

Joint Statement on May 2025 Immigration White Paper

Summary



September 2025



As organisations supporting migrant women victim/survivors of violence against women and girls (VAWG), trafficking and modern slavery, we are deeply alarmed by the sweeping changes to immigration policy introduced by the UK Government,¹ which will harm victims/survivors and limit their access to safety and justice.

Mainstreaming the far-right in immigration policies

We are deeply concerned by the dangerous and racially discriminatory escalation marked by the White Paper, which scapegoats immigrants, not austerity, for economic and social deprivation. The government is mainstreaming far-right rhetoric, using this to inform reactionary policy-making at a time when violence against immigrants, asylum-seekers and refugees is increasing.

Net migration targets further dehumanise migrants and have proved unworkable by successive governments. Migrant victims/survivors are increasingly at risk of harm by far-right groups and now face destabilising policy changes. Amid a chronic shortage of legal aid, many risk losing their status and becoming vulnerable to exploitation.

Migrant victim/survivors of domestic abuse

The White Paper fails to address the vulnerability of migrant victims/survivors of VAWG. Frontline services support migrant women whose inability to access mainstream refuges, financial support, stable housing or quality legal advice prevents them from fleeing domestic abuse and rebuilding their lives. Existing protections, such as the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) and Domestic Violence Indefinite Leave to Remain (DVILR) are extremely limited, and cover only a limited number of women with insecure immigration status.

The risk statutory services, including the police, sharing information with immigration enforcement is directly weaponised by perpetrators, deterring reporting and access to protection. The devastating impacts of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), data sharing and restrictive concessions on migrant victims/survivors have been highlighted by the sector, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, and Ministers. Jess Phillips MP has previously emphasised the critical need for a firewall between immigration enforcement and the police. Despite this, commitments to remove these barriers have not been followed through, and protections remain unavailable for most migrant victim/survivors.

It is deeply disappointing that the MVDAC-DVILR has not been extended, despite the unanimous support of the VAWG sector for these measures. Protections for victims/survivors with insecure immigration status are absent from the White Paper, perpetuating a two-tier system where safety depends on status.

1 Home Office, May 2025, *Restoring control over the immigration system: white paper*. Online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/restoring-control-over-the-immigration-system-white-paper>

Unless these systemic barriers are addressed, thousands of victim/survivors will remain trapped in cycles of abuse. If women do not feel safe to report abuse, the government will fail to accomplish their manifesto pledge to halve VAWG within ten years. The government cannot claim to support victim/survivors whilst expanding the policies and emboldening the discourse that actively endanger migrant women.

Labour market and immigration

The White Paper's approach to migrant labour is harmful, continuing to devalue the "low-skilled" roles overwhelmingly held by migrant women in the UK. This includes care work, cleaning and support services, where essential workers already lack fair conditions and robust protections. The decision to scrap care worker visas is particularly alarming and risks collapsing an already fragile sector.

We are alarmed that genuine workforce planning and sectoral investment are being replaced with a reliance on migrant women workers as temporary stopgaps for labour shortages. By restricting their access to long-term stability and settlement, these policies force workers to accept poor conditions and deepen dependency on partners or employers, increasing the risk of abuse and exploitation.

We also wholly reject the government's framing of immigration control as a means to address labour exploitation. This narrative misrepresents the root causes of abuse in the labour market and instead targets the victims/survivors, rather than the exploitative employers who profit from their precarity.

Criminalisation of victim/survivors

The White Paper deepens the criminalisation of victim/survivors of VAWG, trafficking and exploitation, who will be prevented from accessing support, justice and long-term stability if they fall under the category of "foreign national offenders."

In the UK, most women in prison or under community supervision have experienced abuse or exploitation. For vulnerable migrant victims/survivors, criminality often results from coercion or economic precarity. Migrant women also face barriers to report abuse and exploitation, meaning they slip through the cracks before later coming into contact with the criminal justice system.

Automatic deportation and accelerated removals will prevent victims/survivors from pursuing meaningful justice and rebuilding their lives. These measures directly undermine the aim of the Women's Justice Board, to improve outcomes for women in the criminal justice system by addressing their distinct needs.

Urgent priorities for action

The Government faces an urgent choice: to continue bolstering far-right ideology or to take immediate action to protect migrant victims/survivors. We call on the Government to:

- ✓ **Abandon the UK Government's Immigration White Paper (May 2025), which harms victim/survivors of VAWG, trafficking and modern slavery.**
- ✓ **Implement safe reporting mechanisms.**
- ✓ **End the criminalisation of victim/survivors of VAWG, trafficking and modern slavery.**
- ✓ **Fully repeal the Illegal Migration Act (2023) and the Nationality and Borders Act (2022).**
- ✓ **Tackle systemic racism and structural inequalities.**
- ✓ **Centre and provide ring-fenced funding for *by and for* organisations.**
- ✓ **Extend the combined MVDAC-DVILR model to all victim/survivors regardless of immigration status.**

To read the full report please [click here](#).