

No woman
should be
**missed
out**

What needs to be done

The Violence Against Women strategy promises a “cohesive and comprehensive” response across government. This will not be met unless women seeking asylum are included and guaranteed:

- access to a fair and gender-sensitive asylum system which results in decisions that are right first time
- Border Agency officials who demonstrate an understanding of gender-based persecution
- equivalent levels of sensitivity and expertise already expected of the police and Crown Prosecution Service when dealing with women affected by sexual violence
- a political commitment that assures them the same rights as other women

www.asylumaid.org.uk/charter

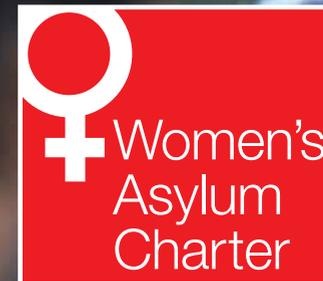
*“I’m all on
my own and
I’m fighting
to stay at a
place that I
think is safe
and nobody
seemed to
believe me”*

‘Esther’

When a woman’s human rights are violated overseas, the UK government promises to help.

But when the same woman seeks asylum here, these promises count for nothing.

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The government has promised to tackle violence against women and girls in the UK and overseas. They are about to report on their progress.

Women seeking asylum don't need special treatment – just the same rights as other women.

No woman should be missed out

The UK government has shown a welcome commitment to tackling violence against women both at home and abroad. Its Violence Against Women and Girls strategy links support for women living in the UK with the help it provides to women at risk abroad. There is a long-term promise to tackle the causes and consequences of such violence.

Yet some women are still missed out. Around 7,000 women claim asylum in the UK every year – women who we know are among the most vulnerable in the UK. Not only have the majority of these women experienced sexual violence before they reach the UK, but the evidence is clear that asylum-seeking women face an increased risk of sexual exploitation and abuse once here. Despite this, plans to protect their safety are almost entirely missing from the Violence Against Women strategy.

The Violence Against Women strategy contains 100 'actions' to help women resident here and women facing abuse outside the UK. But only one commits the UK Border Agency to help women seeking asylum.

These are women who have fled human rights abuses abroad, and who are vulnerable to further abuse in the UK. Many will have received limited legal advice or support. Some of these women have been raped, some locked up in immigration centres, some cast out onto the street.



Cover photograph: Howard Davies
The women shown in the photograph are refugees, but do not necessarily represent the stories told

The facts

One third of people who claim asylum in the UK in their own right are women. But almost three-quarters are refused asylum by the UK Border Agency, and research has shown that the majority of women are refused because they are simply disbelieved.

The failure of the Border Agency to reach fair, sustainable decisions has a disproportionate affect on women, many of whom are left isolated and vulnerable by an unfair asylum system. Research by Asylum Aid and others has shown the serious impact this has on the mental and physical health of women seeking asylum.

Many cases are overturned on appeal by independent judges. Unnecessary appeal hearings are an overwhelming waste of public money, at exactly the time the government is trying to find savings. It is in everyone's interests for the government to develop a gender-sensitive asylum system, committed to getting decisions for women right first time.

Oxfam and Women for Refugee Women have recorded the harrowing consequences for women asylum seekers who are left destitute, and exposed to the grave risk of sexual violence and exploitation. Many were left homeless. Many found themselves forced to exchange sex for a roof over their heads.

The government has pledged to address violence against women at home and abroad. There is a bitter irony in the fact that its own asylum policies place at risk those women who have fled such violence overseas to find safety in the UK.

“she doesn't have anywhere to sleep, she doesn't have food, she doesn't have rights, even if someone abused her, she couldn't tell anyone, because if she told the police they would take her to a detention centre”

Oxfam on the risks facing a female asylum seeker (2011)