

Agenda  
35-47 Bethnal Green Road  
London E1 6LA

**Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP,**  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street,  
London  
SW1A 2AA

22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021

**Dear Prime Minister,**

*Cc Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP*

***Re: A Way Forward - Call for social recovery strategy to improve the lives of millions of women and girls who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic***

We are writing as **over 70 charities and organisations** working with and for the women and girls in our society who are at the sharpest end of inequality. We are deeply concerned that, one year from the start of the first lockdown, **women and girls are in a state of emergency**. Now is the opportunity to prevent further long-term damage to the most vulnerable women and girls in our society.

Recent events have catapulted the shocking nature of the violence that women and girls experience on a daily basis into public discourse. We can no longer ignore the **1.2 million women and girls in England alone who have experienced extensive violence and abuse across their lifetime**. Over half of these women have a mental health problem, one in five experiences homelessness, more than half are living with a disability and they are disproportionately likely to be among the poorest in our society.

Unless urgent action is taken immediately, the devastating and traumatic impact the pandemic has had on women and girls lives and will cause profound and long-term harm. Research published today by Agenda, *Voices from Lockdown: A Way Forward*, shows that the combination of increased debt, poverty, rising unemployment, soaring rates of domestic abuse, exploitation and challenges accessing support have led to an unprecedented crisis. The economic and social impact of the pandemic on women and girls has meant that anxiety, complex trauma, depression and PTSD are now at alarming rates, with existing mental health conditions made worse.

Over this past year, Agenda has surveyed voluntary and community organisations on the frontline and spoken to women and girls facing these issues. The findings in the most recent survey are deeply concerning:

- **100%** of services report an **increase in the complexity of need in the women and girls** they support.
- **Almost a third of services reported an increase in poverty, destitution and basic needs** among the women and girls they support, since the pandemic began.
- **Over half (56%)** of services identified **domestic abuse, financial problems and poverty as a key driver of mental health problems** for women and girls.
- **95%** of services report the **pandemic has made existing mental health problems worse**, with **90%** saying it has created **new mental health problems**.
- **9 in 10** services report women and girls experiencing **complex trauma** during this year.

Girls and young women, and Black and minoritised women and girls, have been extremely hard hit. Young women who have been out of education, are currently furloughed or have lost already precarious employment risk being a 'lost generation'. Migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee women and their children are being driven into destitution and are at further risk of abuse, with many having No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

Voluntary and community services on the frontline have proven to be agile and innovative in supporting the most vulnerable women and girls during the pandemic. Yet, they have struggled to meet the unprecedented increase in demand. Nearly **a third (32%) of organisations have reported that they are not confident about their future sustainability**.

As we rebuild our country, strong leadership and investment can turn around the lives of millions of women and girls and protect their futures. Setting out a clear strategy, in consultation with the voluntary and community sector, would avoid this year's legacy being borne out over decades – impacting generations of women and girls to come.

**We, the undersigned, ask you to appoint a dedicated Minister to take responsibility for the social recovery for women and girls most at risk following the pandemic and develop a long-term cross-departmental strategy to deliver this.** This must include:

- An implementation action plan for 2021-24, to address the needs of the most disadvantaged women and girls, with commitments across government departments.
- Committed funding, including for specialist community women's and girls' services.
- Steps to address inequality and reverse the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on those hardest hit, including young women and Black and minoritised women and girls.

**This is a once-in-a-generation chance to improve the lives of millions of women and girls. We welcome the opportunity to work closely with you as we rebuild and look to the future.**

To arrange a meeting, please contact Hermione Greenhalgh, [hermione@weareagenda.org](mailto:hermione@weareagenda.org).

Yours sincerely,

Jess Southgate, CEO, Agenda  
Pippa Goodfellow, Director, Alliance for Youth Justice  
Joy Doal, CEO, Anawim Birmingham Centre for Women  
Umme Imam, Executive Director, Angelou Centre  
Kathy Roberts, Chief Executive, Association of Mental Health Providers  
Donna Covey CBE, Chief Executive, AVA (Against Violence and Abuse)  
Sara Llewellyn, Chief Executive, Barrow Cadbury Trust  
Josephine Knowles, Co-Director, Beyond the Streets  
Naomi Delap, Director, Birth Companions  
Lisa Dando, Director, BWC (Brighton Women's Centre)  
Jessie Wyld, Engagement Manager, Cardboard Citizens  
Sarah Hughes, Chief Executive, Centre for Mental Health  
Laura Seeböhm, Executive Director, Changing Lives  
Kadra Abdinasir, Strategic Lead, Children & Young People's Mental Health Coalition  
Erin Gavaghan, Executive Director, Clean Break  
Anne Fox, Chief Executive Officer, Clinks  
Oliver Standing, Director, Collective Voice  
Ashley Horsey, Chief Executive, Commonweal Housing  
Nina Champion, Director, Criminal Justice Alliance  
Andrea Simon, Director, End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW)  
Shadae Cazeau, Head of Policy, EQUAL, National Independent Advisory Group  
David Holmes CBE, Chief Executive, Family Action  
Felicia Willow, Interim CEO, Fawcett Society  
Jo Rogers, Project Lead, Fulfilling Lives South East Partnership  
Flavia Docherty, CEO, Getaway Girls  
Samra Said, GMHAN Co-ordinator, Greater Manchester Homeless Action Network (GMHAN)  
Meena Kumari, Founder, H.O.P.E Training & Consultancy  
Rick Henderson, CEO, Homeless Link  
Jackie Richardson, Programme Manager, Inspiring Change Manchester - Women's Voices Movement  
Sally Bonnie, Director/Founder, Inspiring Futures Partnership CIC (Inspire Women Oldham)  
Julian Corner, Chief Executive, Lankelly Chase Foundation  
Gisela Valle, Director, Latin American Women's Rights Service  
Oliver Hilbery, Director, Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM)  
Annie Emery, CEO, Manchester Action on Street Health  
Brian Dow, Chief Executive, Mental Health UK  
Paul Farmer, Chief Executive Officer, Mind  
Amanda Fearn, Chief Operations Officer, National Youth Agency  
Claire Hubberstey, CEO, One Small Thing  
Ellie Turner, Executive Director, Open Clasp Theatre Company

Chris Price, CEO, Pecan  
Karen Biggs, Chief Executive, Phoenix Futures  
Jess Macdonald, VAWG Lead, Redthread Youth  
Jo Todd, CEO, Respect  
Mark Winstanley, Chief Executive, Rethink Mental Illness  
Jo Gough, CEO, RISE  
Suzanne Jacob, CEO, Safe Lives  
Polly Neate, Chief Executive, Shelter  
Okela Douglas, Founder/Director, Sister System  
Pragna Patel, Director, Southall Black Sisters  
Pamela Mhlophe, Head of Client Services, Spires  
Juliet Hope, Chief Executive, Startup  
Dr Nicola Sharp-Jeffs OBE, Chief Executive, Surviving Economic Abuse  
Sue Bowers, Director, The Pilgrim Trust  
Helen Goulden, Chief Executive Officer, The Young Foundation  
Linda Bryant, CEO, Together for Mental Wellbeing  
Rokaiya Khan, CEO, Together Women  
Hannah Shead, CEO, Trevi  
Laura Bunt, Deputy Chief Executive, We Are With You  
Becky Rogerson, Director, Wearside Women in Need (WWiN)  
Huffty McHugh, Centre Co-ordinator, West End Women and Girls Centre  
Fiona Gwinnett, CEO, Wight DASH  
Dr Kate Paradine, Chief Executive, Women in Prison  
Mary-Ann Stephenson, Director, Women's Budget Group  
Tessa Denham, CEO, Women's Counselling and Therapy Service Leeds  
Karen Wint, Chief Executive, Women's Health and Family Service  
Rachel Kelly, Chief Executive, Women's Health Matters  
Farah Nazeer, CEO, Women's Aid Federation of England  
Natasha Finlayson, Chief Executive, Working Chance  
Joe Levenson, Director of Communications and Campaigns, Young Women's Trust  
Joanne Jopling, Chief Executive Officer, Young Womens Outreach Project  
Emma Thomas, Chief Executive, Young Minds  
Catherine Kevis, CEO, YSS