



**National
Council of
Women GB**
For a fair and
inclusive society

December 2025 Current Affairs Update

Online Safety

Ofcom issues new safety guidance to protect women and girls online

Online safety watchdog, Ofcom, has launched new industry guidance demanding that technology firms deliver a safer online experience for millions of women and girls in the UK. Women and girls face distinct and serious risks online, including misogynistic abuse, sexual violence, co-ordinated pile-ons, stalking, coercive control and intimate image abuse. [Ofcom's guidance](#) includes a wide range of practical safety measures that the regulator is urging tech firms to adopt to tackle these harms. These go above and beyond what is needed to comply with their legal duties under the Online Safety Act. The guidance was developed with insights from victims, survivors, safety experts, women's advocacy groups and organisations working with men and boys. Ofcom has written to sites and apps setting an expectation that they start to take immediate action in line with the guidance. It will publish a future report to reveal how individual companies respond. Women's campaign groups remain concerned that, as a voluntary set of guidelines, Ofcom's guidance will not have the teeth of a mandatory code of practice with strong consequences for non-compliance.

Parents worldwide voice alarm over children's online safety

More In Common's [recent survey](#) of nearly 10,000 parents across the US, UK, France, Poland, and the Netherlands highlights widespread concern about children's online safety. Conducted over six months, the study found that around nine in ten parents worry about their children's digital wellbeing, with British parents expressing the highest levels of concern compared to other countries. The research revealed that these anxieties cut across political divides, showing remarkable consensus among parents regardless of party affiliation. A third of parents reported frequent conflict with their children over setting digital boundaries, while many admitted struggling to limit screen time. Across all five nations, parents voiced frustration that politicians and tech companies are not taking online safety seriously enough, with over half believing stronger safeguards are urgently needed. The findings underscore a growing demand for accountability from technology platforms and policymakers, as parents seek greater protections against harmful content, predatory algorithms, and excessive screen use. More In Common argues that this consensus presents a political opportunity to implement tougher regulations, reflecting parents' shared desire to safeguard children's digital lives.

MPs challenge TikTok over Trust and Safety job cuts in London

The Science, Innovation and Technology Committee [has published](#) TikTok's response to its request for details on proposed staffing cuts to its Trust and Safety Teams in the UK. The Trust and Safety Teams, are responsible for protecting users and communities from harmful online content - including deep fakes, toxicity and abuse. At the [urging of Unions and safety campaigners](#), the Committee Chair [wrote to TikTok in October 2025](#) to raise concerns about the company's ability to moderate content on its platform and keep users safe if it reduces its UK Trust and Safety Teams. In its response, TikTok emphasised that evidence showed that these proposed job cuts would actually improve the efficacy of moderation by using AI, third-party specialists and more closely localised teams. However, TikTok did not share the data or risk assessment that justified this in its reply to the Committee Chair. This lack of transparency comes after the Committee's recent inquiry on [Social media, misinformation and harmful algorithms](#), during which MPs heard repeated calls for increased openness about the data that social media companies used regarding content moderation.

Australia's social media ban for under-16s sparks debate

Australia has become the first country to [enforce strict age restrictions](#) across major platforms like TikTok, Instagram and Facebook. The law requires companies to verify users' ages and deactivate accounts belonging to under-16s with stiff financial penalties for non-compliance. However, the rollout has sparked controversy. Officials argue the ban is necessary to shield children from cyberbullying, grooming and addictive scrolling, while giving families more control over digital exposure. Supporters see it as a bold move to prioritise child safety in the digital age. Limiting access is seen as a way to reduce anxiety, depression and sleep disruption linked to excessive social media use. They argue that enforcement may be challenging but children's wellbeing and mental health must come before corporate profits. Critics say the ban will be difficult to enforce as teenagers can bypass restrictions using VPNs or shared accounts. They also warn the policy may isolate young people from important social connections and cultural conversations that increasingly happen online. Many believe the ban is a blunt tool and suggest education and parental guidance would be more effective than outright prohibition. Two Australian teenagers have launched a High Court challenge against the ban arguing that it violates the implied constitutional right to freedom of political communication, silencing young voices in public debate.

Violence against women and girls

Concerns raised at plans for judge-only courts for lesser offences

Justice Secretary David Lammy [has announced](#) sweeping reforms to tackle the record backlog of nearly 78,000 cases awaiting trial in the Crown Court of England and Wales. At the heart of his plan is the creation of "Swift Courts," where cases likely to result in sentences of three years or less would be heard by a single judge rather than a jury. These trials are expected to take 20% less time, while more cases will also be heard by magistrates. Jury trials would be reserved for the most serious offences, including murder, aggravated burglary, and rape. Around a quarter of cases that would otherwise require a jury will be fast-tracked, freeing up capacity for the gravest crimes. The proposals have drawn mixed reactions. Supporters welcome the potential to accelerate justice in serious cases such as rape, with 4,086 adult cases currently awaiting trial and sexual offences facing the longest delays. However, concerns have been raised by women's groups and ethnic minority communities, who warn that judge-only trials risk bias in a judiciary lacking diversity. Mr Lammy himself [has previously cautioned against removing juries](#), describing them as a safeguard against prejudice, and [reiterating in 2020](#) that juryless trials were a "bad idea." Former senior judge Sir Brian Leveson, in a [Government-commissioned review](#), recommended an alternative model: a Crown Court bench where a judge sits alongside two magistrates, rather than a single judge. Alongside the reforms to trial processes, Mr Lammy [announced a £550 million investment](#) over the next three years to improve support for victims and witnesses. The funding will bolster specialist services including counselling and practical advice for attending court.

Stronger safeguards for victims in sexual offence trials announced

The Government [has announced reforms](#) intended to make trials fairer for victims in sexual offence trials and improve their trial experience, aiming to restore trust in the system and reduce the high dropout rate of victims. These include new rules for admitting a victim's sexual history and previous allegations, making it harder to use them as evidence unless highly relevant and necessary, and requiring judges to consider how such evidence might reinforce harmful stereotypes. A higher threshold will be applied to victims' previous compensation claims to prevent them from being discredited. Evidence of domestic abuse history can be used to show patterns of behaviour and 'bad character' of the accused to support convictions in domestic abuse related rape trials. To improve courtroom support, the reforms formalise the use of companions for witnesses, clarify the power to exclude intimidating individuals, and ensure screens shield victims from the defendant.

Angiolini inquiry demands urgent action on women's safety in public spaces

The [second report](#) of the inquiry led by Lady Elish Angiolini KC focuses on police culture, women's safety in public spaces and the systemic failures highlighted by Sarah Everard's murder. The Inquiry found that around three quarters of women aged 18-24 had felt unsafe in a public space due to the actions or behaviour of a man or men. It [calls for urgent national action](#) to prevent sexually motivated crimes against women in public spaces. It says the focus must be on identifying, monitoring, and disrupting predatory men who commit these offences. Early intervention when individuals show concerning behaviour, combined with swift and effective investigations, is essential but currently lacking. A major concern is the absence of reliable national data: basic questions such as how many women were raped by strangers in public spaces last year cannot be answered. Without consistent recording across police forces, patterns of offending cannot be tracked, representing a critical failure. Despite Violence Against Women and Girls being classified as a national threat in 2023, over a quarter of police forces have yet to implement basic sexual offence policies. Recommendations from the first part of her inquiry, published more than a year ago, are yet to be implemented. Building on the 16 recommendations in her first report, Lady Angiolini's makes 13 new ones including immediate investment in proven programmes like Project Vigilant and Operation Soteria to protect women and restore public trust.

Baroness Amos exposes failures in maternity care

Baroness Amos, who is chairing the National Maternity and Neonatal Investigation, has released [an interim report](#) exposing urgent and systemic failures in England's maternity services. Her review, informed by visits to seven NHS trusts and hearing from over 170 families, found a 'staggering' 748 recommendations had been made to improve maternity and neonatal care over the past decade, but many had yet to be implemented. Baroness Amos highlighted deeply disturbing problems: poor standards of basic care, including cleanliness; women not receiving meals, or catheters not being checked or emptied; women left unattended in hospital bathrooms; lack of support for fathers and non-birthing father; inadequate communication; and discrimination against women of colour, younger mothers, and those with mental health issues. The investigation's next steps include an evidence call in January 2026 and further visits, culminating in a more comprehensive update in February and a final report with national recommendations in spring 2026. The newly formed National Maternity and Neonatal Taskforce will translate the recommendations into policy and delivery changes.

Deaf community leaders call for a national strategy for British Sign Language

Witnesses to the Women and Equalities Committee's inquiry into access to British Sign Language [stressed that](#), despite the legal recognition granted by the BSL Act 2022, practical access remains limited and progress has been slow. They highlighted persistent barriers in public services such as healthcare, education, and employment, largely due to a shortage of qualified interpreters and inconsistent provision of support. Concerns were raised about the lack of government leadership and the need for a national strategy to ensure equality and inclusion for Deaf people, framing BSL access as a matter of disability rights rather than simply language provision. Witnesses also pointed to international models where sign language rights are embedded more effectively. They urged the UK to follow suit, while emphasising fairness for self-employed Deaf individuals and the importance of reflecting the diversity of Deaf communities. They argued that responsibility for improving BSL access should be shared across government, businesses, and public institutions, rather than left to individuals to navigate alone.

Childcare places rise, childminder numbers fall, rural families struggle

Between August 2024 and August 2025, [Ofsted statistics showed](#) a decline in childminders across England, with numbers falling by 1,000 from 26,000 to 25,000. This contributed to an overall reduction of 1,270 early years settings, a 2% drop, despite growth in non-domestic childcare provision. Interestingly, while provider numbers decreased, the total capacity of early years places rose by 17,700 (1%), largely driven by non-domestic providers expanding their offering. The figures highlight a shift in the childcare landscape: fewer individual childminders, but more places available overall, alongside consistently high inspection outcomes. However, the loss of small-scale, flexible providers disproportionately affects rural families, who face longer travel times and fewer childcare options, adding pressure to parents' work-life balance.

Government reconsiders compensation for WASPI women

The UK government [has announced](#) it is reconsidering its earlier refusal to compensate WASPI women following new evidence and mounting political pressure. Between 1995 and 2011, changes to the state pension age meant women born in the 1950s saw their retirement age rise from 60 to 65, later aligning with men at 66. Campaigners under the banner of Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) argue that these women were not adequately informed of the changes, leaving many with little time to adjust financially. Earlier this year, ministers rejected calls for compensation despite recommendations from the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, sparking anger among affected women. Now, Work and Pensions Secretary Pat McFadden has confirmed the decision is being revisited after fresh documentation came to light. While campaigners welcome the review, scepticism remains, with many fearing the government may only offer limited redress rather than the thousands of pounds some believe they are owed. The High Court has also granted a judicial review into the government's handling of the issue, adding legal weight to the campaign.

Select Committee inquiries: summary

- **Women and Equalities Committee – Inquiries in progress:** *Access to British Sign Language; Reproductive health in girls and young women; Misogyny: the manosphere and online content.*
- **International Development Committee – Inquiries in progress:** *Future of UK aid and development assistance; Women, peace and security.*
- **Health and Social Care Committee – Inquiries in progress:** *Healthy aging; The Government's 10-year Health Plan.*
- **Education Committee – Inquiry in progress:** *Early years: improving support for young children and parents.*
- **Work and Pensions Committee – Inquiry in progress:** *Employment support for disabled people.*
- **Environment, Food and Rural Affairs – Inquiry in progress:** *Preventing waste and enabling a circular economy.*