

Safety Before Status: Supporting Migrant Victims and Survivors of Domestic Abuse

Two reports issued by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales have highlighted the many challenges facing victim-survivors of domestic abuse who also have insecure immigration status in the UK. Migrant victim-survivors struggle to access vital routes to safety and security, and are confronted by a range of issues at the regional, local and national level which create substantial barriers to getting the support that they need, the research shows.

The first report, *Safety Before Status*, which was published in October 2021, drew on two independent pieces of research commissioned by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner: *Hinterland of Marginality* by the [Angelou Centre](#) and *A Critical Appraisal of the Home Office's Migrant Victims Review*, by the [University of Suffolk](#).

The second report, *Safety Before Status: The Solutions*, was published in December 2022 and followed on from the previous paper to give evidence-based estimates on the size and scope of the number of migrant victim-survivors of domestic abuse with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). It sets out a range of concrete costed proposals for the UK government. The report is based on commissioned research undertaken by the [London School of Economics](#) and the [Migration Observatory](#) at the University of Oxford.

The Home Office [responded](#) to the *Safety Before Status* report in January 2022.

Here are some key takeaways from both reports:

- While the passage of the [Domestic Abuse Act of 2021](#) has been of vital importance in supporting many victim-survivors, those without access to public funds have been left out of the provisions. As a result, some of the most vulnerable domestic abuse victims have been forced to stay with their abusers or face homelessness and destitution.
- The number of victim-survivors with NRPF status who are likely to seek support each year stands at approximately 32,000. Of these, 7,700 may need refuge or other accommodation, some only for a short term period.
- Research has recognised 'immigration abuse' for the first time as being used by abusers as form of coercion and control, and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner has called for the term to be included in the national definition of domestic abuse, something that has been partially accepted by the Home Office. Perpetrators are using or destroying immigration documents to control victims, and statutory services often lack the knowledge and skills to support these victims.
- The risk that police pass information to immigration enforcement means that migrant victims fear reporting abuse in case they are deported. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner has called for the introduction of a firewall between immigration enforcement and public services to ensure migrants can safely report their experiences of domestic abuse. This has yet to be accepted by the Home Office.

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- Survivors' lack of financial resources are used against them in family courts, with perpetrators using that to demand custody of children.
- Police, NHS doctors and local childcare services and housing are forced to pick up the pieces when the situation accelerates to an emergency, and victims come in with injuries and complaints. This costs an estimated overall £16.2 million a year.
- There are two clear options to improve support for migrant survivors. Research shows that if the government adopted the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's preferred option over 10 years, the support of migrant survivors could generate overall social gains worth almost £2.3 billion. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner's recommended option would offer flexible support for all migrant victim-survivors regardless of their status, tailored to the length of the support they require.
- The Domestic Abuse Commissioner has called for a funding injection of £18.7 million over three years to be given to local authorities to ensure those with NRPf status can get safe refuge. Moreover, a dedicated funding pot over three years for specialist 'by and for' services that provides the most tailored support for marginalised survivors is recommended. This has yet to be accepted by the government.

Find out more here:

[*Safety Before Status: improving pathways to support migrant victims of domestic abuse*](#)

[*Safety Before Status: the solutions*](#)

[*Home Office Response to the Safety Before Status Report*](#)

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