

A light blue silhouette map of Scotland is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the page, set against a dark blue background.

Action Against Stalking Manifesto for the Scottish Parliament Election 2026



Introduction

Action Against Stalking is Scotland's only charity specifically dedicated to supporting victims of stalking. Since 2014, we have been working tirelessly to establish a world where everyone has a right to live without fear of psychological or predatory threat. We provide one to one support to victims by specialist advocates, campaign for victim's rights, and work to raise awareness and understanding of the profound harms caused by stalking.

According to the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20, around 11% of adults in Scotland had experienced stalking or harassment within the previous year.[1] Stalking is frequently a serious factor in post-separation abuse and just under half of the victims we supported in 2025 were stalked by an ex intimate partner. Stalking has a profound psychological and physical impact on victims and their families. The harms caused by stalking can include increased anxiety, fear and powerlessness, PTSD symptoms, changes to lifestyles, daily routine or work, and in some cases suicidality. Victims urgently need and deserve support. In 2025, more than 75% of the victims we supported reported an improvement in their emotional wellbeing after working with us, and 86% reported they had a better understanding of the legal process.

[1] Scottish Government. (2021). [Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20 main findings](#).



Meaningful, targeted and sustained efforts are required to prevent stalking and to improve experiences for victims.

Ahead of the 2026 Scottish Parliament election, we are calling on political parties to commit to our four recommendations for long term, lasting change, as set out in this manifesto. This is a critical opportunity for MSPs standing for election to demonstrate their support to victims of stalking, and their commitment to policy development that advances victims' rights.

Our Recommendations



Recognise
stalking as a
public health
issue

Provide
consistent and
sustained
funding to third
sector specialist
support services

Improve
experiences for
victims of
stalking in the
criminal justice
system

Commit to
tackling online
and technology-
facilitated forms
of violence and
abuse

Recognise stalking as a public health issue

Stalking is not only a criminal justice issue, but also a profound public health concern with wide-ranging psychological, social, and economic impacts. The chronic fear, hypervigilance, anxiety, and trauma experienced by victims can lead to long-term mental health challenges including depression, PTSD, social withdrawal, and increased risk of self-harm. The effects extend beyond the individual to families, workplaces, and communities.

As with other forms of gender-based violence, stalking creates significant pressure on health and wellbeing services. Victims frequently require ongoing support from GPs, mental health teams, community services, and specialist advocates. Yet, awareness and understanding of stalking within public health settings remain inconsistent, leading to delays in identification, under-reporting, and ineffective pathways into support.

We call on political parties to recognise stalking as a public health priority by taking the following steps:

- Embedding stalking within national strategies on mental health, violence prevention, and women's safety in the VAWG strategy. Reframing stalking as a public health issue will help shift responses towards prevention and early intervention, as well as improving coordination between health, justice, and specialist services.
- Providing frontline healthcare professionals with dedicated mandatory training on stalking to recognise patterns of harm, which can help to improve early identification of stalking behaviours and reduce long-term health impacts, by enabling earlier, trauma-informed intervention. Training should be developed collaboratively by specialist stalking experts and healthcare professionals, and delivered by those with expertise in this area.
- Comprehensively funding a programme to support prevention, through public awareness, education, and community-based programmes that address risk, perpetrator behaviour, and online harms.
- Supporting earlier and faster availability of targeted mental health support for victims of stalking.



Provide consistent and sustained funding to third sector specialist support services

Specialist support services are a vital lifeline for victims of violence and abuse, providing emotional support, advice and guidance, and advocacy, yet they are chronically underfunded. Victims and survivors across Scotland depend on Action Against Stalking for specialist, trauma informed support, yet our work currently relies on short term, competitive funding cycles, which makes it extremely difficult to develop and sustain the long-term support that victims need. Action Against Stalking invests heavily in training and supporting our specialist staff, but they are forced to accept short term contracts due to funding uncertainty, creating instability for both our staff and our services that victims rely on.

Anyone can be a victim of stalking, but it is predominately a form of violence against women and girls (VAWG), and 80% of the victims we work with are women. To provide the best possible support for victims, we must work together with our colleagues in the VAWG sector, yet they face the same funding challenges as us, and we are often forced to compete for limited resources. Without sufficient funding, support services such as ours are at risk, particularly given increasing demand for support. From 2022-2025, we saw a 126% increase in demand for our service.

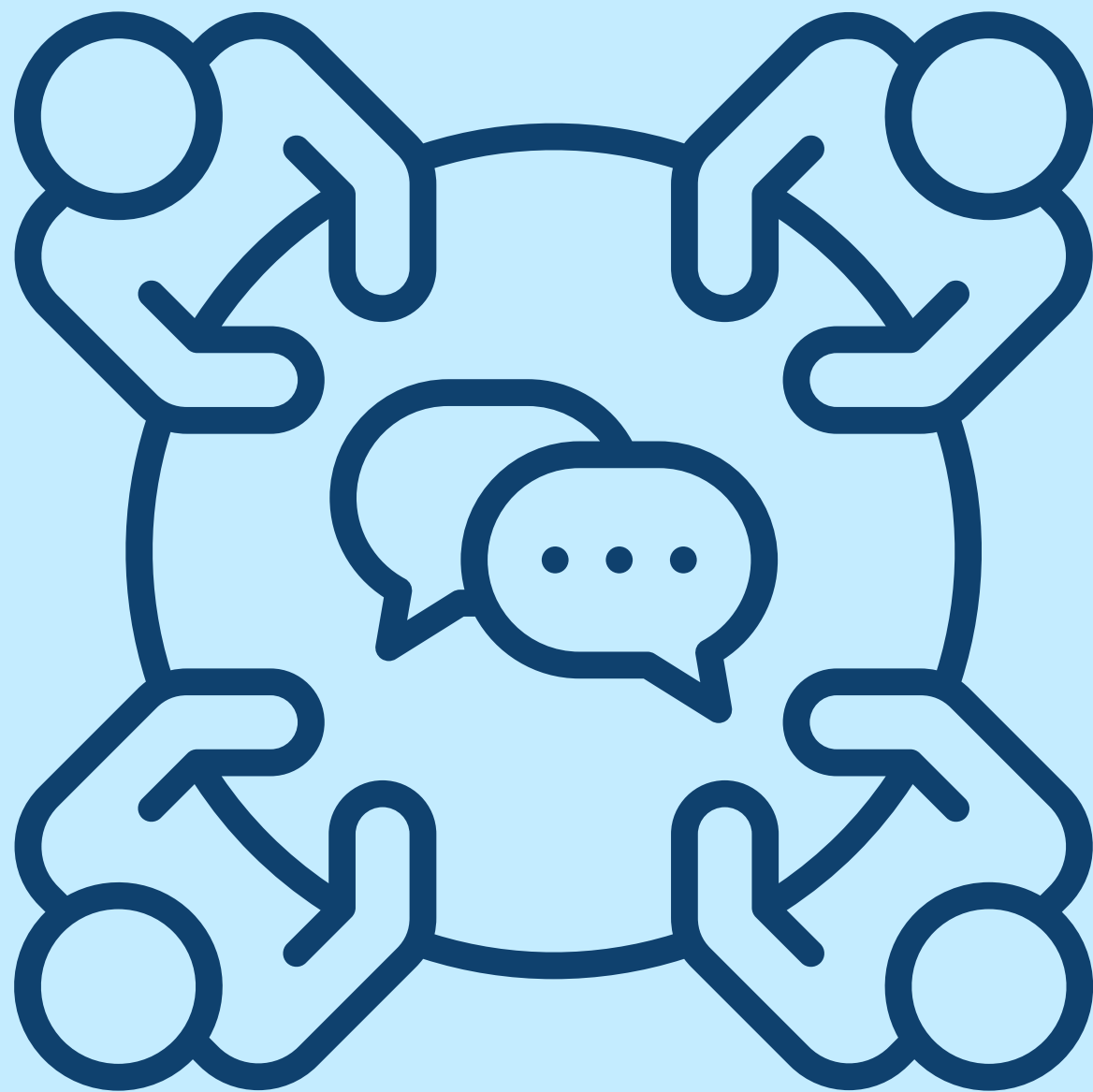
We call on political parties to commit to establishing a consistent funding model that reflects and meets the needs of victims for all specialist third sector organisations who work so hard to offer support and expertise when victims need it most.

Improve experiences for victims of stalking in the criminal justice system

Despite welcome victim-centred legislative and policy advances in Scotland, including distinct stalking and domestic abuse offences, victims of stalking continue to experience disempowerment and re-traumatisation in the criminal justice system. Too often, victims are met with a lack of understanding, long delays and low conviction rates. Importantly, there is no clear mechanism for measuring total stalking charges and convictions in Scotland, which not only makes it difficult to assess the scale of the problem, but also hinders analysis of attrition rates across the criminal justice process. While charging and conviction statistics are available for offences recorded under section 39 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010, stalking which takes place within the context of domestic abuse is generally recorded under Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2021 offences. Although we acknowledge the strengths and benefits of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2021, we cannot hope to improve victim safety and experience, or adequately manage perpetrator behaviours, unless we can accurately identify the size of the problem

Moreover, victims tell us that professionals across the criminal justice system frequently misunderstand the dynamics and patterns of stalking. Research carried out with women who reported stalking or domestic abuse to the police by The Scottish Centre for Crime & Justice Research in 2023 found that most regretted the involvement of the criminal justice system.[2]

Notably, women who took part in the research reported that their feelings of safety did not improve or got worse throughout the criminal justice process. These findings are particularly concerning given that stalking can be a predictor of escalating violence and homicide.[3] Recognising stalking behaviours at an earlier stage would allow for more appropriate investigation and help reduce the risks of escalation.



Work with colleagues in England & Wales as part of the National Stalking Consortium has demonstrated that victims have an improved experience in areas where a Multi-Agency Stalking Intervention Programme (MASIP) is in place.[4] MASIPs bring together experts from the police, health, probation and victim advocacy to coordinate responses to stalking. This multi-agency response has helped transform the experience for victims while enabling more appropriate management and interventions for perpetrators.[5] Evidence shows that victims involved in these programmes were better able to understand and manage risk and feel more in control of their safety.[6]

[2] Lombard, N. & Proctor, K. (2023). Women's Lived Experiences of Coercive Control, Stalking and Related Crimes, as they progress through the Criminal Justice System. The Scottish Centre for Crime & Justice Research.

[3] See, for example, Reynolds, B.W., Randa, R. & Brady, P. (2024). Identifying and Explaining the Harmful Effects of Stalking Victimization: An Analysis of the National Crime Victimization Survey. *Justice Quarterly*, 41(2), 218-242; Flowers, C., Winder, B. & Slade, K. (2020). Identifying the characteristics associated with intimate partner stalking: a mixed methods structured review and narrative synthesis. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, 31(6), 889-925.

[4] Jerath, K., Tompson, L., Belur, J. (2020). Risk Management in Stalking Victims: A Multi-Agency Approach to Victim Advocacy. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(11-12).

[5] Jerath, K., Tompson, L. & Belur, J. (2023). Treating and managing stalking offenders: findings from a multi-agency clinical intervention. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 29(10), 1161-1184.

[6] Jerath, K., Tompson, L., Belur, J. (2020). Risk Management in Stalking Victims: A Multi-Agency Approach to Victim Advocacy. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(11-12).

We call on political parties to take steps to improve experiences for victims of stalking in the criminal justice system by:

- Establishing a clear mechanism for measuring total stalking charges and convictions, including those which take place in a domestic abuse context. We need accurate and up to date total, disaggregated data to allow criminal justice agencies, policy makers, researchers and victim support services to fully understand the prevalence of stalking in Scotland, analyse attrition, and allow for a better understanding of the inequities that may exist for individual victims.
- Introducing specialist mandatory training on stalking and its relationship with other offences, including domestic abuse, for police officers, Procurator Fiscals and other criminal justice staff who interact with victims, to support earlier identification of stalking and help build greater confidence among victims in the justice process. Training must be trauma informed, victim-centred, and intersectional, designed collaboratively with specialist stalking services, and delivered by experts.
- Improving victim safeguarding through more consistent use of bail conditions, such as restricting contact, and protective orders, such as Non-Harassment Orders. Clearer guidance and stronger enforcement of these protections would have an immediate positive effect on victim safety and confidence in the Scottish criminal justice system.
- Ensuring more effective and consistent use of risk assessments linked to practical actions, including the operation of multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) across all local authority areas.
- Strengthen multi-agency collaboration, including exploring best practice and investing in programmes such as MASIPs used in England & Wales, so that victims receive coordinated support that addresses both their safety and wellbeing.



Commit to tackling online and technology-facilitated forms of violence and abuse

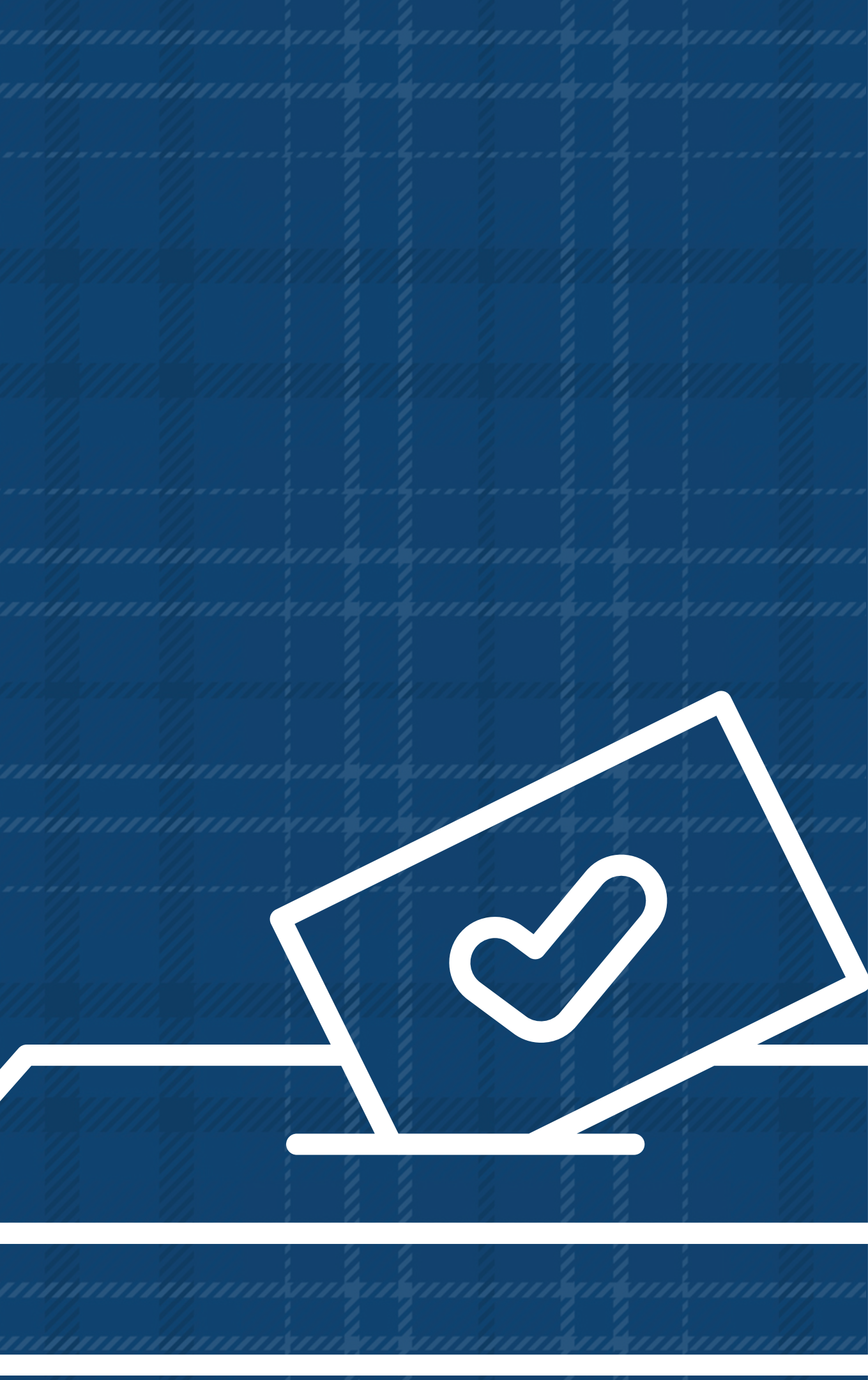
Digital technologies are increasingly being used to perpetrate and extend patterns of abuse, including stalking. These harms can have profound psychological, social, and economic impacts on victims and survivors, and they often intersect with other forms of gender-based violence. While technology can offer important opportunities for connection and support, it is also exploited by perpetrators to stalk, intimidate, and control victims. Last year, more than 75% of victims we supported reported that digital technologies were used by their perpetrator as part of the abuse. Research carried out by Refuge also found that 1 in 3 women in the UK has experienced online abuse or harassment through social media or another online platform.[7]

In addition, the advancement of new technologies presents distinct challenges, with generative AI posing particular threats. Indeed, Security Hero reported a 550% increase in the number of deepfake videos online from 2019-2023.[8] Given the rapid pace at which digital tools are evolving, it is essential that policy responses keep pace with these emerging harms. Likewise, online spaces are increasingly hostile for women and girls in the context of the manosphere, and algorithms targeting misogynistic content at young men and boys.

[7] Refuge. (2021). [Unsocial Spaces: Make Online Spaces Safer for Women and Girls](#).

[8] Security Hero. (2023). [State of Deepfakes: Realities, Threats, and Impact](#).





We call on political parties to commit to tackling and addressing online harms, including those posed by AI, with a holistic and multi-faceted approach, by:

- Explicitly recognising technology facilitated abuse as a key component of stalking and committing to investment that strengthens responses to these behaviours. This should include promoting collaboration with tech companies and regulators to improve reporting mechanisms, increase platform safety, and strengthen accountability for harmful behaviour online.
- Introducing legislation and other measures to ensure that technology is safe by design and that tech companies are held to account where they fail to take appropriate steps to mitigate online harms and abuse.
- Equipping the police with the necessary resources and skills to deal with digital violence and abuse, including the provision of mandatory training by specialist stalking and harassment experts.
- Ensuring that children and young people have sufficient access to education about healthy relationships and gender-based violence, including stalking and online harms.

For Further Information

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