

VAWG Sector Joint Statement on Social Housing Allocations Consultation

March 2024

We are deeply concerned about the proposed changes to social housing allocations as a means to tackle a chronic lack of suitable social housing. The 'British homes for British people' proposals would create further barriers and discrimination towards survivors of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG), preventing them from accessing safe and affordable housing at a time when local councils are on their knees, facing unprecedented financial difficulties and demand for social housing. Marginalised groups will be greatly disproportionately impacted. Migrant survivors of VAWG, in particular, will be forced to face another barrier in the already existing hostile environment.

Domestic abuse is by its very nature a housing issue, with perpetrators creating a context of fear and curtailed freedom usually within the home, a place where women and children should feel safe. Safe, affordable housing – including social homes – for women and children escaping VAWG is an urgent priority. Our organisations see first hand the devastating cost of the housing crisis on survivors, who are often forced to 'choose' between homelessness and housing insecurity or remaining with a perpetrator, leaving them in trapped situations. But the government's proposals to restrict access to the social housing register based on the number of years households have lived in the UK, or within their local area, will do nothing to tackle this. Instead, survivors will face even greater restrictions to accessing the severe lack of social housing and these policies will contribute further to the already existing hostile environment facing migrant women. It is highly concerning that the changes will remove access or social housing for migrant women who do have recourse to public funds, such as refugees, despite their eligibility being protected by international law.¹

Councils already have policies which take anti-social behaviour, criminal behaviour and a 'connection' to the local area into account when designing allocation policies. The language underpinning the new proposals and in recent media coverage contributes to a culture that legitimises the dilution of rights for migrants and other marginalised groups, stoking division and racism which has a direct impact on the women we support. Given that the vast majority of social housing lettings are

¹ UN General Assembly, Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 28 July 1951, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137, Article 21

awarded to UK nationals - over 90% of new lets in 2021-22² - it is wholly unevidenced that further restricting eligibility for social housing based on factors like nationality and income thresholds would help to deal with the chronic lack of access to social housing.

The rationale underpinning this policy bears little relevance to the needs of survivors, who must relocate due to domestic abuse. Women and children fleeing to new local authorities to find safety are therefore highly vulnerable to exclusion in areas which prioritise 'local need'. Furthermore, the Government consulted on the local connection requirements for domestic abuse survivors accessing social housing over two years ago, and is yet to publish their response. It is a source of deep concern to our organisations that, rather than implementing the urgent changes survivors need to exempt them from restrictive local connection requirements, the Government has chosen to prioritise further consultation on these divisive measures.

We urge the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to prioritise building more social housing and delivering the reforms that women and children experiencing VAWG desperately need. The Government should urgently publish its response to the local connection restrictions and joint tenancy reform, and deliver its commitment to empower survivors with the ability to decide what is best for them - remaining in their own home or moving to another home - rather than proceeding with harmful changes to social housing allocations. Most importantly, urgent measures should be taken to provide all survivors, namely those with no recourse to public funds, with equal access to life-saving domestic abuse support and safe accommodation.

Signed:

1. Latin American Women's Rights Service
2. Latin American Women's Aid
3. Women's Aid Federation of England
4. Women's Resource Centre
5. London VAWG Consortium
6. Race Equality Foundation
7. Cardiff Women's Aid
8. Apna Haq
9. Surviving Economic Abuse
10. Deaf Ethnic Women's Association
11. Advance

² Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Continuous Recording of Lettings of Social Housing in England: Count of New Lettings by Nationality of Lead Tenant, 2021-22. Available online at: <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrjoiNDk1N2U4YjktNTNmZS00YTQ5LTljYmItMjlkZDRkY2E5NTJjIiwidCI6ImZmMzQ2ODEwLTljN2QtNDNkZS1hODcyLTl0YTJIZjM5OTVhOCJ9>

12. FiLiA
13. Hibiscus
14. Al Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre
15. Respect
16. End Violence Against Women Coalition
17. Kurdish and Middle Eastern Women's Organisation
18. Imkaan
19. Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse
20. Safety4Sisters
21. The Traveller Movement
22. White Ribbon UK
23. Southall Black Sisters
24. Rape Crisis England & Wales
25. Own My Life (The Women's Liberation Collective)
26. Women for Refugee Women
27. Rights of Women
28. Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid
29. Women's Budget Group
30. Chartered Institute of Housing
31. Anah Project
32. Asian Women's Resource Centre
33. Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit
34. Women and Girls Network
35. Working Chance
36. Make It Mandatory
37. Violence Against Women and Girls Research Network (VAWGRN)
38. RASASC (Rape Crisis South London)
39. London Black Women's Project
40. Women in Prison
41. IDAS (Independent Domestic Abuse Service)
42. IKWRO - Women's Rights Organisation
43. MEWSO - Middle Eastern Women and Society Organisation
44. Centre for Gender and Violence Research, University of Bristol
45. Bawso Ltd
46. IDAS (Independent Domestic Abuse Services)
47. René Cassin
48. NIARA
49. Roshni Birmingham
50. Agenda Alliance
51. The Traveller Movement
52. Birth Companions

53. Welsh Women's Aid (even though housing is a devolved matter for the Welsh Government, we are signing this in solidarity)
54. Solace Women's Aid
55. Refuge
56. SafeLives