

Template letter to your Constituency MP

Name and Address of MP

Your address

Date:

Dear [Rt. Hon. **Name of MP**],

Subject: Migrant victim-survivors of domestic abuse need a safety net to prevent destitution

I am writing to you with deep concern over this government's lack of response to the issues concerning migrant victim-survivors with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). Halving violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the missions of this government. Nevertheless, the rights and entitlements for the over 32,000 migrant victim-survivors of VAWG with NRPF have not been part of the government's recently announced VAWG strategy. A VAWG Strategy that seeks to be transformative cannot leave some of the most vulnerable behind.

A wealth of evidence has shown that migrant women's vulnerability to experiencing gender-based abuse increases due to insecure immigration status. Migrant women with NRPF are also prevented from accessing most welfare benefits and housing under the Homelessness Act. This puts them at risk of destitution if leaving an abusive partner and prevents them from accessing a safe refuge space. Many victim-survivors and their children therefore face a stark choice between domestic abuse and deportation and destitution. No victim-survivor should have to make this choice as they are, first and foremost, victim-survivors. In recognition of this, I urge you to prioritise safeguarding migrant victim-survivors of domestic abuse as part of your parliamentary agenda.

Southall Black Sisters (SBS) have spent three decades leading campaigns to highlight this issue and introduce reform so that victim-survivors are not trapped in violent relationships. Over the years, SBS have helped to introduce the existing successful model of protection for migrant women on spousal/partner visas – the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) in 2012 (later renamed to the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC)) and Domestic Violence Indefinite Leave to Remain (DVILR) in 2002. The combined MVDAC and DVILR model is one of the best in the world as it gives access to benefits and housing as well as a route to settlement which encourages victim-survivors to come forward and seek help. There is no evidence of misuse in this model, which helps at least 1,000 victim-survivors per year.

However, this reform does not protect those on non-spousal/partner visas and undocumented victim-survivors. It urgently needs to be extended to them to bring these vulnerable groups under the protection of law and ensure they have access to adequate support.

You may be aware that SBS leads a UK wide partnership pilot project for victim-survivors with NRPF funded by the Home Office, Support for Migrant Victims (SMV), which provides housing

and subsistence costs for victim-survivors and their children for a short period of three months. Two evaluations – one by the Home Office independent evaluators and another by the London Metropolitan University – of the first year of the pilot show a vital need for this service (see [here](#)), which have led to 4 extensions of this scheme. However, these evaluations also highlight that the support provided is not for long enough or at a high enough rate to enable victim-survivors to enter safe accommodation like a refuge (the rates paid are below Universal Credit).

The London Metropolitan University report recommends the extension of the MVDAC and DVILR as the longer-term solution to the problem of domestic abuse and NRPF. This recommendation has been supported by previous pilots (see, for instance, [here](#)) and by research by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, which has shown that the high social value of this reform is £4 saved for every £1 spent on supporting victim-survivors (see [here](#)). Additionally, research by SBS and partners shows that the government saves over £42 million a year by when victim-survivors with NRPF receive a *by and for service's* support (see [here](#)). The estimated number of victim-survivors who would benefit from this reform would be about 7,700 per year who need housing support – a small, but significant number.

Based on the considerable evidence now available, I would like to request that you urgently raise my concerns with the Home Secretary, the Minister for Immigration, and the Minister for Safeguarding about the urgent need for protection for migrant victim-survivors of domestic abuse. In particular, I ask that the combined model of MVDAC and DVILR is extended to all victim-survivors of domestic abuse; and that the MVDAC be available for six months instead of three months while victim-survivors seek help, recover from abuse and consider their options. In addition, I would like the Government to lift the reservation on Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention which gives victim-survivors – partners in abusive relationships – the right to residency. This will ensure that the Government meets its human rights obligations and acts on its commitment to equality and non-discrimination.

Finally, I urge you to meet victim-survivors, their representatives at SBS, and its campaign partners and supporters to discuss in detail proposals to enhance systems of protection for women facing domestic abuse with an insecure immigration status and NRPF. SBS contact details are as follows:

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Yours sincerely,

[Remember to sign and add your name]