Nowhere to Turn 2022

Findings from the sixth year of the No Woman Turned Away project

# Report summary

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## Introduction

The No Woman Turned Away (NWTA) project is delivered by Women’s Aid and has been funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) since January 2016. The NWTA project employs four paid specialist practitioners, providing telephone and email support to women in England looking for a refuge space, and one dedicated research and evaluation officer. The quantitative data in this report was recorded by the NWTA specialist practitioners using On Track, the Women’s Aid case management and outcomes system.

## Full report

This full report is available at: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/no-woman-turned-away/>

**Published by:** Women’s Aid Federation of England, a registered charity in England & Wales (1054154) and a company limited by guarantee in England & Wales (3171880)

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## Help and support

For help and support, you can access Women's Aid's direct services, including our Live Chat, the Survivors' Forum and the Survivor's Handbook, at <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/>

## Dedication

This report is dedicated to the women whose experiences of seeking safety from domestic abuse are detailed here.

## Summary of findings

* **184 women** were supported by the NWTA project this year.
* **34.9%** of the women who were supported were Black and minoritised women, reflecting the structural inequalities that they face when escaping domestic abuse.
* While waiting for a refuge space:
	+ **60** women experienced further abuse from the perpetrator(s).
	+ **40** women sofa-surfed.
	+ **24** women experienced abuse from (an) additional perpetrator(s).
	+ **10** women were physically injured as a result of an attack by the perpetrator(s).
	+ **6** women slept rough.
* The NWTA specialist practitioners provided an average of **4 hours and 57 minutes** of support to each survivor. The main areas of specialist support included housing, signposting, immigration support, emotional support, children, finances, safety planning, and support with mental health.
* Women referred on the basis of NRPF were supported for **five days longer** on average than women who were known to have access to state benefits at the point of referral.
* Some outcomes…
	+ **25.5%** of women secured a place in a suitable refuge.
	+ **19.0%** found emergency accommodation.
	+ **83.1%** of the 124 survivors we were able ask reported feeling safe after having been supported by NWTA.
	+ The support does not end here**: 84 women** went on to be supported by a local VAWG organisation, and **74 women** went on to be supported by a non-VAWG organisation after finishing their work with NWTA.

# **Part 1** - Who did we support and what were survivors’ experiences during their search for a refuge?

## How many women did we support?

In all, 184 women began and finished their support between the 1st January 2021 and the 31st December 2021, with eight of these women being supported twice, and one woman on three occasions (i.e. 194 exits from the project overall). The analysis of quantitative data in this summary report relates to these 184 women.

## What barriers did women face?

Survivors face a multitude of barriers when it comes to accessing refuge space. The most marginalised women often experience intersecting structural barriers and inequalities. For example, poor agency responses, discrimination, and immigration policy context. The five most common reasons for women being referred to No Woman Turned Away for support in accessing a refuge were:

* Mental health support needs;
* No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF);
* One or more disabilities (including Mental Health disabilities);
* Substance use support needs – drugs and/ or alcohol
* Language support needs

Many women were referred for more than one support need. Women from Black and minoritised backgrounds made up 34.9% of survivors supported this year.[[1]](#footnote-2) Although this is a hugely diverse group of women, this high percentage possibly in part reflects the systemic racism that Black and minoritised women may face when it comes to accessing safety and support from domestic abuse. These can be structural inequalities that disproportionately impact Black and minoritised women, such as NRPF (or being presumed to be[[2]](#footnote-3)), as well as the lack of specialist provision for women with specific religious/ cultural requirements,[[3]](#footnote-4) or language support needs.

## Challenges in securing support

This year there were three women, where the NWTA practitioners searched Routes to Support[[4]](#footnote-5) over 30 times without finding an available space.[[5]](#footnote-6) This is the first time that we have recorded the NWTA practitioners not finding a space for a survivor on Routes to Support after searching 30 times. Out of 171 survivors where the number of times they had been refused refuge space had been recorded, there were a total of 238 rejections between these women. The most common reasons that refuges were unable to accept survivors were: unable to support needs around No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) (26 women); unable to support needs around mental health (17 women); and unable to support needs around substance misuse (14 women).

## Where did women stay while they waited for a refuge space?

Over a quarter (28.3%) of survivors spent time in emergency accommodation whilst waiting for a refuge space. Just over a fifth (21.7%) sofa-surfed, and 4.3% paid to stay in a hostel or B&B. A small but notable number of women (3.3%) spent time sleeping rough.

## Mixed-sex accommodation

As of August 2020 we began recording instances in which survivors were placed into mixed-sex accommodation, such as temporary hostels and B&B’s, whilst waiting for a refuge space. During this reporting period, 9.2% of survivors supported by NWTA project were placed in mixed-sex accommodation whilst waiting for a refuge space. Over 50 percent (52.9%; 9 out of 17) of these survivors were referred to the NWTA project on the basis of mental health support needs.

## What happened to women whilst they waited for a refuge space?

Almost a third (32.6%) of survivors supported by the NWTA project disclosed that they experienced further abuse whilst waiting for refuge. Alarmingly, we have seen an additional increase compared to last year, in the proportions of women experiencing further abuse from the perpetrator/ perpetrators whilst waiting for a refuge. Along with this, 18.5% of the survivors were afraid to go outside whilst waiting for a refuge; 14.1% called the police out to respond to an incident; 13.0% experienced abuse from an additional perpetrator; 7.6% spent time as an inpatient/overnight in hospital; and 5.4% were physically injured as a result of an assault by the perpetrator.

## What did we find out about survivors' encounters with statutory services?

Out of the 184 survivors, the NWTA practitioners recorded 125 system failures on behalf of the police, local authority housing team, or social services. These failures include police failing to notify the survivor of a change in the perpetrator’s bail conditions following arrest, the local authority inappropriately contacting the perpetrator for evidence, and Social Services failing to accept their duty to accommodate women and children.

## Social services and survivors with NRPF

Although survivors with NRPF made up just over a third (34.2%) of women supported, they were almost four times as likely to experience a failure on behalf of social services to meet their duty. With 14.3% (9 out of 63) of women with NRPF recorded as experiencing this, compared to 4.1% (5 out of 121) who did have recourse to public funds. During this same period, the NWTA caseworkers recorded two incidents in which survivors with NRPF were prevented from making a valid homelessness application by local authorities as a result of discrimination on the basis of their nationality.

# **Part 2** - The Impact of the No Woman Turned Away Project

## What kind of support did women receive?

Each of the 184 women received on average 4 hours and 57 minutes of support in total over the course of being supported by the NWTA practitioner. Support was provided on a daily or almost daily basis over an average time span of just under four weeks (27.5 days), with the length of support varying from one day to just under five months. Women referred on the basis of NRPF were supported for five days longer on average than for women who were understood to be entitled to benefits from the point of referral. This year we saw an increase in the amount of time caseworkers were spending supporting survivors around immigration, with 9.2% women supported with this. The main forms of support provided were Housing; Referral and Signposting; Immigration; Emotional Support; Children; Finances; Safety Planning; and Mental Health.

## How many women were accommodated in a refuge?

Of the women supported by the NWTA specialist practitioners, 25.5% were eventually accommodated in a suitable refuge space. There were inequalities in refuge access depending on the specific barrier that women faced. Women with four or more children (5.3%), or an older male child (5.9%), or women with one or more disability (10.5%), or a mental health support need (20.8%) were the least likely to find suitable refuge accommodation.

# Conclusion and recommendations

## Conclusion

This report highlights how often the most marginalised survivors continue to face a range of barriers to accessing safety. This includes the real possibility of homelessness, as well as further abuse from the perpetrator, or even from an additional perpetrator. These findings demonstrate the vital ongoing need for the NWTA project, which offers survivors the hope of securing safe accommodation away from abuse in a context of insufficient refuge vacancies to meet needs and inequalities in domestic abuse service provision.

Some specific findings from this year will continue to be monitored by us to better understand women’s experiences of seeking a refuge space. These include the increase in the number of times the NWTA practitioners are finding no suitable refuge spaces, as well as the increase in the proportion of survivors subjected to further abuse whilst waiting. The lack of access to immigration support in the domestic abuse sector is not sustainable and is resulting in many survivors being led to believe that they cannot access support. Many services do not have the resources to adequately assist survivors in accessing immigration advice, resulting in survivors being put at risk and the NWTA project spending more time on these cases to reach a positive outcome.

## Recommendations

### Urgent recommendations

* National and local Government to ensure existing refuge spaces are sufficiently funded so that support can be provided to survivors facing additional barriers, such as mental health needs, substance misuse, and structural inequalities. Also to provide funding to create extra spaces when needed to deliver vital additional refuge spaces that can accommodate these survivors.
* National and local Government to ensure funding is available to provide emergency immigration advice to survivors of domestic abuse to ensure survivors have access to the support and information that they are entitled to.
* Local authorities to commission single sex emergency accommodation, in adherence to the law under the Equality Act 2010, in recognition of the number of survivors accessing this form of accommodation and to ensure their safety and support needs are being met.
* Central Government to empower the National Expert Steering Group (NESG) to develop robust accountability mechanisms for local authorities failing to meet their duties under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. This should be done through improved assessment and gathering of quantitative and qualitative data on the delivery of the duty, which should be presented to the National Expert Steering Group. This could also include funding specialist services to contribute to this data - gathering exercise, to ensure a frontline perspective on the funding landscape.
* Domestic abuse training must be rolled out across local and housing authorities – and it is imperative this is informed and delivered by specialist organisations, including those led ‘by and for’ Black and minoritised women - to ensure that women and children are not further traumatised when seeking safe accommodation.

### Longer-term recommendations

#### Recommendations for national government

* Training on immigration rights across statutory agencies and continuous monitoring to ensure compliance.
* Implement a national needs assessment to underpin the duty on local authorities to commission support in safe accommodation, in order for commissioning to reflect best practice. This would include support available across boundaries, and to make refuge services accessible to all women and children who need them.

#### Recommendations for local government

* Adhere to the Homelessness Code of Guidance (MOJ, 2018) and refrain from putting placing women fleeing domestic abuse in mixed-sex emergency accommodation, or in other spaces which may be inappropriate.
* Ensure changes delivered to ‘priority need’ in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 are accompanied by robust training from specialist domestic abuse services to housing officers, with quality assurance and key points of accountability built in.

#### Recommendations for commissioners

* Prioritise the needs of marginalised groups, including Deaf and disabled women, and Black and minoritised survivors, in commissioning decisions in order to meet the needs of all survivors.
* Building on national funding for ‘by and for’ services in 2021-22, provide ring-fenced funding for these specialist services and, as set out in the statutory guidance, to support implementation of the duty on local authorities to commission support in safe accommodation, where possible, conducted on a multi-year basis.
* Develop proportionate approaches to contract monitoring and quality assurance, with reference to and use of national outcomes data collection and quality standards developed by Women’s Aid, and other specialist VAWG sector organisations, as recommended by the Home Office’s VAWG Commissioning Toolkit.
1. This is based on 169 of the 184 survivors where ethnicity had been recorded. 59 out of 169 survivors were recorded as being from a Black and minoritised background. See Appendix 1 for a full list of survivors’ ethnic backgrounds. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Two women referred on the basis of challenges related to them having NRPF were subsequently found by the NWTA caseworkers to actually be entitled to claim benefits. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. For example, refuges set up to accommodate women to practice their faith or cook and access specific food i.e. halal meat. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Routes to Support is the UK violence against women and girls directory of services and refuge vacancies, run in partnership by Scottish Women’s Aid, Welsh Women’s Aid, Women’s Aid Federation of England and Women’s Aid Federation of Northern Ireland. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. As we do not generally record the exact number in cases where this happened over 30 times, this means that we have not been able to calculate the average number of times that the NWTA practitioners found no places available per survivor. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)