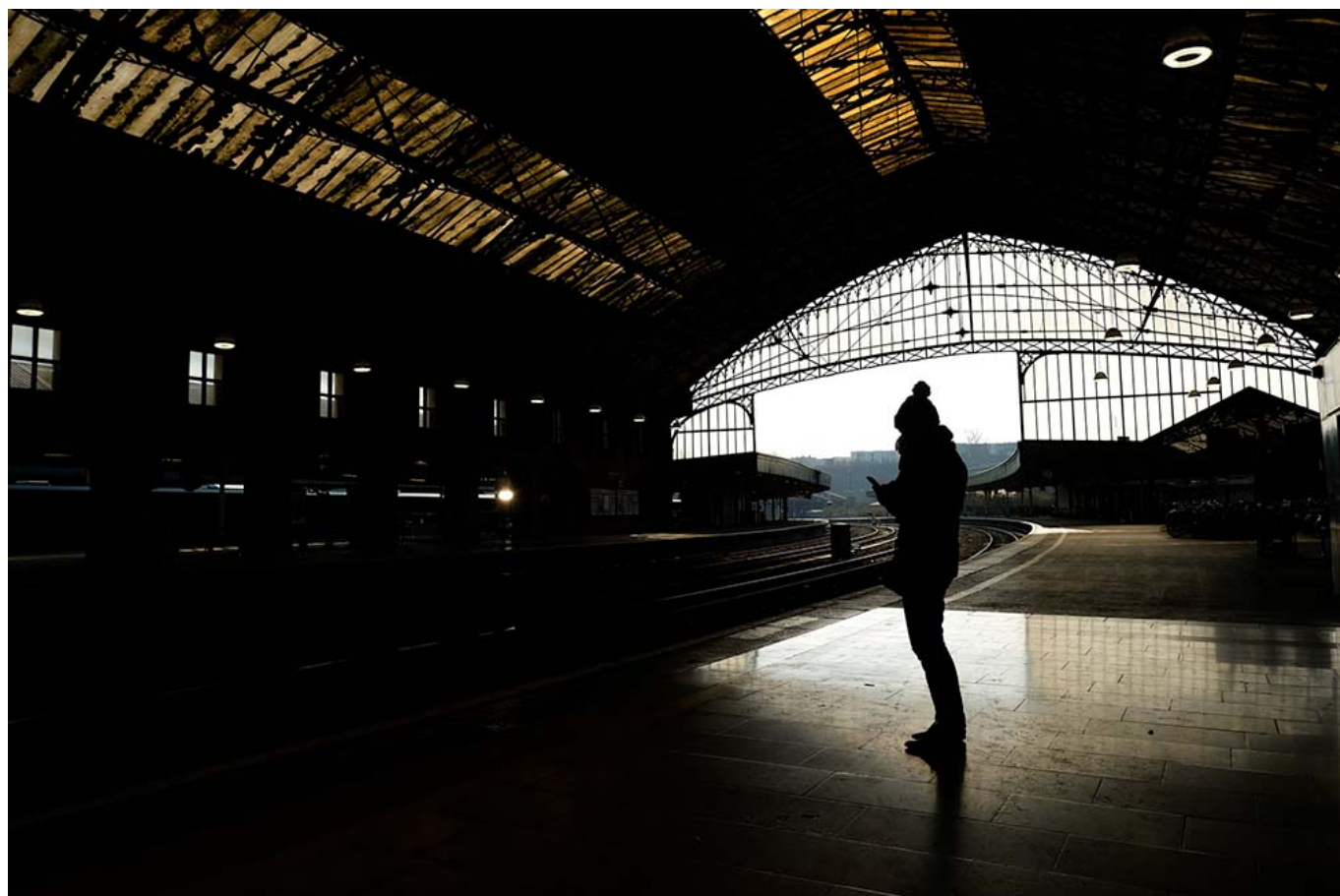


# Women's Aid launches impact briefing on Rail to Refuge initiative

December 3, 2021



Today, Women's Aid is launching a briefing on the Rail to Refuge programme, showing the good work it has done to help people in distress.

The Rail to Refuge scheme offers free train travel to women, children and men fleeing domestic abuse, who have been given an offer of a place in refuge.

Since launching, the latest data says the programme has helped 2,265 survivors – including 650 children – reach safety. On average, four survivors, including children, find safety each day.

Of this, a significant 64 per cent would not have been able to travel without Rail to Refuge, and could have been left at increased risk of homicide or suicide.

The scheme was introduced by all train operators during the first lockdown, having been pioneered by Southeastern in 2019 and joined by GWR in March 2020.

Women's Aid says that the continuation of this scheme is vital. It says that with upcoming changes to Rail

Delivery Group, the facilitators of the scheme, confirming how Rail to Refuge will be funded in future is essential to ensure the scheme's continuation.

Women's Aid said it is also keen to discuss with the Department for Transport the potential for expansion of the scheme on buses, trams and ferries.

Women's Aid is also encouraging public sector organisations and private sector transport companies to support the work, and for Black and minoritised women's organisations and specialist women's organisations to be involved in the design of future schemes for survivors. For future schemes to effectively support survivors, it is crucial that there is appropriate safety and support in place for survivors and full training for staff. Services for survivors must be joined-up with frontline services to provide optimal, holistic support.

Farah Nazeer, chief executive of Women's Aid, said: "This report shows just how many women and children's lives have been saved through Rail to Refuge. When we know abuse isolates you from your finances, this scheme, which takes these barriers into account and brings survivors to safety at no cost to them, is exemplary. The continuation of this scheme is essential for the safety of women. It is a lifeline for survivors who would otherwise be trapped in abuse and at a huge increased risk.

"We are delighted that train companies have worked with us to remove such a significant financial barrier to escaping abuse and hope to receive positive news soon regarding funding that secure the future of this lifesaving scheme."

Jacqueline Starr, chief executive of Rail Delivery Group, said: "The railway has an important role to play in ensuring a fair recovery from the pandemic right across the country, so train companies are immensely proud to have helped over two thousand people so far to escape domestic abuse and get to a place of safety. This report shows almost two thirds of people wouldn't have been able to leave without the free travel provided by train companies, so it really does offer a way out for the people who urgently need it."

About the scheme: Free train travel, provided by train companies, can be booked by member services of Women's Aid Federation of England (WAFE), Welsh Women's Aid (WWA), Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) and Imkaan (the UK's umbrella organisation dedicated to addressing violence against Black and minoritised women and girls).

These organisations can make bookings when offering them a place in their refuge, or referring them to a refuge place outside of these organisations' memberships.