



FAO: UK Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights

29th July 2025

Dear Lord Alton of Liverpool,

I write further to the expert evidence I provided to the Joint Committee on Human Rights regarding the Universal Periodic Review on Wednesday 25th June 2025.

During the session, I raised the issue of protecting migrant women from domestic abuse and the positive action that could be taken by both the Committee and the government in terms of withdrawing the reservation lodged against Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention. I note that you asked me to follow up on this in writing.

Below is a summary of my work in this area, with a focus on actions the Committee could take. I have also attached my article, *Improving Recommendations from the UN's Universal Periodic Review: A Case Study on Domestic Abuse in the UK*, published in the Pace International Law Review in 2023. The article offers guidance on strengthening UPR recommendations and includes specific findings on domestic abuse in the UK, particularly in relation to vulnerable groups such as migrant women.

Protecting women and girls from domestic abuse must remain a central priority of the UK's human rights commitments. On this point, and based on my work in the area, I wish to highlight the persistent and serious concerns regarding migrant women in the UK and their experience of domestic abuse. These concerns have been raised consistently by NGOs, academics, practitioners, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), and were previously acknowledged by the Joint Committee on Human Rights during scrutiny of the Domestic Abuse Bill, particularly in relation to the UK's obligations under the Istanbul Convention. Of specific relevance is the reservation the UK lodged against Article 59 of the Convention, which relates to support for victims regardless of their immigration status.

While the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) was a major step forward in addressing violence against women and holding perpetrators to account, it notably failed to address the specific vulnerabilities of migrant women. Migrant women often face what has been described as "immigration abuse," where their insecure immigration status (frequently tied to a spousal visa) prevents them from leaving abusive partners. The fear of deportation, losing their children, financial dependence, language barriers, and lack of secure housing create unique and compounding obstacles that leave migrant women especially exposed to ongoing harm.

These shortcomings were identified in the UK's Fourth Cycle Universal Periodic Review in 2022. Iceland recommended revising the Domestic Abuse Act to ensure protection and support for migrant women; the UK government partially supported this, asserting that the Act already provides "strong measures," a position that is not supported by the evidence. Mexico made a similar recommendation, calling for protection "regardless of immigration status," while Spain urged the UK to lift its reservation to Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention.



The issue was further underscored in the EHRC's *Baseline Evaluation of the UK's Implementation of the Istanbul Convention* (February 2024), which stated that "reservations restrict protections for women and girls and undermine the UK government's ability to comprehensively address violence against women and girls." It added that the Article 59 reservation means that victims whose residence status depends on a partner "do not enjoy fully equal protection in the UK, undermining the principle of non-discrimination in Article 4 [of the Istanbul Convention]."

Given this continued gap in protection and the increasing complexity of the migration and asylum landscape, there is a real risk that the rights and safety of migrant women experiencing domestic abuse will be overlooked. I therefore recommend that the Joint Committee on Human Rights reintroduce this issue to its agenda and resume scrutiny of the UK's approach to migrant women under the Istanbul Convention. This includes pressing for the removal of the Article 59 reservation and ensuring domestic law and policy fully reflect the principle that protection from abuse must apply equally to all women, irrespective of immigration status.

I would be happy to provide further assistance on this matter should it be of benefit to the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Alice Storey, PhD, LLM, PG Dip (Legal Practice), LLB (Hons)

Associate Professor of Human Rights

Associate Director Centre for Human Rights

Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership (AHRC) Site Director

Birmingham City University, School of Law and Social Sciences, The Curzon Building, 4

Cardigan Street, Birmingham, B4 7BD, United Kingdom

Email: alice.storey@bcu.ac.uk