

## HOME OFFICE PUBLISHES EVALUATION REPORT ON SUPPORT FOR MIGRANT VICTIMS PILOT SCHEME ON DOMESTIC ABUSE AND NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS

### SOUTHALL BLACK SISTERS RESPONSE

Southall Black Sisters (SBS) welcomes the Home Office's long-awaited independent evaluation [report](#), 'Evaluating the Support for Migrant Victims (SMV) Pilot'. The SMV pilot scheme was set up as a result of our concerns about the plight of migrant women facing a stark choice between domestic abuse, and deportation and destitution due to their insecure immigration status and the no recourse to public funds (NRPF) condition. Our amendment for legal reform to end this stark choice had cross party support during the passage of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

The [SMV](#) pilot scheme is a UK-wide partnership led by SBS that provides victims of domestic abuse and their children with NRPF problems with limited housing and subsistence costs from a last resort [No Recourse Fund](#). The pilot also provides advocacy to assist women in accessing legal immigration advice and other wrap-around services such as counselling and support groups, with the majority of these services being funded in kind by SBS and our delivery partners, which include BAWSO, Shakti Women's Aid, Foyle Women's Aid, Ashiana Sheffield and Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid.

The Home Office evaluation report covers the SMV pilot's work during its first year, which ran from April 2021 to March 2022. In the absence of a longer-term solution, the pilot has been extended twice, and it is now set to end in March 2025. The Home Office has thus recognised the critical need for the service, but we are still waiting for urgent legal reform so that women are not left without support when the scheme ends or due to insufficient resources while it is in operation.

We note that the Home Office evaluation report confirms what we have said about the devastating impact of NRPF on victims of domestic abuse, and how providing emergency relief in the SMV pilot for housing and subsistence costs, as well as holistic specialist 'by and for' services for migrant women and children, are a vital life line. Furthermore, the report confirms our view that there is a need to provide more money for longer period of time to cover housing and subsistence costs so that women can access safe refuge accommodation. It also recognises the importance of resolving women's immigration status in order to reduce women's anxiety about their future, and ensure their safety and recovery from abuse.

We do not agree with the finding in the Home Office evaluation report that most agencies surveyed outside of the pilot provided services for victims of domestic abuse with NRPF in equal numbers to those with access to public funds, as we know from experience and other research that these victims are often turned away. However, we note that these agencies are less likely to sign post, provide refuge accommodation and generally have a lower level of service to those with NRPF because of lack of capacity and funding.

Much of the findings on the SMV pilot scheme is mirrored in a second independent evaluation, '[Living at the Edge](#),' carried out by the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit at London Metropolitan University for the same period and commissioned by SBS.

Both reports echo the findings of a third independent evaluation, '[Safe and Secure](#)', of a similar pilot carried out in 2017-19 by the University of Warwick and funded by the Tampon Tax Fund.

There is now overwhelming evidence to support our call for legal reform as the longer term solution, which is widely supported by many organisations and data collected or research by others, including the [Step Up Migrant Women](#) campaign, the [Domestic Abuse Commissioner](#) and the [Women and Equalities Committee](#).

We once again call for:

- **Extension of the Domestic Violence Indefinite Leave to Remain (DVILR) and Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) model** for those on partner/spousal visas to all migrant victims of abuse regardless of their immigration status. This will prevent migrant women from being trapped in violent relationships.
- **Extension of the current three-month provision to six months under the DDVC** to give women the 'breathing space' to resolve problems by seeking advice and recover from abuse, and to encourage more refuge providers to accept referrals and not turn victims away.
- **Remove the reservation on Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention now**, which will entitle all migrant victims facing domestic abuse from a partner/spouse to the right to residency. This will encourage more women to come forward and uphold migrant women's human rights.

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