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Unprotected: Migrant Women, VAWA, and a Deficit of Support Under Trump 2.0

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Abstract

Wavering immigration status is known to exacerbate vulnerability to violence, particularly for women. In the United States, laws like the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) exist to support battered migrant women. However, accessing these protections often requires navigating a complex web of bureaucratic hurdles that may be difficult for someone new to the country's legal system. Non-governmental organizations, particularly those that promote the rights of immigrants, provide guidance and representation for this population. Under the current Trump administration, funding for many of these NGOs has been threatened, leaving them uncertain about their future and ability to continue serving those in need. This paper explores how recent Trump-era policies, especially the defunding of key NGOs and state departments, directly harm migrant women seeking protection under VAWA. It examines how reduced resource access intensifies formal and informal barriers to safety and legal aid. It also considers ongoing responses to these challenges and proposes policy recommendations to ensure continued support for migrant women despite shifting federal priorities.

Dedication

Dedicado a todas las sobrevivientes de la violencia, cuya resiliencia y valentía continúan iluminando el camino hacia la justicia.

Dedicated to all survivors of violence, whose resilience and courage continue to light the path toward justice.

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Survivor of Sexual and Domestic Abuse in Chicago Faces Deportation

South Side Weekly May 29, 2023

Migrant woman sexually abused while on the search for housing highlights the vulnerability for attacks, experts say

Chicago Tribune July 24, 2024

Eyes shut, computer off, the room spinning. I sat at my desk attempting to process the countless headlines, failing to grasp the gruesome realities faced by migrant women—my mother’s age, my age, and even younger. The words on the screen felt sanitized, as if someone had rinsed the pain and terror out of them. “Vulnerable.” “Abused.” “Exploited.” These headlines were somehow palatable. They flattened stories that should gut you, reducing lives to numbers and statistics— abuse rates, percentages of survivors—as if that alone could capture the horror. Forgotten in this cold arithmetic were the women and girls whose lives were unraveling. And yet the language dulled the impact, making it easier to scroll past and detach from a reality too brutal to bear in full.

For the millions of women and girls who have recently immigrated to the U.S. or have lived here their whole lives with wavering immigration status, this reality does not dissipate with the closing of a computer, the deletion of a tab, or the turning off of a phone. Instead, this reality follows them, lurking in the margins of their daily lives. It follows them into the kitchen and the bedroom, the silence after a slammed door. Without legal protection or stable immigration status, these women find themselves in a constant state of vulnerability, where they are often dependent on their abusers for shelter, food, or the false promise of safety.

The fear these women carry is constant. Their choices are shaped and often restricted by that very fear, especially in a country where legal status and limited resources can quickly

become barriers to safety and determinants of isolation. And yet, these women and girls push their fear aside, driven by the hope of building a better life for themselves and their families. But is their hope and determination enough? Will a nation that once promised freedom and opportunity for all rise to protect them? Or will it allow their immigration status to deepen their vulnerability to violence and limit their ability to seek safety when they need it most?

“It can’t be,” I want to think, finally opening my eyes and snapping out of the trance I had slipped into. My mind turns to the organizations that might support these women, offering legal aid, shelter, or even help covering necessities. I think back to my time at CCLS, where I interned the summer after my first year in college, and to the countless unaccompanied girls, undocumented women, and their families we worked with. For a fleeting second, I feel comforted by the thought that someone, somewhere, is helping them.

The comfort is short-lived. Even as these organizations work tirelessly to fill the gaps left by federal policy and indifference, their capacity to support the most vulnerable is increasingly under threat. Many of these organizations play a crucial role in helping survivors navigate protections under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), one of the few legal lifelines available to undocumented migrant women fleeing abuse. Since January 20, 2025, the Trump administration has moved to threaten or cut funding for many of the organizations and institutions that battered migrant women rely on. While these cuts are recent, the fear they generate is immediate, and the consequences could be devastating for survivors who depend on VAWA to seek safety and justice.

In this paper, I aim to explore how the various policies recently implemented by the Trump administration, particularly the potential defunding of essential non-governmental organizations and key state departments, will have a direct and harmful impact on migrant women seeking protection under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). I plan to examine

how losing funding for these vital resources will exacerbate informal and formal barriers for these women in accessing legal support, shelter, and safety. I will also look at what is currently being done to address these challenges and offer policy recommendations that could help ensure these women receive the protection they desperately need, despite the constant changes in federal priorities and the lack of adequate support from the current administration.

VAWA: Federal Legal Protections for Immigrant Victims of Abuse

In 1994, Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act 1994. VAWA is a comprehensive set of laws that are designed to end violence against women and has been reauthorized in both 2000 and 2005. VAWA 2000 and VAWA 2005 reauthorized the grant programs created by the original VAWA. They expanded the initial mandate to address not only domestic violence, but sexual assault and stalking as well, and specifically considered the needs of underserved populations.¹ One of these populations was battered immigrants. This expansion of protection “allowed abused noncitizen spouses to ‘self-petition’ for themselves and/or their abused children for lawful permanent resident (LPR) status independently of their sponsoring spouses”².

In simpler terms, VAWA is a federal law that provides various forms of relief for women who are victims of abuse. In the case of undocumented migrant women, VAWA creates a special pathway to lawful immigration status for those who have faced or face intimate partner violence, sexual assault, or stalking. This is particularly crucial for victims who would otherwise have to rely on their abusers to file a petition for them. By allowing survivors to “self-petition” for legal

¹ About OVW fact sheet. Accessed May 19, 2025. <https://www.justice.gov/archive/ovw/docs/about-ovw-factsheet.pdf>.

² Kandel, William A. Immigration provisions of the violence against women act ..., 2013. <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R42477>.

status, VAWA empowers them to seek protection and stability without the fear of having their immigration status controlled by their abuser. This means that, with the protection of VAWA, migrant women who are being abused can begin to rebuild their lives, free from the constant threat of deportation or harm.

Gender-Based Violence and the Migrant Experience

Before we can fully grasp the consequences of recent legislation and its potential impact on migrant women seeking VAWA protections, we must first understand the forms of violence recognized under the law, the specific circumstances in which immigrant women are protected, and why migrant women in the U.S. with uncertain legal status are especially vulnerable to abuse.

The Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), created specifically to implement VAWA and subsequent legislation, provides the following definition for domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking, all of which are instances of violence against women under which migrant women can seek protection. **Domestic Violence** “can be defined as a pattern of abusive behavior that is used by an intimate partner to gain or maintain power and control over the other intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone.”³ **Sexual Assault** “can be defined as any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs by force or without consent of the recipient of the unwanted sexual activity. Falling under the definition of sexual assault is sexual activity such as forced sexual intercourse, sodomy, child molestation, incest, fondling, and attempted rape. It

³ About OVW fact sheet.

includes sexual acts against people who are unable to consent either due to age or lack of capacity.”⁴ **Dating Violence** “is defined as violence committed by a person who is or has been in a social relationship of a romantic or intimate nature with the victim; and where the existence of such a relationship shall be determined based on a consideration of the following factors: the length of the relationship, the type of relationship, and the frequency of interaction between the persons involved in the relationship.”⁵ **Stalking** “can be defined as a pattern of repeated and unwanted attention, harassment, contact, or any other course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear.”⁶

While migration itself does not cause violence against women, it often exacerbates existing vulnerabilities. For example, employment in the informal economy, language barriers, and dependence on a partner’s immigration status can all strip women of protection and agency. These conditions not only heighten the risk of violence but also silence survivors thus, leaving many without access to legal support or trusted pathways to report abuse. As a result, the violence they experience is often overlooked, unaddressed, and allowed to persist in the shadows.

Bureaucratic Hurdles of VAWA

For migrant women, the pathway to safety, particularly the petitioning of VAWA, is highly complex and unique to each case. It involves many different stakeholders and departments, such as the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

⁴ About OVW fact sheet.

⁵ About OVW fact sheet.

⁶ About OVW fact sheet.

The process of petitioning under VAWA begins with gathering evidence of abuse, such as police reports or medical records. It continues with completing form I-360 (Petition for Amerasian, Widow(er), or Special Immigrant), submitting the application to US Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) under DHS, and culminates in waiting for the decision of USCIS, which may either approve or refuse an application.⁷

If the application is approved, the doors to protection open, and individuals may be eligible to apply for a work permit (eventually a green card), health insurance, section 8 housing, and overall federal assistance. However, it is worth noting that all of these services require applications of their own and have eligibility requirements, which may vary from state to state. For example, states can decide who is a “qualified alien” and whether the applicant meets their definition of “qualified alien”, such that they can receive federal support like Medicaid or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).⁸

The Role of NGOs in Protecting Battered Migrant Women

As you can imagine, petitioning under VAWA and applying for federal assistance is complicated, with complex and unfamiliar bureaucratic hurdles like those mentioned above. For migrant women who are already vulnerable, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, these barriers can be overwhelming, making it even harder to escape violence and get the help they need. According to Roberta Villalón, author of *Violence Against Latina Immigrants: Citizenship, Inequality, and Community*, these obstacles can be divided into formal and informal

⁷ “Abused Spouses, Children and Parents.” USCIS, January 24, 2025. <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/abused-spouses-children-and-parents>.

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⁸ (OCR), Office for Civil Rights. “Domestic Violence Fact Sheet.” HHS.gov, August 10, 2021. <https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/special-topics/national-origin/domestic-violence/index.html>.

barriers⁹, both of which have become even more severe during the Trump administration due to restrictive immigration policies, heightened enforcement, and reductions in social service funding. **Formal barriers** include the structural, bureaucratic hurdles built into official procedures.¹⁰ Under Trump, policies like increased evidentiary demands, longer processing times, and narrowed access to public benefits have all made it more difficult for women to petition under VAWA. **Informal barriers** include language obstacles, fear of deportation, mistrust of government agencies, and lack of reliable information.¹¹

This is where NGOs step in. Organizations like Catholic Legal Services (CCLS) in Miami and the Jenesse Center in East Los Angeles help address these barriers in several ways. They offer legal representation and translation services, assisting survivors to prepare complete and compelling VAWA applications. They mediate interactions with agencies like USCIS and HHS, reducing confusion and delays. As mentioned earlier, they assist women in applying for federal support and provide trustworthy information through initiatives like “Know Your Rights” campaigns. These organizations also collaborate with other vital stakeholders, using their networks to connect survivors with additional resources and services.

It is clear that without the intervention of NGOs, many survivors would have to navigate the system alone, with little understanding of their rights or the processes involved. For migrant women, this support can mean the difference between remaining trapped in abuse or building a safer, more stable future.

Methodology

⁹ Villalón, Roberta. *Violence against latina immigrants: Citizenship, inequality, and community*. New York: New York University Press, 2016.

¹⁰ Villalón, Roberta

¹¹ Villalón, Roberta

To understand how the recent policies implemented by the Trump administration, particularly the potential defunding of essential non-governmental organizations and key state departments, will exacerbate informal and formal barriers to protection for migrant women, I examine both top-down policy shifts at the federal level and their ground-level impacts. Using an interview with Maitte Barrientos of Catholic Legal Charities, funding data, and reports on shrinking safety nets, I trace how cuts to resources exacerbate wait times for Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) claims, reduce access to legal support, and foster an atmosphere of fear and scarcity, thus echoing the hostile environment that defined Trump's first term in 2017.

State-Level Defunding and Its Impact on Migrant Services

As mentioned previously, there are three main departments interconnected with VAWA protections, petitioning, and the allocation of services. These departments include:

1. *The Department of Justice*: Home to the Office on Violence Against Women, which implements the provisions of VAWA and provides national leadership on issues of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.¹²
2. *The Department of Health & Human Services*: This department runs several programs providing shelter care, health services, and placements with nonprofit organizations for individuals who have applied for U-Visas or T-Visas under VAWA.¹³

¹² "Abused Spouses, Children and Parents." USCIS, January 24, 2025. <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/abused-spouses-children-and-parents>.

¹³ Immigration Relief for Vulnerable Populations: Human Trafficking, Crime Victims, Domestic Violence and Child Abuse. Accessed May 19, 2025. <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/presentations/T-U-VAWA-relief.pdf>.

3. *The Department of Homeland Security*: Through its agency, USCIS, this department processes VAWA petitions, adjudicates eligibility, and grants immigration benefits.¹⁴

Yet, under the current administration, these departments are facing layoffs, heightened scrutiny, and funding cuts, which have significantly impacted their ability to provide essential services, as well as to allocate funding to organizations through grants and other support.

For instance, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has been forced to lay off approximately 2,600 employees since Trump took office. On March 27, 2025, HHS also announced a sweeping restructuring plan under the "Department of Government Efficiency" Workforce Optimization Initiative, which will eliminate about 10,000 additional full-time employees. This downsizing — reducing HHS's workforce from 82,000 to 62,000 — is framed as a cost-saving measure aimed at streamlining operations. However, it also consolidates 28 divisions into just 15 and cuts the number of regional offices by half, centralizing key agencies that serve vulnerable populations, such as the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), into a new entity called the Administration for a Healthy America (AHA). While officials claim critical programs like Medicare and Medicaid will be protected, these changes are likely to severely disrupt access to health services, mental health care, and shelter programs — services that migrant women victims of abuse particularly rely on.

Similarly, the Department of Homeland Security has reduced its workforce by at least 405 employees, including 50 from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which

¹⁴ "Immigration Options for Victims of Crime: Homeland Security." U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Accessed May 19, 2025. [https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-options-victims-crime#:~:text=Violence%20Against%20Women%20Act%20\(VAWA,and%2Dparents%20for%20more%20information](https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-options-victims-crime#:~:text=Violence%20Against%20Women%20Act%20(VAWA,and%2Dparents%20for%20more%20information).

plays a crucial role in processing VAWA petitions. Already, the median processing time for an I-360 petition — the form required to obtain lawful permanent residency under VAWA — has increased from 3.1 months in the last fiscal year to 3.7 months in the current fiscal year (Figure 1).¹⁵ Given that we are only halfway through the fiscal year, there is serious concern that these wait times will continue to climb, further delaying relief for survivors who are already in precarious and dangerous situations.

While less impacted by direct layoffs, the Department of Justice has recently (literally moments ago, as I write this on April 24, 2025) cut grants totaling \$811 million. According to a Reuters report, the affected grants include those intended to support sexual assault survivors, anti-human trafficking programs, and juvenile justice initiatives.¹⁶ This is particularly significant, as it represents an 18% decrease from the \$4.4 billion in total funding allocated during the fiscal year of 2023.¹⁷

¹⁵ Processing Times. Accessed May 19, 2025. <https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/>.

¹⁶ Eisler, Peter, and Sarah Lynch. US cancels hundreds of grants for police, crime victims, justice dept documents show | reuters, April 23, 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-justice-department-cancels-hundreds-grants-police-crime-victims-2025-04-23/>.

¹⁷ Roebuck, Sarah. “DOJ Cancels Hundreds of Grants for Police, Crime Prevention Initiatives.” Police1, April 25, 2025. <https://www.police1.com/police-grant-center/doj-cancels-hundreds-of-grants-for-police-crime-prevention-initiatives>.

Form	Form Description	Classification or Basis for Filing	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025*
I-90	Application to Replace Permanent Resident Card	Initial issuance, replacement or renewal	8.3	5.2	1.2	9.1	11	0.9
I-102	Application for Replacement/Initial Nonimmigrant Arrival/Departure Record	Initial issuance or replacement of a Form I-94	3.9	4.0	7.8	5.2	3.6	2.0
I-129	Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker	Nonimmigrant Petition (Premium filed)	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.4
I-129	Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker	Nonimmigrant Petition (non Premium filed)	2.3	1.8	2.3	2.5	2.2	3.8
I-129F	Petition for Alien Fiancée)	All Classifications	4.6	8.0	12.1	13.9	8.5	5.7
I-130	Petition for Alien Relative	Adoptions	22.3	27.7	35.4	49.2	37.3	45.6
I-130	Petition for Alien Relative	Immediate Relative	8.3	10.2	10.3	11.8	11.7	14.6
I-131	Application for Travel Document	Advance Parole Document	4.6	7.7	7.3	5.8	5.9	6.4
I-131	Application for Travel Document	Parole in Place	4.8	4.9	4.7	5.4	4.1	4.2
I-131*	Application for Travel Document	Travel Document	4.0	7.2	10.6	15.9	14.3	13.6
I-140	Immigrant Petition for Alien Workers	Immigrant Petition (Premium filed)	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.7
I-140	Immigrant Petition for Alien Workers	Immigrant Petition (non Premium filed)	4.9	8.2	9.3	4.3	7.1	7.6
I-360	Petition for Amerasian, Widow(er), or Special Immigrant	Immigrant Petition (All Classifications)	11.4	5.5	8.4	6.8	3.1	3.7

Figure 1: Historical National Median Processing Time (In Months) for All USCIS Offices for I-360 Form

Shrinking Resources for Legal Aid and Social Services for Migrant Women

If at this point you are beginning to wonder how an immigrant woman, new to this country, unfamiliar with its legal system, facing abuse, and possibly caring for her family, can manage all of these changes happening around her, then you are asking the right questions. And you are likely standing on the right side of history. It is here that countless non-governmental organizations like Catholic Legal Services of Miami and the National Immigrant Justice Center in Chicago step in. These organizations provide essential legal support, connect women to emergency shelters, food services, and counseling, and guide them through the political shifts and barriers I outlined above. Without their help, many migrant women would face violence, legal confusion, and isolation with little to no support.

Sadly, many of these organizations, including those I have just mentioned, face severe budget cuts, forcing them to reduce their services or eliminate programs. These funding cuts are

especially harmful to immigrants with undefined legal status, particularly women, who depend on these groups for representation and help navigating their legal proceedings. Take, for example, the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC), which, in a statement released earlier this year,¹⁸ reported that its Immigration Court Helpdesk (ICH) at the Chicago Immigration Court received a stop-work order from the Department of Justice on January 23, 2025.

According to the NIJC “The Stop Work Order offered virtually no explanation, just a vague reference to the January 20, 2025 “Protecting the American People from Invasion” Executive Order, presumably indicating an unspecified desire to audit the Programs under that Executive Order.”¹⁹ This helpdesk located in the Pro Bono Room at the Chicago Immigration Court, provided free legal information to unrepresented immigrants since 2016, assisting dozens of people each week, many of whom were recent arrivals from Venezuela and other countries seeking asylum or legal protection.

NIJC’s policy director Azadeh Erfani explained that the helpdesk “worked collaboratively and with the full support of immigration judges and court staff... [and] filled a vital gap as many people cannot afford to retain an attorney.” She emphasized that the desk helped prevent deportation orders, identified urgent filing deadlines, explained legal options, and ensured immigrants had the information they needed to make informed decisions. Removing such a program, she warned, “is unconscionable at a time where the administration is conducting mass raids and further swelling an immigration court backlog nearing four million people”.²⁰

¹⁸ Cullen, Tara. “DOJ’s Forced Pause of Vital Legal Programs for Immigrants Cuts off a Lifeline for People Navigating a Complex and Punitive Immigration System.” National Immigrant Justice Center, January 28, 2025. <https://immigrantjustice.org/press-releases/dojs-forced-pause-vital-legal-programs-immigrants-cuts-lifeline-people-navigating>.

¹⁹ Appelbaum, Adina. Case 1:25-cv-00298-RDM document 53-1 filed 04/14/ ..., April 14, 2025. <https://amicacenter.org/app/uploads/2025/04/53-1.pdf>.

²⁰ Cullen, Tara

Yet, organizations like NIJC in Chicago are not the only ones facing devastating funding cuts and program shutdowns. It is happening all over the United States. In Miami, for example, Catholic Legal Services is grappling with similar challenges. Maitte Barrientos, the Senior Litigation Attorney at Catholic Legal Services, has witnessed these changes firsthand. I had the privilege of interning with her a few years ago, when the political climate felt uncertain but not as openly hostile as it is today. Recently, I had the opportunity to interview her again three years later, and the contrast between then and now could not be starker.

When I first worked with Barrientos in 2022, the focus was expanding access to legal protections for immigrant survivors of violence, building community trust, and fighting for greater protections under existing immigration law. Today, much of her work has shifted to triaging the damage, such as helping women who are caught between dwindling resources, rising fear, and an increasingly unforgiving legal system. Catholic Legal Services, like many NGOs across the country, now must do more with less, even as the need for their services has never been greater.

Barrientos opened up about how recent state and federal cuts have hit Catholic Legal Services where it hurts most. When I asked how CCLS had been impacted, she didn't hesitate. "Yes! We lost all of our legal orientation program funding," she said, underscoring just how essential those programs were for helping immigrants understand and navigate the legal system. Without that foundation, the consequences for survivors of violence are immediate and devastating. "It will affect them directly if we can't help survivors of GBV and/or DV apply for protections such as VAWA or U visas," she explained. These protections are often the only way for immigrant women and children to find safety and stability. Without access to legal aid, many are left trapped, preferring "to be in the US suffering in silence than completely at risk of larger harm back in their home country."

But this is not all. The impact of defunding reaches far beyond individual programs. It disrupts the ability of organizations like CCLS to function at even the most basic level. When I asked about the broader implications, Barrientos was clear: “Absolutely, without our federal grants, we have had huge financial cuts, and so it calls into question hiring and salaries. How will we get the work done if we don’t have the budget to hire/pay attorneys?” This simple question cuts to the heart of the crisis: there can be no legal aid without lawyers. No safety without staff. No justice without infrastructure. And all of that, every bit of it, depends on funding.

In light of this reality, organizations continue to fight for resources, adapt to budget cuts, and innovate new ways to serve not only migrant women but the broader immigrant community. Countless immigrant rights organizations have filed federal lawsuits aimed at blocking the Trump administration's termination of critical legal orientation programs for immigrants, such as those at CCLS and NIJC. “Our office, along with other nonprofits and private attorneys, have stepped up and filed some federal lawsuits, class actions included, against the federal government for their due process and human rights violations,” explains Barrientos. Similarly, NIJC, along with eight other organizations, filed a renewed Temporary Restraining Order (TRO), which is a short-term court order that temporarily halts a specific government action until a formal hearing can be held. This renewed TRO is part of a broader lawsuit against the Department of Justice (DOJ), Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem, and other defendants, originally filed by the same organizations in January 2025, challenging a stop-work order impacting these same legal access programs.²¹

²¹ Cullen, Tara.

Aside from fighting for resources through legal action, these organizations have been forced to make do with what little non-governmental funding they have, often keeping programs alive by a thread. For organizations like CCLS, this has meant prioritizing essential services such as education and basic needs. As Barrientos explained, “We keep our community educated through presentations and community outreach. We have a few grants that were not part of our federal funding that we have maintained to work in partnership with homeless shelters that house migrants.”

However, these community partnerships and organizational restructuring can only go so far. The reality is that NGOs like CCLS and NIJC are being stretched to their limits and forced to prioritize only the most basic services to stay afloat. To create lasting change, we need more than reactive, temporary fixes that act as band-aids for Trump’s inhumane policies. Real change requires systemic policy reform, sustained federal funding, and a strong private-sector commitment to addressing the formal and informal barriers migrant women face. This begins with the restoration of grants and a shift away from overreliance on unstable government funding toward a more sustainable, diversified funding model that includes private foundations, community support, and alternative revenue sources. On top of that, systemic policy reform remains essential, including restoring federal grants, expanding access to legal aid, and strengthening outreach through multilingual education and “Know Your Rights” campaigns. Lastly, increased accountability and oversight must ensure protections for migrant survivors are enforced consistently. Without this dual approach combining private sector engagement and targeted policy action, these organizations will continue to struggle, and migrant women will remain vulnerable.

While these recommendations may seem like a low priority for many organizations struggling to survive with limited resources in the current political climate, they are essential.

Both NGOs and public institutions affected by funding cuts must work together to implement these changes. Only through this collaboration can we build a stronger system capable of withstanding political instability like the challenges we face now under the Trump administration.

The women behind the statistics, the ones whose stories too often go unheard or hidden behind our closed computer, or turned off phone, deserve more than temporary fixes or weakened support networks. Their safety depends on a resilient infrastructure that can withstand shifting policies and funding cuts. Without that, hope and determination alone will not be enough.

It is on us to ensure that legal protections and resources do not become casualties of political agendas but remain steadfast lifelines for migrant women seeking safety and justice.

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