

Stalking or Harassment: Authorised professional practice (APP) consultation



College of Policing

Response by the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)

September 2026

About the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)

LAWRS is a human rights, feminist organisation run by and for Latin American migrant women living in the UK. We support women who are exposed to violations of their fundamental human rights, facing violence against women and girls, exploitation in low-paid sectors, trafficking, and/or enduring severe poverty and deprivation.

We also advocate for women's rights, migrants' rights and the rights of ethnic minorities at local, national and EU levels, working with sister organisations in the women, anti-trafficking, immigration and racial justice sectors, to tackle the vulnerabilities faced by Latin American women who are affected by intersectional layers of discrimination.

For further information, please visit our website: www.lawrs.org.uk

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7. 'It is clear what police officers and staff need to do in relation to the initial response or investigation of stalking or harassment' - to which extent do you agree?

Disagree.

8. Please provide an explanation for your response

Elements of the guidance are clear. We are pleased that the APP emphasises the impact of early identification and initial responses on the investigative process. The APP is also clear that a trauma-informed, proactive initial response can prevent stalking/harassment behaviours from escalating.

Several sections encourage officers to consider interpreter provision for victims with communication barriers, including those whose first language is not English (Sections 3 and 3.3). However, the relevant section on initial response (Section 4) does not mention interpreter provision. **The provision of interpreters to victims with communication needs is a statutory duty. The guidance should include interpreter provision as an initial action in all cases involving victims with communication needs.**

The lack of early interpreter provision makes it more difficult for police officers to identify the correct offence and adequately assess risk. This affects subsequent investigation and safeguarding. In a recent LAWRS case, a victim of stalking and sexual exploitation waited a month for an interpreter in order to give her witness statement. Meanwhile, the stalking escalated and she was forced to flee, becoming homeless. The failure to offer interpreters in a timely manner means victims are not able to exercise their rights to understand and be understood, or to have crime details recorded without undue delay, as stipulated in the Victim's Code (Ministry of Justice, January 2025).

Additionally, our frontline team has identified a concerning trend — in high-risk stalking/harassment cases without interpreter provision, police officers are incorrectly recording that the victim wishes to withdraw her report. In one case, a victim who fled a relationship that involved threats to kill and non-fatal strangulation was stalked after the perpetrator was released on bail. Her original police interview took place without an interpreter. The police then sent her, on two occasions, letters in English asking her to sign to confirm that she consented to withdrawing the case. The service user did not wish to withdraw the report, and did not understand the letters.

In another case, we supported a victim who separated from her partner after being sexually and physically assaulted. The perpetrator stalked his ex-partner and slept outside her home. Although she reported this to the police, no interpreter was provided. The victim did not receive a crime reference number and was not asked to make a witness statement.

For several weeks the stalking/harassment escalated. The perpetrator tried to break into the victim's home and assaulted her, leading to his arrest and release on bail conditions. When the LAWRS caseworker asked about the possibility of a Stalking Protection Order, police officers incorrectly said that the victim wished to withdraw her report.

As in this case, we often support victims who have reported stalking/harassment to police but do not receive a CAD or crime reference number. This prevents a pattern of behaviour being recorded, and leads to missed opportunities for early identification and investigation. **The 'First Response' section should contain guidance on ensuring that crime reference numbers are provided** when victims come into contact with the police.

In our experience, this often occurs with undocumented victims. Migrant victims supported by LAWRS are routinely pressured by police officers to disclose their immigration status when reporting stalking/harassment. On multiple occasions, officers have called Immigration Enforcement in front of the victim and declined to provide a crime reference number, meaning the stalking/harassment offence was not recorded. Data-sharing between Immigration Enforcement and police officers creates a barrier to disclosure for all migrant victims. In cases of high-risk stalking/harassment, this puts victims at direct risk of serious harm. **The guidance should discourage police from sharing victims' data with Immigration Enforcement, emphasising that safeguarding and investigation take precedence.**

15. 'The APP makes it clear the actions needed to support and safeguard the victim' - to which extent do you agree?

Strongly disagree.

16. Please provide an explanation for your response

The APP emphasises the importance of a trauma-informed approach. This includes avoiding victim-blaming or minimising stalking/harassment behaviours.

However, Section 3.2 does not contain a specific sub-section on the actions needed to support and safeguard migrant victims. **The APP should include a section outlining the vulnerability**

factors for migrant victims of stalking/harassment, bringing it in line with related guidance. For example, the Crown Prosecution Service's 'Stalking or Harassment' guidance acknowledges that perpetrators *'target vulnerable people, recognising that they may face additional barriers to accessing help or support, for example: exploiting someone's vulnerability owing to their immigration status'* (Crown Prosecution Service, January 2025). Likewise, the domestic abuse statutory guidance contains a section on immigration status and migrant victims, which states that perpetrators *'deliberately [use] the immigration system to control and threaten a victim. For example, actually and/or threatening to report their insecure status to the Home Office'* (Home Office, April 2023).

Section 3.2 provides crucial information on supporting specific victims, including a description of risk factors, indicators, statutory obligations, safeguarding needs and intersection with other forms of abuse. Given their vulnerability, the APP should provide specific guidance on supporting migrant victims. Like older and vulnerable adults, migrant victims are targeted due to their perceived or real vulnerabilities: physical and social isolation, communication barriers, lack of information and insecure immigration status itself, which prevents victims accessing refuges or reporting stalking/harassment behaviours to the police.

A key barrier to safeguarding migrant victims is the widespread practice of data-sharing between police and immigration enforcement. In many of our cases, no safeguarding actions are taken by police as officers focus on the victim's immigration status rather than her safety. **The APP should state that safeguarding takes precedence over the victim's immigration status.**

As stated by the APP, officers should support victims to access legal advice in order to deal with the practical impacts of stalking/harassment. As migrant victims' immigration status is a high risk factor, **the APP should emphasise the need to support migrant victims to access immigration legal advice as soon as possible following a report.** This is crucial to safeguarding. For example, victims with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) need immigration advice to lift the condition and access benefits and mainstream domestic violence refuges. Without this, victims are trapped at home or forced into homelessness whilst stalking/harassment behaviours escalate.

The APP must also state that responding officers should not provide immigration advice themselves. Instead, victims should be referred to specialist organisations/legal providers for qualified immigration advice at the earliest opportunity. The victims we support often receive unregulated immigration advice from police officers, such as advising victims to apply for certain visas or promising that applications will be successful if they cooperate with investigations. This advice is illegal and creates false expectations of security for victims.

Safeguarding is also more difficult if a victim's existing leave to remain is revoked because she makes an incorrect immigration application.

We recently supported an undocumented victim of domestic abuse, sexual exploitation and stalking/harassment who came into contact with the police after a third-party report was made. The police advised her to apply for Appendix VDA leave and did not complete a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referral, despite indicators of exploitation. The victim received immigration advice at LAWRS from a solicitor who explained that she was ineligible for Appendix VDA leave due to her immigration status. Confused by the conflicting information, the victim chose to follow the police's advice instead.

17. 'The APP effectively addresses digital offending, including online behaviours, technology-facilitated abuse and associated risks' - to which extent do you agree?

Disagree.

18. Please provide an explanation for your response

It is helpful that the APP provides examples of online and cyber harassment, as we have supported many women whose experiences of digital harassment and stalking have been minimised by police officers. It is also helpful for the definition of 'doxing' to be included.

Minoritised women, including migrant women, are disproportionately likely to experience technology-facilitated abuse, with 45% having experienced online abuse and harassment (Refuge, October 2021). We have also seen that online behaviour and technology are increasingly being used to drive racial harassment, both online and in person. This is being carried out by significant numbers of perpetrators at once, and can involve behaviours like doxing, inciting violence, hate-based language and threats to kill. This behaviour is both racialised and gendered. **The APP should address the vulnerability of migrant women to technology-facilitated abuse, including racial and gendered harassment.**

Moreover, whilst the APP discusses stalking/harassment in the context of domestic violence, **it does not effectively address the link between technology-facilitated stalking/harassment and modern slavery, particularly sexual exploitation and domestic servitude.** Many of the victims of exploitation supported by LAWRS have their privacy invaded with camera surveillance throughout the property where the exploitation takes place, allowing the perpetrator to watch and record the victim constantly. These victims are also subjected to technology-facilitated

harassment after fleeing. For instance, we often support victims of sexual exploitation whose perpetrators threaten to publish recordings of the exploitation online, in order to 'out' them if they do not return.

There is also an important overlap between this form of stalking/harassment, and 'honour'-based abuse and harmful practices. In the example of sexual exploitation, perpetrators are using technology-facilitated harassment in order to humiliate the victim within the wider community, which puts her in danger of violence and abuse from other people. The link between stalking/harassment, honour-based abuse and harmful practices has been acknowledged by bodies like the Crown Prosecution Service. **The APP should provide guidance on the ways that technology-facilitated stalking/harassment can be used as tools for honour-based abuse and harmful practices.**

23. What (if anything) do you think should be added to the APP?

As outlined, the APP should contain a specific section on the vulnerabilities of migrant victims. This would provide responding officers with the necessary information to identify stalking/harassment behaviours, safeguard victims and proactively investigate. In addition to this, the APP should include the following essential information:

Indicators of modern slavery and exploitation

Police officers frequently miss the indicators of modern slavery when responding to reports of stalking/harassment. As a result, the victim is not offered the possibility of being referred into the NRM by police. The APP does not contain any mention of modern slavery, exploitation or the NRM, despite stalking/harassment behaviours being integral to the coercive control used by exploiters. **The APP should provide guidance on the overlap between stalking/harassment and modern slavery, including indicators of modern slavery and the appropriate assessments, safeguarding and follow-up actions that police officers should take.**

Stalking/harassment through children

Victims with children frequently experience post-separation abuse and stalking/harassment via child contact. Perpetrators with parental rights may excessively contact the victim with demands to see the child, or will use the child's routine to locate the victim. For instance, a woman supported by LAWRS experienced stalking/harassment after separating from the father of her child due to domestic abuse. He kept the keys to her flat and started entering in the middle of the night, demanding to see the child. In another case, a perpetrator stalked and harassed his ex-partner, sending her constant death threats. During child contact, the perpetrator abducted the child in order to force the mother to meet with him. Other examples

from our service users include perpetrators waiting near the child's school to locate the victim during pick-ups/drop-offs, or asking teachers and social workers for the victim's new contact details. **Examples of stalking/harassment via children should be included in the APP so responding officers understand how to protect victims and their children from these behaviours.**

Immigration abuse

For the migrant victims whom we support, stalking/harassment behaviours are a form of immigration abuse. Repeated threats to harm victims and their dignity by having them be detained, abusive language about nationality and immigration status, and the use of immigration enforcement to intimidate and distress are all examples of the intersection between immigration abuse and stalking/harassment. These behaviours fall under the verbal, psychological, discriminatory and third-party harassment categories outlined in '2.3 Types of harassment,' but are not mentioned in the guidance. **In order for police officers to understand and identify these behaviours, examples of immigration abuse-related stalking/harassment should be explicitly provided in the guidance.**

Faith-based abuse, 'honour'-based abuse and harmful practices

Stalking/harassment offences often overlap with other forms of abuse, including faith-based abuse, honour-based abuse and other harmful practices. This involves the weaponisation of cultural beliefs or community members to amplify the harm of stalking/harassment behaviours. For example, our service user fled her abusive husband after experiencing a forced pregnancy. The perpetrator began stalking the victim and also started volunteering with the police, telling her she would be arrested if she reported the abuse. As well as threatening the victim directly, he contacted her family to accuse her of parental alienation. He also convinced members of the victim's church to call her and persuade her to resume the relationship for religious reasons. **The APP should provide an explanation of the relation between these types of abuse and stalking/harassment, as well as guidance on referring victims to specialist, *by and for* services for culturally-appropriate support.**

26. As a result of the guidance given in the APP do you think there may be impacts on members of the public? For example, those with protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010 and those with non-protected characteristics? These impacts can be positive as well as negative.

Yes.

27. Please explain these impacts. If you feel the impact will be negative, please explain how we could prevent or reduce this.

Without directly addressing the needs and vulnerability of migrant victims, the impact of the APP will be limited or negative. The result will be that minoritised and migrant women continue to have unequal access to support and protection after experiencing stalking/harassment.

For the women we support, their experiences of stalking/harassment are shaped by multiple protected characteristics, such as sex, race (including colour, nationality and ethnic origin) and age. This means they face: systemic barriers; racialised and gendered abuse; fear of not being believed; hostile immigration restrictions and data-sharing; isolation from support networks; communication barriers; lack of information about rights and processes in the UK; insecure immigration status and dependence on perpetrators. In particular, the practice of data-sharing between police and Immigration Enforcement means migrant women will not report violence, or will disengage from investigations. Stalking/harassment behaviours will continue to escalate if perpetrators cannot be identified and brought to justice, limiting the APP's positive impact.

Migrant and minoritised women are also overrepresented in many forms of violence against women and girls and modern slavery, including domestic homicide, technology-facilitated abuse, sexual exploitation and domestic servitude. This abuse and exploitation is inextricable from stalking/harassment. Without specifically addressing their needs and vulnerabilities, they will continue to be disproportionately affected by this violence.

For example, research from LAWRS' Young Women's Advisory Board found that young Latin American women in the UK are routinely subject to fetishisation and sexual harassment both online and at university. As Latin Americans, migrants, women and young people, they experience multiple barriers and stigmatisation. This dissuades them from reporting harassment, affects their daily routines and has a profound impact on their mental health and sense of identity (Young Women's Advisory Board LAWRS, March 2024; February 2026). **To ensure equal access to support and protection for migrant women, including young women, it is vital that the APP directly addresses these vulnerability factors and the overlap with other forms of abuse.**

28. What impact do you think the APP could have on the police service? This could be positive or negative and could include, for example, how you feel the APP affects public trust, day to day policing activities and/ or policing practices and outcomes.

The APP's emphasis on a trauma-informed approach is positive. This could decrease victim-blaming, improve trust and reduce the negative interactions that we often see for the victims we support.

However, the APP's positive impact will be limited if it does not directly address migrant victims' vulnerabilities and the need for specific support. Interpreter provision will continue to be missed in high-risk stalking cases if it is treated as an optional step, rather than essential to the victim's rights, identification of offences, crime recording, investigation and safeguarding. Responding officers will not support migrant victims to access immigration advice or will continue to provide legal advice themselves, increasing the risk to victims. Most importantly, immigration status will continue to be placed above safeguarding and investigation for migrant victims of stalking/harassment. As a result, migrant victims and survivors will continue suffering poor outcomes and barriers to safety and justice, and police will miss vital intelligence needed to investigate crime, leaving perpetrators to act with impunity.

The need for safe reporting mechanisms to prevent migrant victims and witnesses having their information shared by police with Immigration Enforcement has strong backing from specialist organisations like LAWRS and key stakeholders such as the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales, the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

This has also been backed by the College of Policing itself. A 2020 joint investigation by the College of Policing, HMICFRS and the IOPC found that 'significant harm is being caused to the public interest' by data-sharing of victim and witness data, and the resulting fear of reporting. The report recommended establishing clear, consistent policy for responding officers; consultation with specialist organisations to understand the barriers to reporting for migrant victims; identification of immigration status as a risk factor; supporting victims to access legal immigration advice; and **'an immediate change in police practice to allow a separation between the response to a victim's report of domestic abuse and the handling of their immigration status'** (College of Policing, HMICFR, IOPC, December 2020).

Safe reporting practices have been implemented successfully both in the UK and abroad. Most recently, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) introduced a policy preventing the data of

migrant victims and witnesses being shared with Immigration Enforcement, except where police have reasonable suspicion of high-harm offending. Any data-sharing must be substantiated with evidence and approved by an Authorising Officer. The policy also asks responding officers to account for counter-allegations, particularly in domestic abuse cases, and to ensure that the primary perpetrator has been established before any data-sharing takes place (PSNI, January 2026).

Adopting a similar approach to the PSNI would improve public trust and outcomes for migrant victims and witnesses who are too afraid of negative immigration repercussions to report stalking/harassment. For victims in England and Wales, we are yet to see the positive impact from the joint-investigation's recommendations, as data-sharing continues to be a routine, widespread practice. The women we support consistently have their immigration status placed above safeguarding. **In order for the APP to positively impact public trust, policing practices and outcomes in stalking/harassment cases, the guidance must implement the joint investigation's recommendations on safe-reporting mechanisms and support for migrant victims.**

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