

Weaponisation of VAWG harms the women you claim to protect

On 19 August, 2026, the Home Office published a guide for people seeking asylum titled **‘Understanding behaviours and expectations in the UK: a guide for asylum seekers.’**

The guide provides information on gender equality, sexual consent, domestic abuse and acceptable behaviour in public, alongside warnings about the legal consequences of committing offences. It provides a few helpline numbers for women who may experience domestic abuse in the name of support. The Home Office says the guidance is intended to help people seeking asylum understand what is expected of them while living in the UK.

This raises concerns about how domestic abuse is being racialised and politicised.

Why are only people seeking asylum the audience of such messaging?

The patronizing tone of the guide is not its primary problem. It is the colonial, orientalist and imperial messaging that relegates violence against women and girls as a problem of the ‘other’. The guide locates the issue of VAWG in ‘other’ cultures, traditions and communities and reinforces colonial notions that Global Majority countries are barbaric, uncivilised, and regressive in gender and sexual norms.

The question should not be whether individual asylum seekers can perpetrate violence against women. To frame messaging in such a way implies that people seeking asylum are inherently more violent or have more reasons to commit gendered violence. This is not factually correct and diverts from the root causes of gendered violence such as patriarchy, racism, classism, ableism and insecure immigration status.

We reject the racialised and collective framing of that violence i.e. taking the actions of individual men and using them to portray people seeking asylum or particular ethnic and religious communities as inherently threatening to women.

As a specialist by and for organisation, we have firsthand witnessed the impact of such racialised public messaging on women seeking support, housing, safety and justice for VAWG. Such racialised messaging acts as a barrier for victim-survivors of VAWG in seeking support and information, risk identification and assessment, reporting, and pursuing legal actions and relief. Victim-survivors have mistrust and fear in engaging with law enforcement, as they fear racial bias, anti-immigrant hostility and punitive consequences (including deportation, criminalisation, and forceful separation) for themselves, their families and loved ones. This

fear can be deadly and impede access to life-saving interventions, and this risk is magnified for women with insecure immigration status who are especially vulnerable to VAWG.

Where is the support for women with insecure immigration status who do face domestic abuse?

We support the provision of useful information to those seeking asylum, many of whom risk their lives, experience diverse forms of violence including VAWG and trafficking, and are at the intersections of multiple vulnerabilities including race, religion, class, caste, disability and gender. Many people seeking asylum would benefit from information relating to displacement, trauma, heightened VAWG risks and vulnerabilities, legal advice and information, access to housing, transportation, sanitation and food. Instead of focussing on life-saving crucial information, the guide uses punitive framing to caution ‘outsiders’ against legal consequences, inadvertently reinforcing the racialised narrative that VAWG is not a UK problem, it is an outsider problem. This double standard matters. It legitimises hostility towards Black, ethnic, migrant, refugee and other racialised communities, while doing little to address the underlying causes of gendered violence.

This is a timely opportunity to remind ourselves that this narrative is not borne out by data. Violence against women and girls is endemic across society and is perpetrated by men from all backgrounds, including white British men who were born and raised in the UK.

The political and strategic choice to release this guide must be re-thought. It risks diverting resources, political and public attention away from specialist women's services, including organisations like ours, that provide vital support and protection to Black, minoritised and ethnic women experiencing violence.

Why now?

Far-right actors and their vast swathes of supporters have been carrying out virulent, Islamophobic, and misogynistic campaigns, where they blame migrants and people seeking asylum for all of UK's structural issues including impoverishment, lack of productive employment, VAWG and environmental degradation. In particular, they weaponise VAWG for their own political and divisive ends, with no genuine interest in women's rights, freedoms and safety.

There was a 6% increase in race hate crimes and a 3% increase in religious hate crimes recorded by the police (excluding the MPS) [over the last year](#). There have been multiple [targeted attacks](#)

on temporary accommodations of people seeking asylum with the clear message- you are not welcome here.

After this guide was published, members of Reform and the Conservative party have seized the opportunity to call for deportation of people seeking asylum, despite the knowledge that doing so may exacerbate the risks of VAWG against those seeking asylum. In this moment of anti-immigrant and racialised hostility, this messaging does more damage than good to victim-survivors of VAWG, many of whom have no recourse to public funds and are seeking asylum.

What is actually helpful for VAWG victim-survivors?

We encourage challenging misogyny and patriarchal practices in any community, including our own. However, misusing concerns about VAWG to target people seeking asylum is divisive and does nothing to make women safer.

Women with no recourse to public funds and women seeking asylum need holistic support. This includes free legal advice, culturally informed services, safe housing, trauma-informed counselling, advocacy, and access to education and employment. Such support must be accessible, culturally grounded, and free from racism, misogyny, hostility and judgement.

Specialist by and for organisations have been providing such support for decades and will continue to do so. This guidance indicates the issues with policy decision-making in silos and is a missed opportunity for adopting and emulating the coordinated community response and learning from specialist organisations who support women with no recourse to public funds and who are seeking asylum. Such guidance that is merely posted on a government website and only in English, defeats the purpose of wider access to people who may be more fluent in other languages.

Any guidance for migrants and people seeking asylum must be co-created with specialist organisations with rich experience in supporting women facing diverse forms of VAWG, across diverse communities.

We reject such protectionism that falsely pits women survivors of VAWG against people seeking asylum.

We stand with VAWG victims-survivors of all ethnicities and stand committed to addressing the root causes of gendered violence.