

# RAIL TO REFUGE

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## IMPACT BRIEFING



women's aid  
until women & children are safe

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## Bringing Rail to Refuge to Life

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# Foreword

**By Farah Nazeer**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Women's Aid**



For survivors, the barriers to leaving an abusive relationship and accessing support are innumerable.

Abuse, by definition, isolates. Economic abuse can make leaving very difficult. With no access to money, escape feels unlikely, particularly when survivors are in need of refuge far away from perpetrators. With little to no access to a job, bank account or extra cash, raising the money for a train ticket can be near impossible. Coercive control can further these barriers, with survivors unable to arrange their own travel and support for fear of a perpetrator finding or accessing plans.

Rail to Refuge lifts many of these barriers. It is a lifeline for survivors, free train tickets across the country give direct access to safety. With travel booked through the refuge supporting the survivor, each ticket is a ticket to a safer, better future.

This report has found that, since its inception in April 2020, Rail to Refuge has helped 2,265 survivors, including 650 children, reach safety. On average, the scheme helps four survivors, including children, find safety each day. This is extraordinary. For those survivors and their children, the scheme has given them a lifeline to safety, freedom and security. A lifeline to a future which would have been impossible to reach without the support of the scheme. Further, the scheme has saved a great many lives. 64% of survivors would not have been able to travel without Rail to Refuge, and could have been left at increased risk of homicide or suicide.

These achievements have been possible due to the collaboration between Women's Aid and the rail industry. During the pandemic - a time of change and uncertainty for many, we acknowledge that the rail industry faced many challenges, and despite this, thankfully, the provision for Rail to

Refuge ticket costs were made available. In the coming months and years, the organisation of Britain's rail will look different, as it transitions to Great British Railways. However, with these statistics in mind, it is vital that we are able to continue this scheme beyond March 2022, the projected end date for Rail to Refuge. An essential part of this is working with the Department for Transport to ensure the scheme's continuation, with potential for expansion of the scheme on buses, trams and ferries. With this support, we can give countless survivors access to safety and security.

We also ask for public sector organisations and private sector transport companies to work with specialist led by and for Black and minoritised women's organisations and specialist women's organisations in the design of future schemes for survivors. For future schemes to be effectively supporting 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 effectively with frontline services so as to provide optimal, holistic support.

Women's Aid is incredibly grateful to train operators Southeastern Railways, Great Western Railway and the Rail Delivery Group in helping Rail to Refuge to come this far. We hope the scheme will continue to be supported to allow more survivors to escape from abuse, at no cost to themselves or the stretched services supporting them. We look forward to a permanent Rail to Refuge, a scheme which transports survivors and their children to transformative life-long safety.



**Jaq Starr**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Rail Delivery Group**



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.

# The Rail to Refuge scheme

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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. Free train travel, provided by rail 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.

WAFE, WWA, SWA and Imkaan collectively hold a membership of approximately 241 frontlinespecialist women's organisations supporting survivors of abuse, of which 38 are led by and for Black and minoritised women. Over a combined 158 years of experience working towards ending violence against women and girls (VAWG), these organisations

and their members have gained collective knowledge and expertise of tried and tested ways of working to support survivors in all stages of their journey. This expertise meant that this scheme was developed to provide the appropriate safety and support a survivor needs, for example safety whilst escaping and support needs whilst travelling (e.g. an interpreter or support travelling with children).

Free train travel is provided by Britain's train companies via the Rail Delivery Group.

This impact briefing outlines the evidence base behind the scheme, the inception of Rail to Refuge, the impact on survivors so far, learnings and how the scheme can be taken forward beyond March 2022. This report covers the time from the scheme's launch in April 2020 to 12th September 2021. Please see Appendix 1 for descriptions of partner organisations.

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**Cymorth i Ferched Cymru**  
Welsh Women's Aid

**imkaan**

**Rail Delivery Group**

# The travel needs of survivors escaping abuse

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There is a **need for survivors to travel locally as well as nationally** to reach safety. A large mixed methods study analysing the relocation patterns of survivors escaping abuse found that out of 19,000 cases per year (2003-2009), there were “10,000 women (over half with children) migrating across local authority boundaries to access services and nearly 9,000 relocating within their local authority”<sup>1</sup>.

The **need to relocate due to abuse is experienced overwhelmingly by women**, and any schemes tailored to assist women’s travel needs to escape abuse should **ensure that they can meet the needs of disabled women and Black and minoritised women**. Of those relocating Janet Bowstead found that the vast majority were women, with 1.3% being men<sup>2</sup>. 8.2% were disabled women and women of all ethnicities (from census categories) relocated, “67.4 per cent being White British”<sup>3</sup>. It is also notable that over half of women travelling outside of their local authority area travelled with children. As a result, it **should be ensured that any needs children and women travelling with children may have can be met**.

A woman relocating is likely to **need significant and trusted support whilst leaving**. Through interviews with survivors, Bowstead also found that women “only move outside their local authority if they are forced to do so”<sup>4</sup>. Often a number of attempts are made to ensure safety at home first, for example through gaining civil orders and/or improving home security, however ultimately relocation was the only option<sup>5</sup>. This shows that even after trying a number of routes to find safety, a survivor is likely to be experiencing significant risk.

The majority of relocations to refuges are women travelling outside of their local authority area. WAFE found that from July 2020 to March 2021, 79.6% of journeys to refuges were from a different local authority<sup>6</sup>. This has been the case for a number of years; Bowstead also found that from 2008-2009, over 70% of women’s journeys to refuges were from outside their local authority<sup>7</sup>. This indicates that the journey is also likely to be long and, as a result, of a high cost.

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<sup>1</sup> Janet Bowstead, Why women’s domestic violence refuges are not local services, 2015, [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/SR/Shelters/Janet%20C\\_Bowstead\\_Critical\\_Social\\_Policy-2015-Bowstead-327-49.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/SR/Shelters/Janet%20C_Bowstead_Critical_Social_Policy-2015-Bowstead-327-49.pdf), pg331.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pg336.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pg337.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pg334.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg334.

<sup>6</sup> Women’s Aid Federation of England, The Domestic Abuse Report 2022: Early Release, October 2021, <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Domestic-Abuse-Report-2022-Early-Release.pdf>, pg24.

<sup>7</sup> Janet Bowstead, Why women’s domestic violence refuges are not local services, 2015, [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/SR/Shelters/Janet%20C\\_Bowstead\\_Critical\\_Social\\_Policy-2015-Bowstead-327-49.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/SR/Shelters/Janet%20C_Bowstead_Critical_Social_Policy-2015-Bowstead-327-49.pdf), pg338.

There is a **need for easily available, undetectable and free transport routes to escape**. Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) outlines the ways in which the nature and severity of economic abuse has evolved during and since the pandemic<sup>8</sup>.

It defines economic abuse as control in the forms of “restriction, exploitation and/or sabotage”<sup>9</sup> of economic resources. Economic resources can “include money and finances, but also those things that money can buy, such as food, clothing, housing, mobile phones and transportation”<sup>10</sup>. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has also recognised economic abuse as a form of domestic abuse<sup>11</sup>.

Between June to August 2020, SEA found “over two thirds of victim-survivors living with a perpetrator had experienced the perpetrator interfering with their access to economic resources”<sup>12</sup>. Of which, the most common economic resource being controlled was access to transport<sup>13</sup>. It is important to note that perpetrator/s often restrict multiple resources at the same time. A common survivor experience is for transport, often crucial for leaving, to be controlled, for example access to types of transport and frequency of use could be allowed only with a perpetrators’ knowledge and permission. Therefore, access to finances without the perpetrator/s knowing is likely to be difficult, and as a result a barrier to leaving.

SEA states:

“Economic barriers to leaving can lead to women staying with an abusive partner for longer and experiencing more harm as a result. In this way, economic abuse underpins physical safety. Women who experience it are five times more likely to experience physical abuse and are at increased risk of both homicide and suicide. Lack of access to economic resources post separation makes the process of rebuilding an independent life more challenging. It is the primary reason women return to an abusive partner. Moreover, because it does not require physical proximity, economic abuse can continue, escalate or even start after separation and be experienced for many years. One in four women reports experiencing economic abuse after leaving the perpetrator and 60% of economic abuse survivors are coerced into debt”<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Surviving Economic Abuse, The Cost of Covid-19: Economic abuse throughout the pandemic, 2021, [https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/SEA-Cost-of-Covid-Report\\_2021-04.pdf](https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/SEA-Cost-of-Covid-Report_2021-04.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pg3.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pg2.

<sup>11</sup> Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Part 1 Section 1, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/section/1> [accessed 9th November 2021].

<sup>12</sup> Surviving Economic Abuse, The Cost of Covid-19: Economic abuse throughout the pandemic, 2021, [https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/SEA-Cost-of-Covid-Report\\_2021-04.pdf](https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/SEA-Cost-of-Covid-Report_2021-04.pdf), pg50.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pg50.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pg3.



As well as easily available, undetectable transport routes, there is also **a need for these to be free**. The nature and impacts of financial abuse have been highlighted by WAFE in 2018, in which it was found 43.1% were in debt due to abuse, 56.1% who had left the relationship “felt that the abuse had impacted their ability to work, with long term employment prospects/ earnings being negatively impacted for over two-fifths of survivors and 31.9% “said their access to money during the relationship was controlled by the perpetrator”<sup>15</sup>. This shows raising the finance to pay for travel is also a barrier to leaving. Alongside the experience of perpetrator/s controlling a woman’s economic resources, including affecting her ability to work, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated widening socio-economic inequality. This is in a pre-existing

context of austerity<sup>16</sup>. Women, in particular Black and minoritised women and disabled women, have been - and continue to be - disproportionately affected by the systemic and structural impacts of the pandemic<sup>17</sup>. This presents a further barrier to accessing the financial resources needed to escape abuse. Furthermore, having no recourse to public funds (NRPF) on a visa status, which means a woman is not eligible for “key welfare benefits and local authority housing”<sup>18</sup> can mean even more “limited access to an independent income”<sup>19</sup>.

Easily available, undetectable and free transport routes are key to enabling women to leave abuse, because women need to travel both locally and nationally, and receive trusted support whilst they do so.

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**15** Women’s Aid Federation of England, The Domestic Abuse Report 2019: The Economics of Abuse, <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Economics-of-Abuse-Report-2019.pdf>, cited in Ibid.

**16** Z. Haque, L. Becares, and N. Treloar, “Over-Exposed and Under-Protected: The Devastating Impact of COVID-19 on Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in Great Britain,” <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Runnymede Covid19 Survey report v3.pdf>, Runnymede Trust, 2020, pg24.

Runnymede Trust, “Intersecting Inequalities: The impact of austerity on Black and Minority Ethnic women in the UK”, <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Executive-Summary-Intersecting-Inequalities-October-2017.pdf>, October 2017; The Women’s Budget Group, NA end to Austerity? What the Spending Review means for women, <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/FINAL-Spending-review-response-06-09-19.pdf>;

**17** Ibid.

**18** Southall Black Sisters, In an emergency: Abused Women with No Recourse to Public Funds, <https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/need-help/abused-women-with-no-recourse-to-public-funds/>, accessed 7th October 2021.

**19** Ibid.

# The inception of Rail to Refuge

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In late summer 2019, WAFE was approached by Southeastern Railway, after Darren O'Brien, one of its station managers, watched a Dispatches documentary 'Safe at Last'<sup>20</sup>, supported by WAFE and featuring Reigate and Banstead Women's Aid. Together, WAFE and Southeastern Railway agreed to trial an issuing of free tickets for journeys across their network to member services, for survivors to reach a place in their refuge services. From October 2019 until April 2020, approximately eleven tickets were issued to the 19 services in the region.

WAFE already had a supportive relationship with Great Western Railway (GWR), who they approached in December 2019 with a request to replicate the trial. GWR agreed to a launch of the service, for 18 WAFE member refuges in the South West of England, nine WWA and one Imkaan member refuge in South Wales, in time for International Women's Day 2020.

The scheme now had a name, 'Rail to Refuge', and its launch took place at Paddington Station on the 4th March 2020, attended by colleagues of the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), GWR, Southeastern, Women in Rail, British Transport Police and Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF).

In its first weeks, GWR issued a small number of e-tickets. Three weeks later, due to the coronavirus pandemic, lockdown measures came into force. Requests to WAFE's Live Chat service grew by 41% and WAFE was noticing women at increased risk and with reduced

options to leave. With attempts to separate or having separated from an abusive partner a known escalator of homicide<sup>21</sup>, lockdown highlighted that reducing barriers to leave remained essential and urgent.

At the beginning of April 2020, in the space of a week WAFE and the RDG agreed on what would be needed and reached agreement on the details. The scheme covering all of England, Scotland and Wales began on 13th April 2020 and the RDG agreed to temporarily fund ticket costs during lockdown. This quick turnaround was made possible by learning from the trials with Southeastern Railway and GWR, the fast pace of the response from colleagues in the rail industry, the trust between two sectors and the commitment to survivors of abuse.

During the few months the nationwide scheme was in place, Rail to Refuge was met with support from:

- ▶ The public
- ▶ Press
- ▶ Members of Parliament across parties:
  - Victoria Atkins (Conservative Party)
  - Chris Heaton Harris (Conservative Party)
  - Luke Pollard (Labour)
  - Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour)
  - Grant Shapps (Conservative Party)
  - Rachel McLean (Conservative Party)
  - Carolyn Harris (Labour)
  - Kerry McCarthy (Labour)
- ▶ The Duchess of Cornwall
- ▶ Local politicians
- ▶ Network Rail

<sup>20</sup> Channel 4, <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/safe-at-last-in-a-womens-refuge-dispatches>, [accessed 24th November 2021].

<sup>21</sup> Femicide Census, UK Femicides 2009-2018, <https://www.femicidecensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Femicide-Census-10-year-report.pdf>, pg30.

- ▶ Women in Rail
- ▶ Rail Safety and Standards Board
- ▶ Office of Rail and Road
- ▶ Community Rail Network
- ▶ London Travel Watch
- ▶ Rail Business Daily
- ▶ Northern Rail
- ▶ East Midlands Railway
- ▶ London North Eastern Railway
- ▶ Avanti
- ▶ Scotrail
- ▶ West Midlands Railways
- ▶ Transport for London.

In November 2020, WAFE and the RDG were able to announce that nearly 1,000 Rail to Refuge tickets had been booked through the scheme, and that the RDG would be able to

continue to cover the cost for the rest of the financial year.

The cost of tickets was reduced by using e-ticketing, in addition to paper tickets provided by The Ticket Keeper (TTK), where a passenger presents a barcode at the ticket barrier. Refuge workers asked those fleeing if they had a smart phone which could display an e-ticket or a credit/debit card that they were able to use to collect a paper ticket. Each survivor was asked which they felt was the safest method to use. If a survivor did not have a smart phone or credit/debit card, frontline services would look for other routes to support a survivor to reach safety. This remains the case, however a solution still needs to be found to ensure Rail to Refuge is just as easily accessible to women who may not have access to these resources.

## Methodology

Quantitative administrative data was recorded by the National Rail Enquiries call centre and shared with WAFE, who then analysed it using Microsoft Excel.

Two case studies were also collected by Southeastern train operating company at the beginning of 2021. A member organisation, MK-ACT<sup>22</sup>, was approached and a support worker documented survivors' journeys under four headings; accessing the service, the abuse, support and Rail to Refuge. Names and details have been anonymised for confidentiality purposes.

All findings in this report relate to journeys booked from 13th April 2020 to 12th September 2021 (except for the type of ticket booked, member usage and numbers of adult and child survivors accessing the scheme per month). This is the first 17 months of the Rail to Refuge scheme. Data is based on a total of 1,642 bookings that were made. Of these, 70 were found to be either:

- ▶ duplicate bookings, which encompassed the same journey, date, departure time, number of people travelling and type of ticket e.g. paper or e-ticket;

22 <https://www.mkact.com/>

- ▶ or booked twice, which encompassed the same journey with a different number of people and/or different departure time, or different type of ticket. The latest booked journey has been included in the dataset.

This left a total sample size of 1,572 bookings made.

Data time periods and sample sizes vary for findings relating to the type of ticket booked, member usage and numbers of adult and child survivors accessing the scheme per month, due to additional data fields being added as the programme developed. Data time periods and sample sizes for these findings can be seen in footnotes.

Findings reflecting the range and average cost of bookings made have been analysed per booking and as a result sometimes include a range in the number of adults and children travelling on one booking. Anomalies in data, e.g. larger than the average numbers of adults and children travelling on one booking, did not show up in the highest figure in range of cost. Therefore, anomalies in data have not affected the numbers found, and as a result reflect a reliability of findings. The number of anomalies has been broken down in the footnotes.

Where possible, data has also been broken down by financial year and can be found in Appendix 2.

Due to ethical considerations it was not possible to collect demographic data. It would not have been appropriate for the call centre to gather survivors' demographic data whilst booking tickets. Therefore, demographic data and data specific to children under five years of age is not reported on here. Please see the recommendations section for further discussion.

As a scheme, Rail to Refuge has developed organically and rapidly in response to urgent need. This report has also been developed in the same spirit. Upon hearing that Rail to Refuge could cease to exist from April 2022 onwards, it was felt that there was an urgent need to understand more about the impact of the scheme so far. As a result, this piece of research was undertaken on a short time scale and unfunded.

There is further work we would want to do, which we were unable to do during the timeframe of this phase. Moving forward, we hope to be able to carry out qualitative research to find out if the scheme meets the needs of children, Black and minoritised women and children, disabled women and children and LGBT+ survivors. This report focuses on both the existing literature and the gaps in the data, to inform future work moving forward.



# Key findings

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**2,265 adult and child survivors accessed Rail to Refuge.<sup>23</sup>**

**1,615 adults.**

**650 children.**

**A total ticket booking cost in the range of £5.90 to £479.00.**

**The average cost of a total booking made is £72.99.<sup>26</sup>**

**On average the Rail to Refuge scheme helped 4.4 adults and children to safety each day.<sup>24</sup>**

**41.7% of adults and children booked a paper ticket.**

**57.0% booked an e-ticket and 1.2% was missing data.<sup>27</sup>**

**64.4% of survivors would not have been able to travel to refuge without a free ticket.<sup>25</sup>**

**21.2% would have still travelled, 7% were not sure and 6.5% did not answer.**

**Across WAFE, WWA, SWA and Imkaan 120 members have used Rail to Refuge.<sup>28</sup>**

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**23** Sample size of 1572 bookings made. It is also important to note that this is not an exact number but an approximate as in a very small amount of cases we are anecdotally aware that a support worker or interpreter may have travelled as well as the survivor. For a breakdown by financial year see Appendix 2.

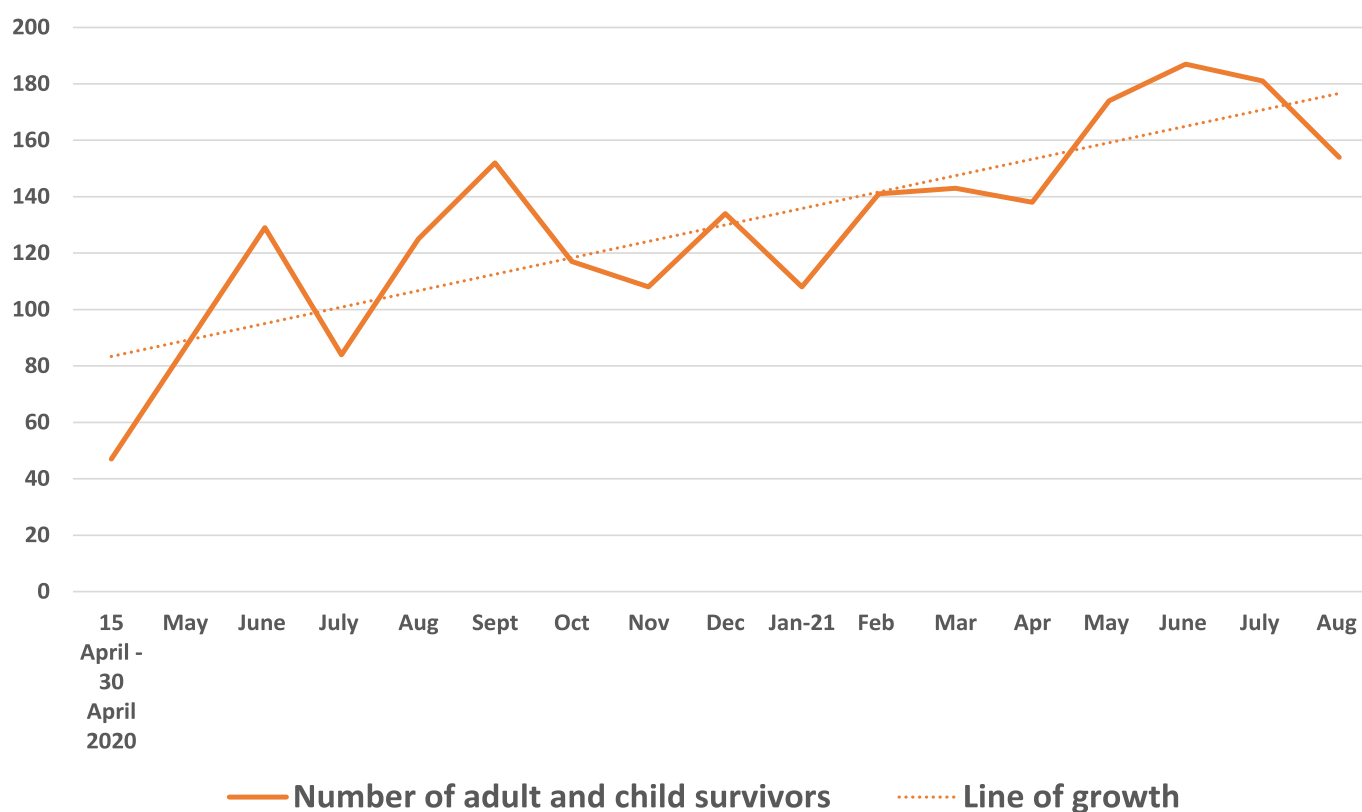
**24** For a breakdown by financial year see Appendix 2.

**25** At the time of booking, member services completed the question 'Would the person have travelled if the journey was not paid for?'. Options were; yes, no, not sure. For a breakdown by numbers see Appendix 2.

**26** Anomalies: there were 5 bookings with 3 to 5 adults travelling, however none of these included the highest range figure of £479.00; similarly, there were 19 bookings made with 4 to 6 children travelling however none of these included the highest range figure of £479.00. The sample size was 1572 of bookings made with 994 paper tickets, 564 e-tickets and 14 bookings held missing data. Findings are based on 994 paper tickets as raw data did not reflect costs for e-tickets.

**27** Data period of approximately 10 months (24th November 2020 to 12th September 2021) as e-tickets were introduced on 24th November 2020. For a breakdown by numbers see Appendix 2.

**28** Please see Table 5 in Appendix 2 for a breakdown of total members per second tier organisations.

**Graph 1:** Number of adult and child survivors accessing Rail to Refuge per month <sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> This graph shows data from a sample collected in the first 2 weeks of the programme (in April 2020), and subsequently data for a complete month. The last two weeks across the 17 months of data (1st September to 12th September 2021) have not been included as this is not a complete months' worth of data and as a result is not comparable to previous months to find out levels of growth of the scheme.

# Impact and learnings

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## A significant number of women and children have used the scheme in just under a year and half.

Approximately 2,265 adult and child survivors<sup>30</sup> using Rail to Refuge in the first 17 months of the scheme's operation is a significant number of survivors helped to safety. As outlined in the methodology, due to ethical considerations it was not possible to collect demographic data as a part of the administrative data-collection process. Therefore, we are unable to tell to what extent Rail to Refuge has been accessible to marginalised survivors. This is an important learning point reflected on further in the recommendations for the future of the scheme.

The number of children (28.6%) that have travelled with adults is likely to be understated

as this only includes children from 5 to 15 years of age. As a result, there are likely to be significantly more children who have travelled but have been unaccounted for in data. This correlates with evidence in the travel needs of survivors escaping abuse that many survivors travel with children<sup>31</sup>. This is also a point to note for development of the scheme in the future. Recording data for children under five years of age, and finding out to what extent children's needs and women's needs whilst travelling with children are met could allow for further understanding of the needs of survivors whilst travelling to safety.

## The vast majority of adult survivors accessing the scheme are women.

Approximately six male survivors<sup>32</sup> out of 1,615 overall adult survivors were supported to travel. One survivor was supported via the Men's Advice Helpline and five via non-members. This is a minimal number and shows the vast majority of those using Rail to Refuge are women. This is also reflective of wider evidence, in which 1.3% of those relocating due to domestic abuse were men<sup>33</sup>. A key learning for the scheme is that specialist women's

organisations, alongside those led by and for Black and minoritised women<sup>34</sup> and disabled women, are best placed to continue leading it. This is particularly important because of the ever-growing disproportionate impacts of economic inequality affecting women, most noticeably minoritised women and disabled women. Additionally, the scheme should have continued access for male survivors via Respect and the Men's Advice Helpline.

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**30** As mentioned in key findings footnotes: This is an approximate as in a very small amount of cases we are anecdotally aware that a support worker or interpreter may have travelled as well as the survivor.

**31** Janet Bowstead, Why women's domestic violence refuges are not local services, 2015, Janet C\_Bowstead\_Critical\_Social\_Policy-2015-Bowstead-327-49.pdf ([ohchr.org](https://www.ohchr.org)), pg331.

**32** This is an approximate as bookings were recorded by a number of different staff and we cannot be sure that all members of staff recorded when the booking was made for a male survivor.

**33** Janet Bowstead, Why women's domestic violence refuges are not local services, 2015, Janet C\_Bowstead\_Critical\_Social\_Policy-2015-Bowstead-327-49.pdf ([ohchr.org](https://www.ohchr.org)), pg336.

**34** Imkaan defines specialist led by and for as: "designed and delivered by and for the users and communities they aim to serve" (Specialist Services: A Guide for Commissioners, Voice4Change England and NAVCA, 2012) and highlights "the 'led by and for' model offers a uniquely empowering experience to women and children, as the client group is reflected in staffing, management and governance structures of these organisations" (State of the Sector, Imkaan, 2015).

## The numbers of women accessing the scheme has grown over time.

Although there have been fluctuations in the numbers of adult and child survivors accessing the scheme between months (Graph 1), the line of growth shows that the scheme has grown overtime. Fluctuations between months did not correlate with lockdowns or any

other patterns. This indicates that the longer the scheme has been operational, the more awareness of it has grown, and as a result more women and children have accessed it. This shows a demand and need from survivors for Rail to Refuge.

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## Nearly two thirds (64.4%) of survivors would not have been able to travel, and could have been left at increased risk of homicide or suicide.

The Femicide Census identified that at the point of attempting to separate there is a high risk of escalation of abuse<sup>35</sup>. Furthermore, the World Health Organisation have outlined that attempts to separate from an abusive partner are a risk factor for being a victim of homicide<sup>36</sup>.

Surviving Economic Abuse has similarly highlighted that “women who experience

[economic abuse] are five times more likely to experience physical abuse and are at increased risk of both homicide and suicide”<sup>37</sup>. All of the evidence suggests that nearly two thirds of survivors who would not have been able to travel, are likely to have been left at an increased risk of homicide or suicide without Rail to Refuge.

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## Enabling survivors to access local and national escape routes.

Literature has identified that survivors need easily available free transport both locally and nationally. The wide range of ticket booking costs, being as little as £5.90 and as large as £479.00, shows that it is able to meet the needs of survivors escaping abuse through the availability of a national service available on all rail routes.

At the same time there are many parts of the

country where a person will need to travel using a bus, tram or taxi first in order to reach a train station. Therefore, it could be argued that the need for easily available free transport has not been completely met.

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35 Femicide census, UK Femicides 2009-2018, <https://www.femicidecensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Femicide-Census-10-year-report.pdf>, pg 31.

36 World Health Organisation, Understanding and addressing violence against women, [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77421/WHO\\_RHR\\_12.38\\_eng.pdf;jsessionid=4DD39FB77FD32FE6CC03FE98F3A27D79?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77421/WHO_RHR_12.38_eng.pdf;jsessionid=4DD39FB77FD32FE6CC03FE98F3A27D79?sequence=1), cited in Ibid.

37 Surviving Economic Abuse, The Cost of Covid-19: Economic abuse throughout the pandemic, 2021, [https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/SEA-Cost-of-Covid-Report\\_2021-04.pdf](https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/SEA-Cost-of-Covid-Report_2021-04.pdf), pg3.



## **The average cost of ticket booking is likely to be a barrier to leaving.**

Taking into account literature outlining the many barriers (socio-economic inequality, having NRPF and economic abuse) to accessing economic resource, it can be argued that the average cost of a booking (£72.99) for a survivor living with any one of these

experiences will be a large sum of money to raise. It is particularly a large sum of money to raise without risking the perpetrator/s finding out. Therefore, further highlighting the necessity of free travel for survivors escaping abuse.

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## **It is vital to keep paper tickets a key feature of the scheme, alongside e-tickets.**

Although 57.0% of bookings were e-tickets, data shows a significant number of survivors (41.7%) booked a paper ticket. This could be as a result of perpetrators monitoring phones, meaning that it is not safe for a survivor to receive a barcode on their smartphone. Paper tickets would also be needed for anyone that does not have a smartphone. To ensure Rail to Refuge is accessible to all, it is vital paper tickets are recognised and kept as a key

function of the scheme. A further reflection on literature shows that some women may not have access to a credit/debit card to be able to pick up a paper ticket. This currently presents an issue for any survivor without a debit card, credit card and smartphone. As mentioned earlier in this report, although frontline services work to find alternative routes for a woman to reach safety, this presents a barrier to accessing the scheme.

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## **There is a significant demand and need for Rail to Refuge from frontline ending VAWG and domestic abuse organisations.**

A good number of different member organisations across WAFE, WWA, SWA and Imkaan, have used the scheme (see Table 5 in Appendix 2). In addition, although the scheme was open to members only, 28 non-members

accessed free tickets for survivors via a request to National Rail Enquiries. This further shows that there is a demand and need for the scheme.

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## **Rail to Refuge can very quickly reduce barriers for women fleeing to safety.**

Case studies below show how quickly Rail to Refuge can reduce a barrier for women fleeing to safety. This indicates that referral pathways in which frontline specialist women's ending VAWG and domestic abuse organisations who

are already supporting a woman work well to enable appropriate safety and support whilst escaping.

# Case studies

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As noted in the methodology, the below case studies are written about a survivor's journey using Rail to Refuge from the point of view of the worker supporting the women. Names are fictional and identifiable information has been removed.

## Naomi's Story

### Accessing the Service

Naomi was referred to [organisation] by the police following a report of a physical assault by a family member.

### The Abuse

Naomi was experiencing physical, verbal, financial and psychological abuse as well as controlling and isolating behaviour from her family members. Naomi shared that during the last incident she was physically assaulted. She had come home later than expected and was assaulted with an object. She stated that she feared for her life and was able to call the police. Naomi was assisted to flee the family home and was placed in a hotel for one night.

[The organisation] and Naomi explored the risk to her from family members whilst she remained in [the local area] and refuge placement outside [the local area] was explored. Naomi was deemed by the police as a high-risk victim of abuse and honour-based abuse.

The hotel placement was coming to an end the following morning so a refuge vacancy needed to be secured before this time.

### Support

Refuge vacancy was secured for Naomi in [a different county across the country] however she did not have the financial means to travel to the refuge. Naomi was still waiting for her Universal Credit application to be processed and did not drive, the refuge could not hold the placement and therefore Naomi needed to travel the same day.

[The organisation] applied to the Rail to Refuge scheme and were able to obtain train tickets the same day. The ticket was sent to Naomi's phone which ensured no delay in travelling. The refuge vacancy was not lost and Naomi travelled to safety the same day.

### Rail to Refuge

Without the Rail to Refuge scheme Naomi would have lost the vacancy in a refuge, which would have meant that Naomi would have remained in an area where the risk was present.

## Zara's Story

### Accessing the Service

Zara self-referred to [the organisation] following encouragement from her friend to access support.

### The Abuse

Zara was experiencing physical, sexual, verbal and financial abuse as well as controlling and isolating behaviour from her spouse. She shared that she had three children and was living in a rental property with her spouse. Zara stated that the abuse had been getting worse since going into national lockdown and the incidents had increased. She shared that she was concerned about the impact on the children from what they were being exposed to at home.

[The organisation] and Zara explored the risk to her from her spouse and ensured telephone contact took place during her daily walks as her spouse was no longer going to work and was at home. Zara requested support to put together a planned exit to enable her to flee the home with her children.

Zara shared she had a support network in [a different county] and felt she would feel safer out of her current area. Zara was informed of the support she could access in a refuge service. She decided refuge would enable her to feel safe and access specialist support for herself and her children.

### Support

[The organisation] looked at refuge options in [the different county] with Zara and secured a vacancy for her and her 3 children. The refuge informed Zara that they needed her to arrive at the refuge the next day by 11am as it was Friday and this was the cut off time for intake into refuge.

Zara was subjected to financial abuse and shared that her spouse monitored her credit card accounts, meaning she was unable to use her credit card to travel since he would then be aware she had purchased train tickets, escalating the risk to her. She could only apply for benefits once she had fled and did not have family or friends that could lend her the money by the following day to cover her travel expenses.

[The organisation] applied to the Rail to Refuge scheme and were able to obtain train tickets the same day. The tickets were sent to the ticket machine at [the local areas station] and Zara was able to independently collect these from the machines. This meant there was no delay in obtaining the tickets and fleeing, the refuge vacancy was not lost and Zara and her children travelled to safety the following day.

### Rail to Refuge

Without the Rail to Refuge scheme Zara would have lost the placement in refuge as it would have taken longer to arrange funding for travel and to safely get the tickets to her. The delay could have resulted in further abuse and further exposure of abuse to the three children.

# Conclusion

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Overall, this report shows Rail to Refuge has positively impacted the lives of many women and children. Findings show that as a scheme it is working well in its set up and reducing barriers for a significant number of adult and child survivors every day.

The relationships of second tier organisations with frontline specialist ending VAWG and domestic abuse organisations, and expertise held within the partnership, bring a significant added value to operations of the scheme.

There is an obvious need for access to free travel and there is a demand for Rail to Refuge from more frontline ending VAWG and domestic abuse organisations.

The Home Office estimated the social and economic cost of domestic abuse in the year ending March 2017 was approximately £66 billion, with the emotional and physical harm accounting for approximately 70% of these costs<sup>38</sup>. Findings indicate that Rail to Refuge could ease these costs by reducing barriers to accessing support and providing the right support at the right time.

Literature also shows that the scheme could be replicated with wider forms of transport e.g. bus, trams and taxis to ensure the need for easily available transport to escape abuse is there for survivors.

Further growth of the scheme operations is also key for example development of data collection methods, finding out if/how accessible the scheme is to marginalised survivors, children and women travelling with children and developing accessibility for those without a smartphone and debit or credit card.

In conclusion, Rail to Refuge is likely to be preventing homicides, suicides and saving lives. The scheme is also enabling survivors to rebuild their lives.

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**38** £47 billion divided by £66 billion, x100.

Home Office, The economic and social cost of domestic abuse, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-economic-and-social-costs-of-domestic-abuse>, [accessed 9th November 2021].



# Recommendations for the future

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Rail to Refuge could cease to exist from April 2022 onwards, as the newly developed Great British Railways Transition Team absorbs functions of the RDG<sup>39</sup>. To ensure that adult and child survivors can access routes to safety at the time that they need it and with trusted support, as RDG moves to become part of Great British Railways Transition Team, **we request continuation of the Rail to Refuge scheme through long term sustainable funding via the Department for Transport.**

Additionally, keeping with good practices that have been identified, it is recommended paper tickets are always available, alongside e-tickets, and bookings made by ending VAWG and domestic abuse organisations to ensure appropriate safety and support systems.

**To build on its potential and to further develop the scheme, this report recommends implementation of the below, and requests funding support to do so.**

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- ▶ Any future development of the scheme should centre the needs of Black and minoritised women, disabled women and LGBT+ survivors, and the expertise of the led by and for organisations. To achieve this, we recommend:
    - consultation with led by and for Black and minoritised women, LGBT+ survivor and disabled women's organisations to understand possible improvements to the scheme.
  - consultation with Black and minoritised women, disabled women and LGBT+ survivors who have used the scheme, and those who have not, to identify if and how the scheme could be developed further.
  - ▶ Extension beyond the membership of WAFE, WWA, SWA and Imkaan, allowing non-member services listed on the Routes to Support database<sup>40</sup> to request access to Rail to Refuge.

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<sup>39</sup> Great British Railways: The Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, May 2021, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/987739/gbr-williams-shapps-plan-for-rail-print.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/987739/gbr-williams-shapps-plan-for-rail-print.pdf), pg49.

<sup>40</sup> [Routes to Support](#) is the UK violence against women and girls directory of services and refuge vacancies, run in partnership by Scottish Women's Aid, Welsh Women's Aid, Women's Aid Federation of England and Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland. Routes to Support is part funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The resource provides violence against women and girls services with 24- hour access to information that supports their work. Sophisticated search tools can identify the most suitable service for the women, children and men they are supporting. It facilitates referrals through national, regional and local helplines as well as between local services, and has been an integral part of the work of the domestic abuse sector since its creation in 2003.

- ▶ Regular Domestic Abuse Awareness training, delivered by specialist women's and led by and for ending VAWG/DA organisations, for managers and frontline customer service staff at train operating companies who are coming into contact with survivors e.g. staff taking bookings over the phone and in person, supporting customers at train stations.
- ▶ Improve the quality of administrative data, qualitative data and demographic data collected. This will allow better monitoring of usage, impact of the scheme and learnings on successes and gaps.
- ▶ Work with the Department for Transport to pilot the scheme with bus, taxi, tram, coach and ferry companies. This is especially pertinent in Wales and Scotland as many areas are not accessible via rail.
- ▶ Partnerships with women's organisations internationally to support their exploration of similar schemes locally.
- ▶ Connections made with other schemes across the transport sector working on safer public transport for women and girls.





# Appendix 1: Partner organisations

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**Women's Aid Federation of England** - Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. We are a federation of over 170 organisations which provide just under 300 local lifesaving services to women and children across England. For 47 years we have campaigned on behalf of our members and survivors to shape policy and practice, and to raise awareness of domestic abuse. We hold the largest national data set on domestic abuse, and use research and evidence to inform all of our work. Our support services, which include our Live Chat Helpline, the Survivors' Forum, the No Woman Turned Away Project, the Survivor's Handbook, Love Respect (our dedicated website for young people in their first relationships), the national Domestic Abuse Directory and our advocacy projects, help thousands of women and children every year.

**Imkaan** - Imkaan is a UK-based, Black feminist organisation. We are the only national umbrella women's organisation dedicated to addressing violence against Black and minoritised women and girls i.e. women and girls which are defined in policy terms as Black and 'Minority Ethnic' (BME). The organisation holds over two decades of experience of working around issues such as domestic violence, forced marriage and 'honour-based' violence. We work at local, national and international level, and in partnership with a range of organisations, to improve policy and practice responses to Black and minoritised women and girls. Imkaan works with its members to represent the expertise and perspectives of frontline, specialist and dedicated Black and minoritised women's organisations that work to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. Imkaan delivers a unique package of support which includes: quality assurance; accredited training and peer education; sustainability support to frontline Black and minoritised organisations; and facilitation of space for community engagement and development.

**Welsh Women's Aid** - Welsh Women's Aid is the national charity in Wales working to end domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women. We are a federation of specialist organisations in Wales (working as part of a UK network of services) that provide lifesaving services to survivors of violence and abuse – women, men, children, families – and deliver a range of innovative preventative services in local communities. We have been at the forefront of shaping coordinated community responses and practice in Wales since we were established in 1978. We do this by campaigning for change and providing advice, consultancy, support and training to deliver policy and service improvements for survivors, families and communities. We deliver services including the [Live Fear Free Helpline](#) funded by Welsh Government, and a [National Training Service](#). We also deliver the Wales National Quality Service Standards (NQSS), a national accreditation framework for domestic abuse specialist services in Wales (supported by the Welsh Government) as part of a UK suite of integrated accreditation systems and frameworks. More information on the NQSS can be found [here](#). Our success is founded on making sure the experiences and needs of survivors are central to all we do.

**Scottish Women's Aid** - Scottish Women's Aid is the lead organisation in Scotland working towards the prevention of domestic abuse. We play a vital role coordinating, influencing and campaigning for effective responses to domestic abuse. We work with a network of 34 specialist local Women's Aid groups toward a shared vision of a Scotland where domestic abuse is not tolerated. Since we were set up in 1976 Scottish Women's Aid has been at the forefront of shaping responses to domestic abuse in Scotland. We are proud of the work that we do with a wide range of partners to achieve change here in Scotland, across the UK and internationally. We work with police and prosecutors, politicians, the children's sector, other agencies and the public in Scotland. Visit our [Working For Change](#) page to find out more about what we do here and across the world.

**Rail Delivery Group** - The Rail Delivery Group (RDG) brings together the companies that run Britain's railway into a single team with one goal - to deliver a better railway for you and your community.

All the passenger and freight rail companies are members of the RDG, as well as Network Rail and HS2 (see the [full list of our licensed and associate members](#)). RDG provides services and support to enable its members to succeed in transforming and delivering a successful railway, benefiting customers, taxpayers and the economy. RDG also provides support and give a voice to freight and passenger operators, as well as delivering important national ticketing, information and reservation services for passengers and staff on behalf of member companies.

# Appendix 2: Data tables

Note: The financial year of 2020/21 covers a time period of 11 and a half months from 13th April 2020 to 31st March 2021. The financial year of 2021/22 covers a time period of 5 and a half months from 1st April 2021 to 12th September 2021. Combined financial years cover the complete time period Rail to Refuge has been operating.

**Table 1:** Number of survivors and children accessing Rail to Refuge

Financial Year	Adults	Children	TOTAL
2020/21	1002	374	1376
2021/22	613	274	889
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1615</b>	<b>650</b>	<b>2265</b>

**Table 2:** Average number of survivors and children helped to safety each day

	Adults	Children	TOTAL
2020/21	2.9	1.1	3.9*
2021/22	3.7	1.7	5.4
<b>13th April 2020 – 12th September 2021</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>4.4</b>

\* This number came from 2.9 and 1.1 being rounded up from 2.85 and 1.07. As a result, 3.9 came from the number 2.85 plus 1.07.

**Table 3:** Number of survivors who would not have travelled if the journey was not paid for.

Bookings made	Yes	No	Not sure	Didn't Answer
1642	21.2% (348)	64.4% (1058)	7.0% (130)	6.5% (106)



**Table 4:** Type of ticket (data period: 24th November 2020 – 12th September 2021. Approximately 10 months worth of data)

	Number of bookings made	Number of adults and children travelling
Paper ticket	41.5% (410)	41.7% (603)
e-ticket	57.0% (563)	57.0% (824)
Missing data	1.4% (14)	1.2% (18)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100% (987)</b>	<b>100% (1445)</b>

**Table 5:** Member usage\*\*

	Number of organisations that have used RTR
Women's Aid Federation of England	79
Welsh Womens Aid	13
Scottish Womens Aid	18
Imkaan	9
Respect	1
Non-members	28
Missing data	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>156</b>

\*\* The sample size of this data is 1114 bookings made from 5th October 2020 to 12th September 2021. This is because the recording of service name was added from 5th October 2020.

**Note:** Numbers per second tier organisation cannot be compared with one another as each holds a different number of members. This is due to differences in geographical size of areas covered and inequality of the funding landscape, most particularly experienced by led by and for Black and minoritised organisations supported by Imkaan.

*Rail to Refuge: Impact Briefing*

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For help and support, you can access Women's Aid's direct services, including our **Live Chat**, the **Survivors' Forum** and the **Survivor's Handbook**, at [www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support)