

**solace**

# **The Solace pledge to end violence against women and girls in London**



**[solacewomensaid.org](https://solacewomensaid.org)**

Solace Women's Aid is a charity registered in England & Wales.  
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## Introduction

The scale of domestic abuse inflicted on survivors during the pandemic and the recent policing and victim support issues raised by the death of Sarah Everard have highlighted the need for the next Mayor of London to prioritise ending violence against women and girls across the City.

We are asking Mayoral and Greater London Assembly (GLA) candidates to sign our four pledges to demonstrate their commitment to achieving this goal so that all women and girls can live free from the fear and reality of male violence and flourish in this great City.



## Mayoral strategy to end violence against women and girls 2021-24

**The Government has delinked domestic abuse from other forms of violence against women and girls, evident in their Domestic Abuse Bill and the separation of their planned domestic abuse and cross-Government VAWG strategies.** This has the effect of deprioritising rape and sexual violence services and support for survivors of forms of VAWG disproportionately experienced by Black and minoritised women, as well as not seeing the links between the forms of violence. The Government has also made the Domestic Abuse Bill gender neutral, reflecting a trend of recent years that has catastrophic effects such as the decommissioning of specialist VAWG services. The Domestic Abuse Bill will enshrine new duties for the GLA to commission domestic abuse services across London.

The death of Sarah Everard in March this year has been a catalyst for women and girls sharing their experiences of harassment and abuse and the failures of the institutions that should have kept them safe - including the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and schools. According to reports in the Observer newspaper, 594 sexual misconduct allegations were made against MPS employees between 2012 and 2018, of which 119 were upheld<sup>1</sup>.

Meanwhile, convictions for rape and sexual offences in London were lower in 2020 than they were in 2015<sup>2</sup>. This is in a year in which domestic abuse spiraled

in the conditions created by lockdown. Referrals to our refuges increased by 53% over the last year and calls to the MPS increased by 11%<sup>3</sup> yet London's prosecution rate for domestic abuse is the worst in the country<sup>4</sup>. The Mayor of London's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)'s rape review, reporting in June 2019, found the single biggest cause of the attrition of these cases progressing through the criminal justice system was victim withdrawal.

*Everyone's Invited* has lifted the lid on structural misogyny and the VAWG that young women are subjected to in and outside of schools<sup>5</sup>. We run specialist training for young people in line with the Government's Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum which addresses all forms of VAWG and healthy relationships. A whole school approach is key to ensuring that teachers, non-teaching staff, governors, parents and young people have a shared understanding and agreement on appropriate behaviour and to survivors knowing they will be believed and supported if they report harassment or abuse.

The VAWG strategy should also be linked to any work to tackle serious youth violence and a public health approach. The GLA Strategic Crime Analysis Team found that over a third of the female victims of serious youth violence were subject to domestic violence and abuse in 2018/19<sup>6</sup>.

### We are calling on mayoral candidates to commit to:

Develop and implement a strategy to end violence against women and girls for 2021-24, encompassing and not delinked from domestic abuse, with specific commitments that the strategy will:

- Invest in work to prevent VAWG across London including training and education resources for schools to support children and young people affected by VAWG;
- Work with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to increase transparency over allegations of VAWG levelled at serving officers and to rebuild survivors' trust in the MPS, particularly Black and minoritised women, lesbian and bisexual women, trans women, working class women and Deaf and disabled women who are already less likely to report VAWG crimes, and introduce targets to reduce victim attrition in reported domestic abuse and sexual violence cases; and
- Join up with any violence reduction strategy acknowledging the links between serious youth violence, gangs and knife crime and violence against women.



# A safe city for migrant women

**Migrant women with insecure immigration status and women with no recourse to public funds are some of the most vulnerable women because their immigration status can be deliberately exploited by perpetrators and their access to support is limited.** Many are reluctant, with good reason, to report their abuse to authorities for fear of immigration enforcement. The report on a super complaint about national policing raised by Liberty and Southall Black Sisters found inconsistencies in police practice and a lack of clarity in policy<sup>7</sup>.

In the emergency Covid-19 refuge set up and run by Solace in partnership with Southall Black Sisters, half of all referrals that were turned away between May

and November 2020 were due to lack of provision for women with no recourse to public funds; despite a modest but hard-won fund for 'ring-fenced' spaces. These women are not eligible for local authority housing support and so face the choice between sleeping rough and returning to their abuser.

One benefit of the emergency refuge model is that places are wholly funded making it easier to support women with no recourse to public funds to make a domestic violence destitution concession application and/ or support them to regularise their migration status.

## We are calling on mayoral candidates to commit to:

Make London a safe city for migrant survivors by:

- Commissioning specialist support for survivors with no recourse to public funds so they are not forced to choose between abuse or destitution, including wholly funded places with allocations for immigration support and intensive resettlement support;
- Immediately halting data sharing between the Metropolitan Police Service and the Home Office on victims of VAWG in line with the recommendation made by the report of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, the College of Policing and the Independent Office for Police Conduct<sup>8</sup>, so that migrant women can be confident they can report VAWG without fear of immigration enforcement; and
- Publicising the fact across London and translated to support survivors from all communities to report abuse and to deter perpetrators from using anyone's insecure immigration status as a mechanism of control.

# Fairer funding

**Contracts for delivering VAWG services are now routinely awarded through competitive tendering models and usually for between one and three years.**

Competitive tendering favours large non-specialist organisations with the capacity to write and submit numerous bids which undercut the bids of specialist services. It disadvantages specialist services and in particular many of the smaller organisations we work in partnership with to provide specialist expertise, because they do not have the capacity to submit multiple funding bids and because they provide services by community need rather than covering a geographical area<sup>9</sup>.

Large non-specialists including housing associations and non-VAWG charities tend to offer services at lower costs in the short-term, though provide poorer value for money in the long-term and risk a race to the bottom in terms of the long-term quality services survivors need. The short-term funding approach also leaves survivors and staff with uncertainty from one year to the next, which is particularly problematic when working with people who have experienced trauma and need stability to build trust and recover. This has enormous knock on effects to health and social care as well as specialist organisations who then have to provide further support as the large non-specialists are not able to.

## We are calling on mayoral candidates to commit to:

Fairer funding practices for VAWG by:

- Moving away from competitive tendering to a value-based grant funding model and issue grant agreements for at least three years with extensions to five where possible to ensure a sustainable specialist VAWG sector for London; An example of best practice was the 2019 MOPAC fund of £3 million for grants to grassroots organisations within the VAWG sector, which MOPAC lobbied hard to secure.
- Tackling the gendered nature of VAWG by commissioning services that are run by and for women; and
- Meeting the needs of Black and minoritised women, Deaf and disabled women, LGBT+ survivors by providing ring-fenced funding for services run by and for these communities.





# Safe, suitable, and affordable housing

**We are still seeing the impact of lockdowns on domestic abuse with fluctuations in our services mirroring the easing of restrictions, and demand continues to outstrip the availability of our services. The highest peak in calls to our advice line since March last year was in September 2020 when schools re-opened, 138% higher than the beginning of the first lockdown in April.**

The majority of women fleeing abuse move addresses at least twice, and when women leave crisis accommodation or move straight into temporary accommodation, they are increasingly housed in accommodation that is not fit for purpose. We have had to provide emergency funding to 200 families for basics like a fridge, microwave or children's beds<sup>11</sup>.

Experience of domestic abuse and violence is near universal among women who are sleeping rough or have experienced street homelessness - either as the cause of homelessness or while they are on the streets or both<sup>12</sup> - yet they often fall through the gaps of strategies to end homelessness and strategies to end violence against women.

Standard refuges are generally unsuitable for women with histories of sleeping rough, who have experiences of multiple forms of disadvantage which can result in higher mental health needs and

problematic substance use. Most short-term and supported accommodation for rough sleepers is not designed specifically for women, which means it is usually mixed sex and therefore unsuitable for women who have experienced and are often still at risk of male violence.

The Domestic Abuse Bill is expected to reach Royal Assent by the end of April 2021. Part 4 of the Bill brings in a legal duty on the GLA to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation. There is an opportunity to fill gaps in services across London and to improve the transition to temporary or long-term housing by making funding flexible.

# References

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/20/revealed-the-grim-list-of-sex-abuse-claims-against-metropolitan-police>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/assembly/sexual-offences-and-rape-cases-convictions>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.lse.ac.uk/News/Latest-news-from-LSE/2020/g-July-20/Big-rise-in-domestic-abuse-calls-during-lockdown>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/london-prosecution-rate-domestic-violence-worst-uk-cps-b924635.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.everyonesinvited.uk/read-testimonies-page-25>

<sup>6</sup> <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/a-public-health-approach-to-serious-youth-violence>

<sup>7</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/945314/safe-to-share-liberty-southall-black-sisters-super-complaint-policing-immigration-status.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/945314/safe-to-share-liberty-southall-black-sisters-super-complaint-policing-immigration-status.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/945314/safe-to-share-liberty-southall-black-sisters-super-complaint-policing-immigration-status.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/945314/safe-to-share-liberty-southall-black-sisters-super-complaint-policing-immigration-status.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-86-the-impact-of-changes-in-commissioning-and-funding-on-women-only-services.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/successful\\_commissioning\\_guide.pdf](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/successful_commissioning_guide.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.solacewomensaid.org/policy-campaigns/safe-housing-survivors>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.mungos.org/app/uploads/2018/10/Women-and-Rough-Sleeping-Report-2018-Summary.pdf>

## We are calling on mayoral candidates to commit to:

Ensure that survivors are able to secure long-term, safe and suitable housing, along with specialist support, to begin to recover and not be retraumatised by multiple moves in London by:

- Adopting a Whole Housing Approach to commissioning safe accommodation under the new Domestic Abuse Bill Duty including flexible funding as recommended by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA);
- Commission a mix of safe accommodation provided by specialist VAWG services including refuges, dispersed accommodation, sanctuary schemes and wholly funded places available for women with no recourse to public funds and funding; and
- Ring-fence a minimum of 5% of housing under new or existing affordable housing programmes and 20% of any funding for ending rough sleeping for survivors of VAWG, to ensure women made homeless through VAWG including those experiencing or at risk of street homelessness women can access safe and suitable women-only accommodation with specialist VAWG support where needed.







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*To protect our service users,  
names & photos of service users  
have been changed.*

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