.org.uk.

Question 1. Who are we?

Focus: A shared understanding of the local context, including population, demographics, inequalities and the strategic structures in place. This understanding will support areas to answer questions focused on the specific needs of those affected by VAWG or assess service provision in detail, which are considered in later sections.

Issues to consider	Who else to involve	Data sources & approaches
• Local demographics and protected characteristics • Variations and inequalities (poverty, health, education, employability) • Geography, rurality and transport infrastructure • Recent and projected population change • Strategic structures implementing Equally Safe • Collaboration and information-sharing processes	• Community Planning leads • Population and migration teams • Public Protection Committees and Chief Officer Groups	• Census, locality and household survey data; population projections • Local government benchmarking data • Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) • Local Outcome Improvement Plans (LOIPs) • Community planning research and engagement • Organograms and governance structures



Question 2. Key issues and needs experienced (and the workforces that support them)

Focus: Identifying and analysing the needs and experiences of those affected by VAWG, and of the workforces supporting them. This will support areas to answer questions focused on mapping the full range of services or assess how well systems are meeting these needs, which are addressed in later sections.

Issues to consider	Who else to involve	Data sources & approaches
• Key and intersecting needs (mental health and trauma, housing, drug and alcohol use, poverty, NRPF, immigration advice, language, isolation) • Emerging and future trends • Specific and multiple forms of VAWG • Differences by age, race and disability • Needs of services and workforces (recruitment, retention, development, funding) • Impact of workload, burnout and vicarious trauma	• Social work leads • Specialist VAWG services (incl. national CSE organisations) • Community-based services (mental health, drug and alcohol) • Equality organisations; advocacy and advice services • Police, NHS, Education, Housing, Employability, COPFS, SCTS • Migration teams; community planning and safety; courts • Women, children and young people, including those not accessing services	• Referral data; waiting lists and caseloads • Police data; MARAC data; routine enquiry data • Population, equalities, housing and homelessness data • Public protection data; case files • Consultation with providers and with people accessing / not accessing services • NRPF annual returns; local case studies

Question 3. Systems and services in place

Focus: Mapping the range, reach and nature of systems, services and processes in place to prevent VAWG and respond to need. This will support further assessment of whether these systems are effective in meeting needs, which is explored in the following section.

Issues to consider	Who else to involve	Data sources & approaches
• Range and reach of services to prevent VAWG, respond to need, and address perpetrators' behaviour • Areas of focus (domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault, CSE, honour-based abuse) • Local systems and processes (referral pathways, risk conferences, learning reviews, workforce development) • Responses to perpetrators (accountability; interventions such as the Caledonian System) • Prevention activity across settings, and work with young men and boys • Gaps, good practice and local barriers (e.g. rurality)	• Social work leads; specialist VAWG and advocacy services • Community-based services; education (early years to HE) • Police, NHS, Housing, Employability, COPFS, SCTS • Migration teams; community planning; community justice and safety • Children's services planning partnerships • Community groups engaging young men and boys; local employers (e.g. Equally Safe at Work) • Women, children and young people, including those not accessing services	• Funding and commissioning data • Local mapping exercises (stress-testing, referral pathways) • Directories of local service provision • Consultation with providers and with people accessing / not accessing services • Local VAW Partnership reporting (Quality Standards)

Question 4. How well needs are met

Focus: Understanding how effectively systems and services meet needs, including how it feels to navigate support. This understanding will support areas to consider the full range of needs or services already identified in other questions, and to assess how well these align in practice.

Issues to consider	Who else to involve	Data sources & approaches
• What the journey looks and feels like for victims and survivors • Where people disengage or drop out, and why • Points that create barriers or increase risk; repeating their story across services • How well services work together • Differences for those with intersecting needs, different forms of VAWG, or additional barriers • Areas of unmet need and system barriers (waiting times, gaps, system-generated risk, information-sharing) • Gaps in workforce training	• Women, children and young people, including those not accessing services • Social work leads; specialist VAWG and advocacy services • Community-based services; equality organisations • Police, NHS, Education, Housing, Employability, COPFS, SCTS • Navigators within the system; youth work and children's organisations	• Conversations with people accessing and not accessing services (journey mapping, case studies) • Conversations with service providers • Feedback data from specialist and universal services • Local VAW Partnership reporting • Local and national research on survivor journeys

Question 5. Collective resources across partners

Focus: Understanding the resources and capacity available across partners, how they are used, and where impact could be maximised. This will support consideration of whether resources are aligned with identified priorities and where impact could be maximised.

Issues to consider	Who else to involve	Data sources & approaches
• Collective resources, staffing, budgets, facilities and non-financial resources • What activities they fund (prevention, early intervention, crisis, recovery, perpetrators, workforce care and development, partnership working) • Alignment of resources with identified needs and priorities • Resources spent responding to the consequences of VAWG, and who bears the cost (police, health, justice) • Opportunities to invest in prevention and early intervention to reduce future crisis demand • Good practice in pooling resources to maximise impact	• Social work leads; specialist VAWG and advocacy services • Police, NHS, Education, Housing, Employability, COPFS, SCTS • Finance and procurement leads • Funders and commissioners	• Finance, staffing and other resource data from VAW Partnership members

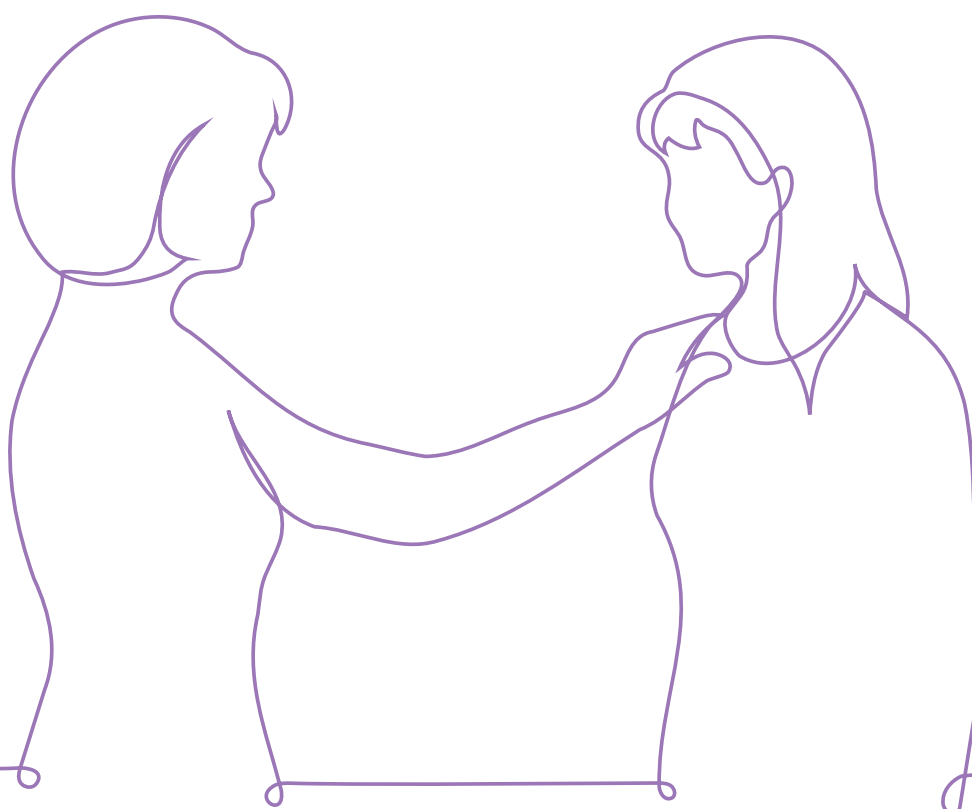
How to use this toolkit

The process in five stages

In practice, Needs Assessments work best when a responsive and iterative approach is taken that builds on connections made throughout each phase. However, for the purposes of this toolkit the process can be broken down into five stages. The toolkit is not intended to be read from start to finish; it is designed to be picked up when relevant and used flexibly. The table below is suggestive of the activities that may take place at each stage.

Stage	Sample activities
Scoping and set-up	• Establishing governance through a steering or working group • Developing project plans with timelines and responsibilities • Creating tenders and engaging consultants • Defining scope and objectives forms of VAWG, age groups, geography, question selection
Designing the approach	• Mapping stakeholders and critical contacts. • Deciding the mix of quantitative and qualitative data needed • Designing the methodology (focus groups, surveys, case studies) • Developing ethical and safety protocols (consent, data protection, support) • Drafting information-sharing agreements between agencies
Building the evidence base	• Gathering quantitative data from national and local sources • Service or system mapping • Developing case studies • Conducting focus groups, interviews, surveys and stakeholder events • Reviewing policy, strategy and case documentation

Stage	Sample activities
Analysis and synthesis	• Identifying gaps and barriers in services and in the data • Thematic analysis of qualitative feedback • Triangulating quantitative trends and qualitative insight
Reporting and next steps	• Drafting final reports • Developing tools or resources • Producing recommendations • Publishing and disseminating findings • Bridging to the next action plan or strategy



Toolkit Map

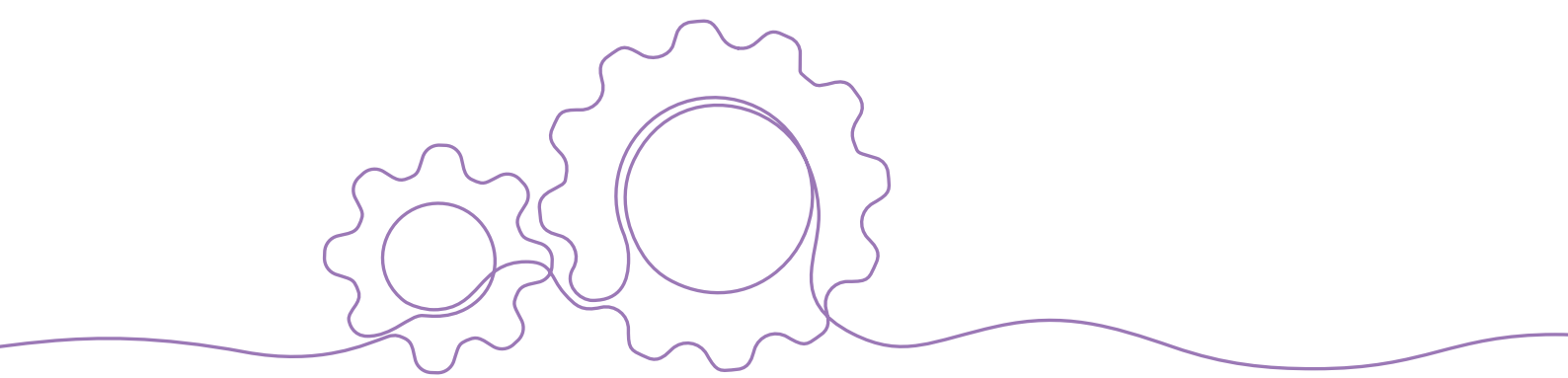
Needs Assessment Tool

Tool overview

1. Scoping and set-up			
Set-Up Guide Governance, roles, planning	Terms of Reference example Model group ToR	TT Template Commission external support	Project Plan Tracker Track tasks and timescales
Stakeholder Engagement Planner Who, how, and when to engage	Data Request Planning Template Plan each data ask		
2. Designing the approach			
East Ayrshire Mixed Methods Approach	Orkney Engagement in Rural/Island Context	Clackmannanshire Mapping Survivor Journeys	Angus Whole Systems Approach
3. Building the evidence base			
Engagement Guide Choosing methods	Stakeholder Event Resource Running events	Case Record Reading Resource Reading case files	Case Study Development Pack Capturing survivor journeys
Interview Consent Form Recording informed consent	Participant Information Sheet What people are told before taking part	Privacy Notice How data will be used and stored	Example Surveys Ready-to-adapt surveys
Question Bank Reusable survey questions			

4. Analysis and synthesis			
Data and Analysis Guide Frameworks for making sense of findings	Data dashboard National data sources	Data landscape Data available from partners	Q1 Worked Example Example structure

5. Reporting and next steps			
Reporting & Next Steps Guide Report Structure, Analytical Frameworks, and action planning	Example reports Full final reports from test areas		



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