

FACT SHEET: THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is a critical law in America's fight to end domestic abuse, sexual assault, and related gender-based violence. Its programs help survivors of violence reach hotlines and crisis centers, access legal aid, and hold perpetrators accountable. Although the vast majority of those who are protected by VAWA are women, its programs are equally available to everyone.

Congress enacted VAWA in 1994 with strong bipartisan support. The law must be renewed every five years, providing a critical opportunity for legislators to recommit to ending violence against women.

How does VAWA protect immigrant survivors of violence?

Congress recognized that immigrant survivors of violence face unique vulnerabilities to violence and barriers to seeking help. These may include language, education, culture, access to public services, isolation from family or other support networks, and familiarity with the system. Immigration status can also be a powerful tool in the hands of an abuser: perpetrators commonly use their victims' fear of deportation to manipulate and control them. Therefore, in addition to its broad protections, VAWA includes additional provisions for immigrant survivors.

- The VAWA "self-petition" allows an immigrant whose abusive spouse could have petitioned for her to gain legal status on her own. The confidentiality of the process is critical, as victims often face retaliation from their abusers when attempting to leave their relationships. Because of the exhaustive and rigorous adjudication process, [fewer than half](#) of applicants succeed.
- A victim of violence may apply for a U visa if a law enforcement agency certifies that she has cooperated with the investigation or prosecution of a crime. The annual cap of 10,000 U visas that may be given is inadequate to meet the needs of victims, including survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Though the number of applications received each year has [decreased](#), the low cap means the backlog has grown and survivors now wait for years to get a visa and reunite with their children.
- The T visa is a critical form of relief that protects victims who are in the United States as a result of human trafficking. The T visa often provides a safety valve for victims who wish to report critical information to U.S. authorities attempting to combat transnational trafficking. Without the T visa, roughly [500 victims](#) per year would fear deportation to their home countries, where traffickers' networks often await them.

We seek reauthorization of VAWA with modest improvements so that Congress may commit to protecting all survivors of violence in the U.S.

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Tahirih is a national, nonpartisan advocacy and direct services organization that has assisted over 25,000 immigrant survivors of gender-based violence over the past 22 years. The immigrants we serve have endured abuses such as rape, domestic violence, and human trafficking, and are seeking protection under our laws so that they may break the cycle of violence for themselves and their children.