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EMBARGOED UNTIL 12/02/2024

Harmful Changes to Support Provisions for Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse

Southall Black Sisters (SBS) are gravely concerned about the changes to the Migrant Victims Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) – formerly called the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) – currently due on 12 Feb 2024.

The MVDAC will grant partners of worker and student visa holders with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) the right to receive benefits and Council housing under homelessness legislation, and grant them limited leave in the UK for a period of three months.

The MVDAC extends the current provisions available to those on spousal/partner visas. However, unlike the spousal/partner group, who are currently entitled, this new cohort will not be eligible for settlement under the Domestic Violence Indefinite Leave to Remain (DVILR).

SBS do not support this so-called ‘extension’, as it creates a cliff edge at the end of three months for those who are unable to pursue any settlement route. They would normally be expected to leave the country. This would prevent many victims from coming forward for fear of deportation, and thus render the extension ineffective.

There is already a dearth of awareness about the DDVC, and we are extremely concerned that creating a separate route which is a watered-down version of the DDVC-DVILR model will create confusion for victim-survivors and professionals, putting victim-survivors at risk of not making informed decisions about their rights. This risk is further exacerbated by the near total annihilation of legal aid and lack of specialist services caused by underfunding and austerity.

Selma Taha, Executive Director of SBS, says:

“Migrant victim-survivors need both status and support in the form of public funds to be safe. We have seen this as a specialist organisation working on the frontline supporting victim-survivors over the last 40 plus years. The MVDAC is not just confusing, but has the potential of putting vulnerable victim-survivors at the risk of further harm, and we do not see this policy helping most of our service users. We urge the government to instead extend the DDVC-DVILR model to all victim-survivors regardless of visa status.”

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Notes

1. Victim-survivors of domestic abuse with NRPF are not eligible to claim welfare and housing benefits, and Council homelessness provision. They are also often turned away from refuges as they cannot pay their rent and have to choose between staying with the perpetrator or being homeless and/or destitute. Since 1992, SBS have been leading a campaign to introduce more support for migrant victim-survivors. This has resulted in the introduction of the DDVC and the DVILR, which give victim-survivors access to public funds for 3 months while they apply to regularise their status in the country under the DVILR. However, these measures are available only to certain visa types, leaving unprotected victim-survivors who are undocumented or on other visa types.
2. SBS are currently running a Home Office funded UK wide partnership pilot, Support for Migrant Victims, which formed the basis of the Home Office’s limited extension of the DDVC. However, this ignores the evidence of two evaluations of the pilot which show the



need to extend the DDVC-DVILR model to all victim-survivors. See <https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/news/support-for-migrant-victims-fund-evaluation/>.

3. The SBS position is supported by the Changemakers Project, which includes Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS), Safety4Sisters and Ubuntu Women Shelter. It is also supported by Rights of Women.