

Questionnaire

UK COVID-19 Inquiry: Module 2 - Rule 9 Request to Southall Black Sisters

Reference: M2/R9R/SBS/TJS

Please provide the following information:

1. A brief overview of the history, legal status and aims of the organisation or body. Please explain whether the work of the organisation or body is UK wide, or is instead confined to England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland only.

- i. Southall Black Sisters (“SBS”) is a not-for-profit organisation which was established in 1979 to meet the needs of black and ethnic minority women. For more than four decades SBS have been at the forefront of challenging domestic and gender-related violence locally and nationally and have campaigned for the provision of proper and accountable support services to enable women and their children to escape violent relationships.¹ Whilst SBS’s focus is on the needs of black and minority women, it also assists any woman who needs emergency help, many of whom are from working-class backgrounds.
- ii. SBS aims to empower black and ethnic women and girls to escape gender based violence and assert their rights to equality, justice and freedom.
- iii. The legal status of SBS is a limited company registered by guarantee.
- iv. The work of SBS is UK wide in the form of a national helpline, strategic cases, policy and research work and the Home Office pilot project it is helping to deliver ‘Support for Migrant Victims Scheme’. However, the majority of its services are delivered locally in London, particularly in west London.

2. A brief description of the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents.

- i. SBS supports primarily black and ethnic minority women, however, they will support any women in need of emergency help.
- ii. They support women facing Domestic Abuse, and other forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (“VAWG”). This includes migrant women, women who have immigration and No Recourse to Public Funds problems, women experiencing homelessness and those who suffer forced marriage and honour-based violence. They campaign to end violence against women in transnational spaces.² Flowing from this, the women they support are commonly experiencing both physical and mental health issues.

¹ <https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/about/>

² <https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/campaigns/violence-against-women-in-transnational-spaces/>

- iii. SBS's support for these women is extended to their children and family, to relieve them all from the hardship they face at the hands of the perpetrator.
- iv. In the Inquiry, SBS seeks to represent the viewpoints of all of the above.

3. A brief overview of the work of the organisation or body in supporting or representing the relevant group(s) between January 2020 and Spring 2022 as it relates to the response to Covid-19 of (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive.

- i. SBS was the leading provider of front-line and advocacy support to black and ethnic minority women facing gender-based violence in the UK between January 2020 to Spring 2022, and throughout the pandemic.
- ii. They were one of the key national organisations who coordinated an emergency non-governmental response to violence against women, which emerged as an urgent social issue at the beginning of the pandemic. This included the following:

a. Increased demand for existing services

In the period January 2020 to Spring 2022 SBS rapidly adapted and expanded its existing service to deal with the unprecedented rise in Domestic Abuse as a result of the pandemic and particularly lockdowns.³ This centred on advice and casework originating from the organisation's national telephone advice line. From one-off enquiries, to undertaking mid to long-term casework, SBS continued to provide frontline advice services to thousands – many of whom had overlapping support needs.

In April 2020, they saw a 62% rise in referrals to their service from a single borough (compared to the same period in the previous year) as well as a 17% increase in new visitors to their website (compared to the same period in 2019). Enquires increased by 46% in April 2020 – March 2021 when compared to the same period the year before, while cases rose by 40%.⁴

The greatest rise in enquiries was in April-June 2020, which was 138%.⁵

SBS's existing crisis fund to support women with No Recourse to Public Funds ("NRPF") fleeing gender-based violence was expanded - the increase in hardship during the pandemic was most acute amongst migrant women with NRPF. Due to the lockdown, women's refuges were over-subscribed and social services were harder to access. The Home Office was also taking longer to make decisions on immigration and Destitution Domestic

³ <https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/news/covid-19-sbs-office-closed/>

⁴ See Point 4(i)(a)

⁵ This is an internal stat, and has not yet been published by SBS.

Violence Concession applications which would enable women on spousal visas facing domestic abuse to obtain benefits for a period of three months while they regularised their status. Therefore, more migrant women with NRPF were homeless or trapped in abusive relationships for longer. SBS's crisis fund gave these women monies to access food, transport, short-term alternative accommodation, toiletries and sometimes medication. This money also provided for their children.

Similar emergency provision was given by SBS to vulnerable families across its networks – to migrant and non-migrant vulnerable women and their families during the pandemic. This included food parcels and mobile phones with data packages.

It is important to note that to meet this increased demand on existing services, SBS staff had to work longer hours under greater stress. New staff were generally only recruited in the latter half of 2020 when much needed emergency funding was confirmed or made available. Furthermore, due to the enforced focus by funders and charities on raising funds for the crisis, SBS was not able to plan or engage in normal fund-raising activities for the longer-term, which threatened recovery and future provision of services.

b. Additional services offered during the pandemic

Lockdowns resulted not only in an increase in Domestic Abuse, but in an increase of isolation, depression and deteriorating mental health amongst survivors. Therefore, in addition to an increase in the frontline provision of services offered by SBS, they introduced remote counselling and support group services.

The issue of a chronic shortage of safe accommodation for women fleeing domestic violence was spotlighted in this period. In May 2020, after SBS saw a 49% rise in calls to their London Advice Line, SBS along with Solace Women's Aid, launched the Covid-19 Crisis Project⁶. This Crisis Project, funded by the Mayor of London, offered safe emergency accommodation with specialist support to women and children fleeing domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG across London during the pandemic. The project initially provided a further 70 emergency refuge bedspaces across London up to November 2020 and 30 bed spaces from November 2020 to September 2021. During their time at the project, SBS offered women therapeutic support, assistance from specialist refuge workers and resettlement support. This project allowed much needed increased capacity at a time where refuges were not seeing women move on and therefore new spaces becoming available and a lack of responses from some statutory agencies. The project provided accommodation and wrap around support to 205 women from May 2020 to September 2021 including 73 with NRPF.

⁶ <https://www.voice-online.co.uk/news/community/2020/05/13/southall-black-sisters-and-solace-launch-covid-19-crisis-project-to-create-urgently-needed-safe-housing/>

SBS also produced information packs and held information sessions on testing and vaccinations tailored to the women they support.⁷

c. A legal challenge and national advocacy

In April 2020, in the absence of any coordinated response from the government during the pandemic to address the increased abuse against women and Covid-19, SBS took steps to initiate a legal challenge against the government. They argued that the government was failing to take sufficient steps to protect vulnerable women and children, contrary to its equality and human rights obligations. In response, on 2 May 2020, the government announced additional funding (£76 million) for domestic abuse charities, although women with NRPF were excluded from the funding and government made no specific commitment to specialist services for black and ethnic minority women who were disproportionately impacted.⁸

SBS advocated for the women it supported on a national level. They contributed written evidence to parliamentary inquiries on the government's preparedness for Covid-19 and the unequal impact of Covid-19 on people with protected characteristics, as well as the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights inspection of Covid-19 and violence against women.⁹

d. Campaigning

From 25th November to 10th December 2020, SBS launched a campaign to highlight the experiences of survivors of domestic abuse during national lockdowns. Called 'My Life Under Lockdown', a number of video diaries were published from survivors of abuse to highlight the personal stories and difficulties these women faced in this period.¹⁰

4. A list of any articles or reports the organisation or body has published or contributed to, and/or evidence it has given (for example to Parliamentary Select Committees) regarding the impact on the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents of the response to Covid-19 by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive. Please include links to those documents where possible.

- i. During the pandemic, SBS were active in contributing to articles, publications and reports, listed here:
 - a. [SBS submission to United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#)

⁷ <https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/news/covid-19-vaccination-and-testing-information-pack/>

⁸ [Gov Press release Emergency funding to support most vulnerable in society during pandemic](#)

⁹ See Point 4(i)(a)

¹⁰ See Point 4(i)(d)

- b. [SBS written evidence to parliamentary inquiries on the government's preparedness for Covid-19 and the unequal impact of Covid-19 on people with protected characteristics](#)
- c. [Letter, on behalf of SBS and Solace Women's Aid regarding Covid-19 – Measures Urgently Required to Protect and Support Domestic Abuse Survivors, dated 31st March 2020](#)
- d. [My Life Under Lockdown SBS campaign](#)
- e. [PRESS RELEASE: SBS and Women's Charities Urge Government to Help Women and Children Escape Abuse](#)
- f. [Domestic violence funding legal challenged launched, the New Statesman article](#)
- g. [Letter to \(then\) Prime Minister Boris Johnson and \(then\) Home Secretary Priti Patel to demand a public inquiry into the handling of the Covid-19 crisis, co-signed by SBS](#)
- h. [Southall Black Sisters & Solace launch COVID-19 Crisis Project to Create Urgently Needed Safe Housing for Women Fleeing Domestic Abuse, article dated 12 May 2020](#)
- i. [PRESS RELEASE: SBS and Women's Charities Urge Government to Help Women and Children Escape Abuse, dated 11 April 2020](#)
- j. [Submission to Home Affairs Select Committee \(Home Office preparedness for Covid-19 \(Coronavirus\): domestic abuse and risks of harm within the home](#)
- k. [BME domestic abuse charity sees highest volume of calls for help in 40-year history during lockdown, Evening Standard article](#)
- l. [Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme \(VKPP\) Domestic Homicides and Suspected Victim Suicides During the Covid-19 Pandemic 2020-2021 report, contributed to by SBS¹¹](#)
- m. ['I have five minutes and I need help': Life on the domestic abuse frontline during coronavirus, Telegraph article](#)

5. The view of the organisation or body as to whether the group(s) it supports or represents was adequately considered when decisions about the response to Covid-19 were made by (a) the UK

¹¹ The National Police Chiefs' Council/College of Policing conducted this research into domestic homicides and suspected suicides during the pandemic. SBS were consulted on this work as part of the 'stakeholder group'. It includes some evidence re disparities for black and minoritised victims, e.g. whilst the majority of victims were White, the proportion of BAME victims since Covid appears to be higher than the previous 15-year domestic homicides average, the 2019/20 domestic homicides data, and the general population. Furthermore, victims from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups were less likely to be previously known to police and other agencies than those from White ethnicities.

Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive. Please also explain the reasons for the view expressed by the organisation or body in this respect.

- i. The broad position of SBS is that the groups they support were not adequately considered when the UK Government was deciding how to contain the spread of coronavirus. This is why SBS applied to and were granted Core Participant status in Module 2 of the Covid Inquiry, which seeks to examine this issue.
- ii. SBS are hopeful that disclosure of materials in Module 2 will shed light on whether the women they support were considered in government decision making. Prior to this, SBS's view that those groups they support were not considered, or adequately considered, stems from the following. Please note, groups SBS support include all those persons detailed at point 2 – including migrant women, women with NRPF, black and ethnic minority women, those women who are experiencing homelessness and their children.

a) A lack of consultation with SBS (and other women's organisations) at the beginning of the pandemic, when determining measures to contain the virus.

In early 2020 when the Government was considering how to contain the virus, they did not contact SBS, experts in their field, to seek their view on proposed non-pharmaceutical interventions such as lockdowns. Indeed, SBS are not aware of the Government contacting or consulting with any organisations who support women suffering Domestic Abuse at this time. This resulted in a lack of planning, preparation and funding from Government to deal with the foreseeable consequences of locking-down women in homes with their perpetrators. Such consequences were already being documented in countries who locked down prior to the UK - China saw a threefold increase in domestic violence cases during the Covid-19 outbreak – and reported in the domestic media.¹² Yet, the Government seemingly ignored international experience as well as domestic expertise when decision making.

Crucially, this lack of consultation with SBS, or with any other similar experts to the best of SBS's knowledge, meant public messaging instructing the nation to lockdown failed to have any nuance or information for those women who were suddenly in increased danger. Were these women allowed to leave the home if they were in danger? Were public authorities such as police aware of these issues when they were implementing lockdowns in communities? If experts in the field had been consulted at the material time, issues could have been pre-empted and mitigated.

b) The slow reaction of the Government to mitigate the rise of Domestic Abuse and other issues faced by groups supported by SBS.

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/28/lockdowns-world-rise-domestic-violence>

The UK went into lockdown on 23 March 2020. On 26 March 2020, The Guardian ran with the headline *Warning over rise in UK domestic abuse cases linked to coronavirus*¹³. Yet, the government failed to provide emergency funding to SBS and others in the sector until 2nd May 2020, following the threat of a legal challenge by SBS and Solace Women's Aid.¹⁴ The government were *forced* to act, as opposed to considering and acting on the needs of survivors in conjunction with decisions to contain the virus.

SBS argues that the government did not consider in their decision-making the acute needs of migrant women with NRPF throughout the period in question. For example, the Home Office could have created an expedited service for immigration and extended the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession ("DDVC") application to allow women on spousal visas facing domestic abuse to obtain benefits for a period of three months while they regularised their status. Taking this action would have helped survivors experiencing domestic abuse, in forced marriages trapped in the UK or overseas and those suffering honour-based abuse to escape, with the knowledge that they would have access to basic welfare provisions. SBS say if the DDVC had been extended to all migrant victims of domestic abuse during the pandemic, the numbers suffering destitution, domestic abuse and trauma would have been reduced.

Yet, the government took no action to review and modify the DDVC.

- iii. The above suggests a lack of consideration of women, and in particular migrant women, to such an extent that it is questionable if Public Sector Equality Duties were being fulfilled.

6. Whether the organisation or body raised any concerns about the consideration being given to the group(s) which it supports or represents with (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive, when the Government(s) and/or Executive were making decisions about their response to Covid-19. Please provide a list of any such correspondence or meetings with the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and/or the Northern Ireland Executive, including the dates on which the body or organisation wrote or such meetings were held, to whom the correspondence was addressed or with whom the meeting was held, and any response received from the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and/or Northern Ireland Executive addressing such concerns.

i. SBS raised concerns directly to the UK Government in writing as follows:

a) Letter regarding Covid-19 – Measures Urgently Required to Protect and Support Domestic Abuse Survivors, dated 31st March 2020

¹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/26/warning-over-rise-in-uk-domestic-abuse-cases-linked-to-coronavirus>

¹⁴ See Pt 4(i)(c)

Issued to (then) Robert Jenrick Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, on behalf of Solace Women's Aid and signed by 58 other groups and individuals including SBS.

b) Open letter regarding Covid-19 pandemic and preventing and responding to an increase in violence against women and girls, dated 3rd April 2020¹⁵

Issued to (then) Prime Minister Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, cc'ing Chancellor of the Exchequer, Home Secretary, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Secretary of State for Justice, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Secretary of State for Education, Minister for the Cabinet Office.

Issued by 21 organisations tackling VAWG, including SBS.

Response received in October 2020 from Home Office Minister.

c) Pre-Action letter to Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, 27th April 2020 and follow up pre-action letter to the same, dated 1st May 2020

Sent to Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, by the Public Interest Law Centre on behalf of SBS and Solace Women's Aid.

Response received on 12 May 2020

d) Open letter demanding a public inquiry into the handling of the Covid-19 crisis, dated 9th July 2020¹⁶

Issued to then Prime Minister Boris Johnson and then Secretary of State Priti Patel.

ii. SBS also raised concerns in meetings. Broadly speaking, there were many meetings in which the impact of Covid 19, recommendations and solutions for support for survivors were discussed from the beginning of the first lockdown. These either involving talking directly to Government officials in working groups or giving evidence to government inquiries, and others such as the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Victim's Commissioner, the VAWG sector (and so indirectly relating to central Government) and Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime ('MOPAC'). Discussions included calling for more national government action to support survivors, particularly migrant survivors, and discussion and development of the hotel project¹⁷ with MOPAC and Solace Women's Aid. SBS also raised the issue of allowing greater flexibility of use of grants to support victims remotely with local government.

It's important to note that the focus of the meetings which SBS attended during the pandemic were not always about the impact of the pandemic, rather the impact of abuse. However, the impact of the pandemic was naturally raised as part of these discussions, but not necessarily reflected in agendas or minutes.

¹⁵ See open letter [here](#)

¹⁶ See point 4(i)(e)

¹⁷ The hotel project involved hotels opening up rooms to those fleeing abuse, including domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Examples of the many meetings SBS attended during the pandemic:

- a) Meetings with MOPAC, on 16th and 20th April 2020
- b) Meeting with the Shadow Justice Minister, on 7th May 2020
- c) Evidence given in meeting with the Domestic Abuse Bill Committee, on 4th June 2020
- d) Evidence to the All-Party Parliamentary Group ('APPG') on domestic abuse on 11th June 2020
- e) Roundtable discussion with Equality And Human Rights Commission EHRC on 22nd June 2020
- f) Advisory group with the Victims Commissioner on 13th July 2020, 2nd December 2020, 12th April 2021 and 4th July 2021
- g) Meeting with Domestic Abuse Commissioner Office on 27th July 2020, 21st April 2021, 25th May 2021, 26th January 2022
- h) Meetings with Ministry of Justice on 28th Aug 2020 and 10th September 2020
- i) Presentation to the House of Lords on migrant women on 22nd September 2020
- j) Presentation to the UN Human Rights Council on 28th October 2020
- k) Roundtable with NR – Safeguarding Minister on 21st October 2020
- l) Meeting with the Mayor of North East London on 27th November 2020
- m) Meeting with Home Office regarding forced marriage on 28th January 2021
- n) Meeting with Home Office regarding firewalls on 14th May 2021, 12th August 2021, 28th September 2021, 31st October 2021 and 4th November 2021
- o) Meeting with Home Office on the role of migrant commissioner on 15th May 2021
- p) Evidence given in a meeting with the APPG on domestic abuse on 24th May 2021
- q) Home Office VAWG stakeholder group on 25th July 2021, 14th October 2021, 25 January 2022
- r) Round table discussion with Victim's Commissioner on family law on 20th July 2021
- s) Roundtable discussion with Domestic Abuse Commissioner on family law on 3rd Sept 2021

t) Roundtable discussion with the Greater London Authority (Police and Crimes Committee) on 3rd Dec 2021

u) meeting regarding migration with the APPG on 30th March 2022

ii.SBS wish to add that there was an inconsistency with regional vs. national consultation, which they say contributed to a lack of consistent messaging on the issue throughout the UK

7. A brief summary of the views of the organisation or body as to any lessons, if any, that can be learned from any consideration which was given to the group(s) that the organisation or body supports or represents by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive when they were making decisions about their response to Covid-19.

i. It is the position of SBS that there are a number of lessons the UK Government should learn in relation to the consideration given to the women whom SBS represent, when making decisions about their response to Covid-19.

ii. The below is a summary of SBS's views at this stage, however, we expect these to develop during the course of their involvement in Module 2. We would welcome the opportunity to submit a Witness Statement from SBS to the Inquiry to develop the observations below.

a) Consultation with expert organisations from the beginning of the pandemic.

Expert organisations like SBS, who work on the frontline, must be involved in the decision-making process if those decisions are likely to impact those they support. Indeed this is normal practice, with SBS regularly consulted by government bodies.¹⁸ The practice of Government plans being scrutinised by expert organisations like SBS is of vital importance and should naturally extended to consultation around pandemic issues. This would reduce the likelihood of omissions in decision-making from government, and would help government mitigate any harmful impacts of, for example, non-pharmaceutical interventions.

This co-working on a pandemic response would enable forward-thinking on protection and provision for those SBS support. This would benefit central government decision-making, but also the decisions of public bodies in general.

As those SBS supports have overlapping-issues, consultation with organisations supporting Domestic Abuse survivors should come hand-in-hand with consulting other experts in the fields of migrant rights, black and ethnic minority rights and housing, to name but a few.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, it would have been good practice to consult SBS and similar experts on national plans for a pandemic. Now the Government has the opportunity to consult

¹⁸ SBS are normally consulted by government bodies on issues that would impact on BME and migrant women's experiences – these include policies such as their domestic abuse and migrant victims policies, their domestic abuse and violence against women and girls policies and strategies.

with SBS to learn lessons for the handling of any future pandemic – we hope this opportunity will be used to its fullest.

ii. Monitoring, working with and learning from the international community during a pandemic.

There were a number of countries experiencing wide-spread virus transmission prior to the UK. China, Germany and Italy to name but a few. There was a documented rise of domestic abuse in these countries¹⁹, meaning a rise in the UK was predictable. Yet, there appeared to be little or no reflection by government on these developments in other countries. Nor does there appear to have been any communication with those countries to determine if they could work together to solve this shared issue.

Strong ties and communication with the international community should have been present throughout government decision-making in the pandemic. This would have benefitted those who SBS support e.g. what could the UK learn from countries who successfully contained the spread of the virus without having to lockdown for long periods? What were other countries implementing to tackle increased levels of Domestic Abuse during lockdowns?

It is SBS's view that, should there be a future pandemic, analysis and greater communication with the international community would benefit government decision-making, and crucially, the women and girls they support.

iii. Ensuring decision-making is lawful e.g. Public Sector Equality Duties (“PSED”)

SBS understands that the Government had to make many significant decisions in a short period of time, certainly at the beginning of the pandemic. This does not however reduce the obligation to adhere to PSED and the Equality Act 2010. We anticipate that Module 2 will reveal these were not adhered to at all times. If that is the case, and in order to ensure that this is not repeated in the event of a future pandemic, SBS's position is that an expert in PSED should be brought on-board to scrutinise decision-making from Cabinet Office during crucial periods of the pandemic.

d) Allocation of extra resources to frontline organisations, public services and local authorities in-line with government decision making.

At the beginning of the pandemic, SBS's existing staff had to absorb the substantive extra workload which came with the increase in Domestic Abuse – many suffered burnout as a result. As detailed above at point 3(viii), they were only able to hire the much-needed extra staff in the latter half of 2020, when emergency funding became available. The need for extra resources arose from the pandemic, but also from government decision-making (in that government had failed to anticipate and plan for the rise in domestic abuse). Yet, the government did not provide extra resources and

¹⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/28/lockdowns-world-rise-domestic-violence>

funding to organisations like SBS at a time when they were relied on to continue providing vital services. In the future, funds should be made available to frontline organisations at the beginning of a pandemic, to allow them to quickly expand services in a crisis.

SBS deal with local authorities and public services on a daily basis through their casework. It is as a result of this experience that they say the question of sufficient funding must be extended to these bodies, if survivors are to be properly considered. The pandemic arrived after a long period of austerity in which public services and local authorities were starved of resources. Prior to the pandemic, survivors supported by SBS routinely struggled to access safe and secure housing. Survivors struggled to access immigration services, health services, social services, welfare provisions and the justice system. These existing problems, relating to systemic underfunding, do not appear to have been considered in government decision-making leading to an escalation of these issues during the pandemic.

e)Urgent action to reduce inequality during a pandemic experienced by women with NRPF.

Migrant women with NRPF suffered particular hardship during the pandemic²⁰. SBS believe that if this group of women were adequately considered during government decision-making, emergency provisions would have been made, from extending the DDVC to women on all types of visas experiencing violence, to taking more widespread action such as lifting all NRPF conditions to entitle all those on NRPF to access public funding for the duration of the pandemic to prohibit destitution and extreme hardship. Some local authorities reacted to mitigate the hardship suffered by migrants on NRPF during the pandemic, but there was no concerted action from central government.²¹

f) Specific attention and provision by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (“FCDO”) for British/Dual nationals or settled residents trapped overseas in abusive relationships and/or at risk of domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour based abuse, abandonment, domestic homicide, honour killings and suicide.

For a number of years, SBS has provided services to the FCDO (more specifically their joint Home Office and FCDO Forced Marriage Unit) to help repatriated survivors of forced marriage who were trapped overseas to resettle once they have arrived in the UK. During the pandemic, SBS received little or no referrals from the FCDO to resettle survivors. SBS fear this is certainly not because the actions of entrapment, forced marriage etc, ceased to exist, but rather, the FCDO failed to continue its work in rescuing survivors. Therefore SBS say in the future, survivors who are trapped overseas must receive appropriate attention in order that they can continue to be rescued, even in the event of a global pandemic.

²⁰ See Point 3(vi)

²¹ ²¹²¹ [Local Authority Responses to people with NRPF during the pandemic Report, dated August 2020](#)