

Key facts summary

Migrant Women and the Economy

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Key Facts Summary

Women and men have different patterns of migration. These are a result of the gender norms that permeate our world and shape women and men's lives, their employment trajectories, their caring responsibilities, and their role in the family.

An immigration system designed without taking these differences into account will have distinct impacts on women and men.

Immigration rules make a difference to migrants' living conditions and experiences in the UK and so do public attitudes. Limits on who can work (in which jobs), the 'no recourse' policy and hostile attitudes to immigrants, fostered by strict and punitive rules from public authorities, make immigrant women highly vulnerable to exploitation in relationships, in the labour market, in private housing, and other social settings.

Women are more likely than men to be dependent on other immigrants. Many come to the UK to follow partners who have settled or who are British citizens, come to form a new marriage, or come as dependants of male refugees, workers or students. The rules around these types of visas – family visas – place women in a precarious situation of dependency: her immigration status and her income will more likely depend on a partner than would a man's.

Dependency in turn increases the likelihood of migrant women becoming victims of coercion, control or physical violence.

Any changes to the design of the immigration system need to be preceded by an equality impact assessment to ensure that women are not disadvantaged by immigration rules and conditionality and that their life patterns are fully taken into account when we think about immigration.

Key Stats¹ – Key Immigration Numbers

Family and dependant visas



Women are the vast majority of immigrants who are dependent on another person for their right to be in the UK:

Women are over two-thirds (68%) of migrants on family and dependant visas.

Work visas



20% of migrant women are in the UK on work visas

but women with all sorts of immigration statuses contribute to the workforce

Student visas



Over a third (36%) of migrant women are on student visas
and they outnumber men on student visas

Asylum seekers and refugees

In 2019 25% of asylum applications were made by women



The proportion varies by nationality (from 8% Sudanese to 52% of Nigerian asylum seekers)

EEA nationals and Brexit



3.4 million EU nationals live in the UK half of whom are women

with concerns many will become undocumented after the EU Settlement Scheme deadline.

¹ Source: Migration Observatory analysis of data provided by Home Office, Table MJ_01 and underlying subsets

Key Facts - Economic Challenges Migrant Women Face

Financial cost of visas



Women earn less

so financially it is harder to secure their right to stay and to bring their loved ones under family visa rules.

High fees for visa application and renewal and a flat-rate minimum income requirement for family visas disadvantage women as well as Black and minority-ethnic (BME) people, disabled individuals and younger people. These groups face higher financial hurdles to secure their immigration status and to bring their loved ones under family visa rules.

Social and cultural barriers



Language barriers and unfamiliarity with the system makes it harder for migrant women to know their rights, seek support or navigate healthcare, bills or job hunting.

Many women face immense cultural pressure to remain within their marriage irrespective of abuse. In many minority communities, concepts like 'honour' and 'shame' serve to regulate and control women's sexuality and behaviours. Transgression is punished with ostracism, violence and even death. Many only seek help as a last resort once all attempts at reconciliation have failed.

A system that actively aims to create a 'hostile environment' for immigrants makes integration and engagement with authorities harder. Race intersects with immigration status and places immigrants but also BME British or settled citizens as targets of suspicion by public authorities, and harassment and hate crime by wider society.

Hostile Environment



In the 'hostile environment', migrants & BME British citizens become target of suspicion by public authorities & wider society

Reporting abuse and accessing support from authorities becomes harder

Work and pay

Many migrant women work in key but low-paid and low-skilled sectors*

Migrants are 16% of social care workforce.



*cleaning, domestic work, social care, hospitality

Caring responsibilities can be a big hurdle for many migrant women to access employment because some lack a social network that could help, and their access to subsidised formal childcare is limited.

Migrant men's employment rate (83%) is higher than UK-born men (79%). For women the inverse is true, with the employment rate of migrant women lower (66%) than that for UK-born women (72%). This is the result of the economic challenges described in this section combined with the different immigration routes that women and men take into the UK and the social and gender norms of different communities.

There are wide disparities in employment rate for women from different regions, with migrant women from the EU employed at a higher rate than UK-born women.

Of those that are employed, fewer migrant women overall work part-time than UK-born women but again there are wide variations by country of birth, ranging from 26% to 54% of total working women.

No recourse to public funds



Many migrant women depend on partners for income

Due to

- No Recourse to Public Funds
- Labour market barriers
- Restricted access to free childcare

Most migrants cannot access public funds under the 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF) condition. This includes most benefits, social housing and most childcare. NRPF leaves many women on family and dependant visas financially and economically dependent on their partners and facing destitution if the relationship breaks down.

Many women with NRPF facing financial hardship are employed and trying to support themselves through work but are in insecure low-paid jobs like cleaning and care.

Local authorities have a statutory duty to support destitute women with children as part of their safeguarding responsibilities (Section 17 of the Children Act 1989). However, migrant women and children are regularly denied this support and need to be supported to access this.

Restricted access to public services

Migrant women have limited or no access to public services

- No access to social housing or homelessness support
- Limited access to free childcare hours



The new healthcare surcharge takes the total costs of visa application and renewal to unsustainable levels to many immigrants. If undocumented, women are liable to pay for their healthcare (hospital) treatment, which includes pregnancy-related care and can amount to several thousands of pounds. New mothers are saddled with unpayable debts that have a severe impact on their health. These debts limit women's future immigration status.

Many migrant women can only access free childcare for 15 hours a week if they have three- or four-year-olds, posing a serious barrier to migrant women earning a living through paid work.

Migrant women with NRPF cannot access social housing. Housing support is only available for destitute children or women asylum seekers. Undocumented women face detention and removal if their landlord (who has a legal duty to check their immigration status) reports them to the Home Office.

Key Facts - VAWG and Immigration



Immigration status can be used by abusers as a tool of coercion and control

Threats to report to Home Office make it difficult for migrant women to leave abusive relationships

The Domestic Violence Rule (DV Rule) provides migrant women on family visas with a route to apply for indefinite leave to remain when their relationship breaks down due to domestic violence.

The Destitution Domestic Violence (DDV) Concession gives women on family visas three months of access to limited state benefits and temporary housing whilst their applications for indefinite leave under the DV Rule are considered. However, this does not extend to migrant women on most types of visas, who often remain trapped in abuse.

Most refuges can't accept women with NRPF as they depend on Housing Benefit to fund their services leaving women with NRPF limited housing options. Many migrant women are forced to return to their abuser, depend on friends and acquaintances or find other means of survival – options which put migrant women at risk of further harm.

Many women who seek asylum have suffered some form of VAWG in their country of origin, in their journey or in the UK but stigma, cultural barriers and disbelief by authorities often prevent them from disclosing it and seeking support.

Recommendations

- **Assess the impact immigration policies have on equality**
- **Review the ‘no recourse’ policy**
- **Extend Destitution Domestic Violence Concession to protect and support ALL migrant women**



Immigration system design

Conduct an equality impact assessment on new immigration system proposals

In order for the Government to fulfil its legal responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty the proposals for re-designing a post-Brexit immigration system need to be assessed for their impact on equality.

Review visa application and renewal fees

Successive increases in visa fees are leaving many unable to apply for or renew visas, leaving them at risk of becoming undocumented. This has a disproportionate impact on women as women earn less and have greater barriers to work due to caring responsibilities and childcare restrictions.

Review the minimum income requirement

The minimum income requirement to bring a close relative to the UK has a disproportionate impact on women (and also BME, disabled and younger people) and their ability to reunite with loved ones. The MIR should be reviewed.

Economic autonomy

Lift restrictions on work for asylum seekers

The UK should lift the restrictions on work for asylum seekers to benefit the economy and reduce asylum seekers' financial hardship and vulnerability to exploitation.

Extend 30-hour free childcare to all children

Free good-quality childcare is crucial to ensure women can earn a living and be financially autonomous in the context of ‘no recourse’ and ensure children from deprived backgrounds can have the best start in life.

Review ‘no recourse’ and abolish it for victims of VAWG

The ‘no recourse to public funds’ policy has a disproportionate impact on women and other protected characteristic groups like disabled and BME people. A comprehensive equality impact assessment should be carried out. ‘No recourse’ should be abolished for women and children subjected to gender-based violence.

Well-being & safety

Social housing available to those who need it

Social housing and homelessness support from local authorities should be available to everyone who need it regardless of immigration status.

Maternity care should be exempt from charging

Pregnancy and maternity care is essential healthcare with enormous repercussions for women’s and children’s health and well-being. Charging for it is discriminatory since only women are liable for payment.

Extend the DV Rule and DDV Concession to all migrant women victims of VAWG

Extend eligibility under the DV Rule and the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession to protect all abused women with insecure immigration status. Extend the time frame for the DDVC from three to six months.

Ensure victims can safely report a crime and are supported

The police should prioritise protection of migrant women victims of violence over immigration enforcement to ensure victims’ human rights are respected.

End the policy of dispersal for women seeking asylum subjected to VAWG

Asylum-seeking women should not be accommodated away from their social networks of support if it is safe to do so.

End detention of migrant women in immigration removal centres

Immigration detention is too often degrading, harmful, costly and pointless. A time limit of 28 days should be introduced and alternative ways to detention should be explored by the government in collaboration with the voluntary sector.

Adequately fund specialist BME and migrant women’s organisations

Specialist ‘for and by’ BME women’s services are best placed to support the most marginalised women and should be sustainably funded to be able to provide cultural- and language-appropriate services.

This is a summary of *Migrant Women and the Economy*
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Full report available:

wbg.org.uk

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