

## Appendix 4: UK women's voluntary and community sector (See Article 3)

At the 2008 examination the Committee recommended that the State party “take the necessary steps to ensure that national machinery for the promotion of equality continues to give priority attention to gender equality and discrimination against women... sufficient resources, both human and financial resources, should be allocated in order to continue and strengthen gender-specific activities and programmes”.<sup>1</sup> The women's NGO sector has been a leader in bringing about positive changes to women's (and men's) lives and improving gender equality in the UK, yet is facing the worst funding crisis in recent history and its sustainability is being seriously undermined.

Government funders are increasingly moving towards procuring the NGO sector to deliver public services and commissioning services that will enable them to meet Government targets on housing, employment, crime rates etc. This move has been hugely controversial in the UK with many NGOs arguing that the independence and advocacy role of NGOs is being undermined. Grant funding has all but been eliminated and this has had serious consequences for women's organisations. A lack of recognition of the role and value of the women's sector within policy and commissioning frameworks has resulted in a trend across central government whereby specialist services are being overlooked for funding and investment in favour of large, generic providers who are being awarded contracts for the delivery of specialist women's services.

Specialist services reach out to the most 'hard-to-reach' groups and this inevitably costs more money. Generic services, whilst cheaper, fail to address the entrenched health and social inequalities that affect the most marginalised members of society. Front-line staff dealing with specialist issues have expert knowledge about the groups they work with and their needs, such as language needs. Involving many minority populations, particularly vulnerable minority women, requires prior work of building trust and removing barriers to participation. This kind of work is often slow and painstaking and requires long-term funding and continuity of personnel to support the development taking place.<sup>2</sup>

Case study:<sup>3</sup>

*“If grant funders and Government all think it's someone else's responsibility to fund key crisis services like ours, where is this magical funder that will pick it all up?”*

NEWomen's Network member

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<sup>1</sup> CEDAW Committee (2008) Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Forty-first session <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/555/92/PDF/N0955592.pdf?OpenElement> Para 271

<sup>2</sup> Maternity Action (2012) *Guidance for Commissioning Health Services for Vulnerable Migrant Women*. WHEC: London

<http://www.maternityaction.org.uk/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/guidancecommissioninghealthservvulnmigrantwomen2012.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> North East Women's Network (2013) *The Health of the Women's Sector in the North East of England: Findings from annual online surveys from 2009 to 2012*

[http://www.newwomens.net/images/stories/January\\_2013\\_-\\_Health\\_of\\_the\\_Womens\\_Sector\\_in\\_the\\_North\\_East\\_report.doc.pdf](http://www.newwomens.net/images/stories/January_2013_-_Health_of_the_Womens_Sector_in_the_North_East_report.doc.pdf)

Women's organisations provide a range of services that support women's equality and human rights including tackling social, health and economic inequalities through training, education, employment and healthcare projects; tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) and its impact; working with some of the highly vulnerable, isolated and otherwise disadvantaged women in UK communities; and breaking down barriers for women in the workplace. However, these organisations are facing a series of cuts:

- A number of funding streams from central government for voluntary organisations have ended or are due to end
- Local Authorities are cutting funding to voluntary organisations as their budgets are cut
- There is a drop in charitable donations from individuals
- Many charitable and non-charitable trusts are receiving an increasing level of grant applications and a falling return on investments, meaning the success rate for applications is falling
- Many voluntary organisations are facing increased demand from the communities they serve as a result of the recession and the impact of other public spending cuts.<sup>4</sup>

For example, 61% of voluntary organisations in the North East of England that provide services to women reported a decrease in income in 2011, compared with 43.9% in 2009 and 37.5% in 2010.<sup>5</sup> A recent survey conducted by the Women's Resource Centre also found that 80% of organisations surveyed had less than 75% of their funding secured for the next financial year (2013/14).<sup>6</sup>

Research has also found that reduced funding has resulted in higher service thresholds, forcing support services to 'cherry-pick' service users. Therefore, survivors of VAWG whom services find harder to reach, or whom the police find harder to get to court, may lose out, for example. (See Appendix: 5) Also, existing services have become less accessible, due to changes such as reduced opening hours.<sup>7</sup>

Cost-cutting exercises can involve significant reductions in staffing, recruiting volunteers to casework positions, reducing the salaries of frontline workers, streamlining referral criteria to prevent women with complex needs from

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<sup>4</sup> Stephenson, M. (2011) *TUC Women and the Cuts Toolkit: How to carry out a human rights and equality impact assessment of the spending cuts on women*. TUC: London

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/equality/tuc-20286-f0.cfm>

<sup>5</sup> North East Women's Network (2013) *The Health of the Women's Sector in the North East of England: Findings from annual online surveys from 2009 to 2012*

[http://www.newwomens.net/images/stories/January\\_2013\\_-\\_Health\\_of\\_the\\_Womens\\_Sector\\_in\\_the\\_North\\_East\\_report.doc.pdf](http://www.newwomens.net/images/stories/January_2013_-_Health_of_the_Womens_Sector_in_the_North_East_report.doc.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2013) *Surviving the Crisis: The impact of public spending cuts on women's voluntary and community organisations*. WRC: London

<http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Surviving-the-Crisis-pdf-3-for-website.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Victim Support (2012) *Listening and Learning: improving support for victims in London*. Produced by Victim Support in partnership with the Home Office and Ministry of Justice

[http://www.victimsupport.org/About-us/Policy-and-research/~/\\_media/Files/Publications/ResearchReports/VSA%20reports/Listening%20and%20learning%20-%20London](http://www.victimsupport.org/About-us/Policy-and-research/~/_media/Files/Publications/ResearchReports/VSA%20reports/Listening%20and%20learning%20-%20London)

accessing refuge provision and cutting key elements of service provision such as specialist advocacy, interpreting and resettlement. While this approach is essentially more appealing to commissioners as it helps to drive short-term costs down, it inevitably compromises the quality and effectiveness of specific support services for women and children. As has been found with Black, minority ethnic and refugee (BMER) VAWG services.<sup>8</sup>

Case study:<sup>9</sup>

*“We had a woman who had suffered years of violence, which she reported but it wasn’t taken seriously. She went to a mainstream agency and they advised her to go back to him. Eventually she found us (online) and was quite distressed by the time we saw her – the initial service she approached clearly had no understanding of her situation and were placing [her] back into a situation of great danger. Specialist BMER services are being cut and we know that situations like this are likely to get worse”.*

Although some services have been funded nationally, devolution of power to Local Authorities and cuts to their budgets mean that many of the organisations needed to support women and improve equality<sup>10</sup> have had to close or their funding has been severely cut at local level.<sup>11</sup> Statutory funding is an important source of income for many women’s organisations, who are already typically more dependent on fewer sources of income than other charities,<sup>12</sup> but many Local Authorities cut more than 25% in voluntary sector support for 2012.<sup>13</sup> The women’s sector has always needed to be creative in a climate where they are less likely to be funded than other groups and funding to women’s organisations is seen as an easy target for savings and is often one of the first areas of spending to be cut.<sup>14</sup> For example, 51.4% of women’s organisations surveyed in 2011 were responding to the cuts by fundraising while 35.1% were lobbying local/national government.<sup>15</sup> Recent

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<sup>8</sup> FORWARD and Imkaan (2011) *The Road to Sustainability: A review of Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee organisations working with women on health and gender based violence in England*. A study commissioned by the Women’s Health and Equality Consortium. WHEC: London <http://www.whec.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/07/TheRoadtoSustainabilityExecSummary2011.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> FORWARD and Imkaan (2011) *The Road to Sustainability: A review of Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee organisations working with women on health and gender based violence in England*. A study commissioned by the Women’s Health and Equality Consortium. WHEC: London <http://www.whec.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/07/TheRoadtoSustainabilityExecSummary2011.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Women’s Resource Centre (2011) *Hidden Value: Demonstrating the extraordinary impact of women’s voluntary and community organisations*. WRC: London [http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/hidden\\_value\\_wrc\\_sroi\\_report\\_2011\\_22.pdf](http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/hidden_value_wrc_sroi_report_2011_22.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Towers, J. & Walby, S. (2012) *Measuring the impact of cuts in public expenditure on the provision of services to prevent violence against women and girls*. Report for Northern Rock and Trust for London <http://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/VAWG%20Full%20report.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Women’s Resource Centre (2011) *Assessing the Financial Vulnerability of Charities Serving Women*. WRC: London

<sup>13</sup> Pati, A. (2010) ‘Redundancies begin as voluntary sector feels impact of the cuts’, *The Guardian*, 20<sup>th</sup> December 2010 <http://tinyurl.com/6jlqal9>

<sup>14</sup> Women’s Resource Centre (2012) *Factsheet: Women and the cuts 2012* <http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/women-and-the-cuts.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Women’s Resource Centre (2011) survey on women’s organisations and funding (unpublished)

research has found that organisations are also working in partnership (71%), increasing their volunteers (61%) and engaging in decision making forums (64%).<sup>16</sup>

Unless serious and meaningful steps are taken to administer austerity measures differently and preserve the core services that address women's needs, the cost in the long-run will be much greater on society.

This is also happening at a time when there is an increase in demand for these services. 56% of women's organisations in the North East reported an increase in demand for their organisation's services in 2012 and this was attributed to women's needs increasing around issues such as poverty, domestic violence and homelessness as well as loss or lack of availability of other services.<sup>17</sup> Research based on experiences of organisations across the country supports the findings in the North East: 94% of organisations reported an increase in demand for support when surveyed.<sup>18</sup>

Case study:<sup>19</sup>

The Angelou Centre in Newcastle has experienced a rise in demand for its services; over the last three years four times as many have women approached the Centre for help as in 2010. The increasing level of need is attributed partly to cuts in services or closure of other organisations providing training support and advice, a result of changes in benefits, less availability of accommodation and increased pressure on women to find work. The resources available for children locally have also diminished.

### **Women-only services**

The women's voluntary and community sector (WVCS) is struggling to survive in a context where gender neutral policies hide the continued and persistent discrimination against women, resulting in women's organisations having to justify their women-only status and even open up their services to men despite minimal demand and the inappropriateness of this in most cases.

The Equality Act 2010<sup>20</sup> makes it clear that women-only services are legal and appropriate in certain contexts; it is still legal and appropriate for public authorities

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<sup>16</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2013) *Surviving the Crisis: The impact of public spending cuts on women's voluntary and community organisations*. WRC: London  
<http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Surviving-the-Crisis-pdf-3-for-website.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> North East Women's Network (2013) *The Health of the Women's Sector in the North East of England: Findings from annual online surveys from 2009 to 2012*  
[http://www.newwomens.net/images/stories/January\\_2013\\_-\\_Health\\_of\\_the\\_Womens\\_Sector\\_in\\_the\\_North\\_East\\_report.doc.pdf](http://www.newwomens.net/images/stories/January_2013_-_Health_of_the_Womens_Sector_in_the_North_East_report.doc.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2013) *Surviving the Crisis: The impact of public spending cuts on women's voluntary and community organisations*. WRC: London  
<http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Surviving-the-Crisis-pdf-3-for-website.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> In North East Women's Network (2012) *Findings and recommendations from interim case study: The impact of austerity measures upon women in the North East of England*, October 2012 and updated April 2013. NEWomen's Network and Women's Resource Centre  
<http://www.newwomens.net/index.php/latest-news-leftmenu-50>

<sup>20</sup> Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

to fund (and provide) women-only services.<sup>21</sup> Yet, these services are being threatened by misinterpretation of equalities legislation.<sup>22</sup>

The UK's 7<sup>th</sup> Periodic Report<sup>23</sup> states that "*Independent research commissioned by GEO [Government Equalities Office] found no evidence that the Gender Equality Duty affected the stability or sustainability of the women's voluntary sector. An evaluation of the 2009/10 Special Fund found that, while some recipients had been encouraged to provide services to male victims of sexual violence, there had been a range of responses to this by individual organisations from providing separate services for men to retaining exclusively women-only services. Nor was evidence provided to the CEDAW Committee during the 2008 examination to substantiate these assertions.*" However, research in 2012 has found that about one in three Rape Crisis Centres in England and Wales have been challenged by funders about the fact that they provided women-only services<sup>24</sup> and previous research found that 70% of women's organisations felt that being women-only made it more difficult to access funding.<sup>25</sup>

Case study:<sup>26</sup>

"*We are being questioned about why we are a women's service – in fact, [they are asking] why do women need help with advice, welfare rights etc.!*"

Following concerns raised in the last CEDAW examination of the UK and considerable changes in policies affecting the funding and commissioning of women-only services, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)<sup>27</sup> conducted further research into the provision of specialist services for women. This shows a complex picture with many services experiencing difficulties in securing sustainable funding.<sup>28</sup> The research found that while national policies recognise the need for women-only services across a range of sectors, the move

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<sup>21</sup> "The Equality Act should not be interpreted to mean that both sexes should be treated the same. Single sex services are permitted where it can be shown to be the most effective way of providing those services or where the service is needed by one sex only." Equality Act 2010, Schedule 3, Part 7 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/schedule/3>

<sup>22</sup> In North East Women's Network (2011) *The Health of the Women's Sector*. Survey conducted in January 2011 - 37% of respondents attributed a reduction in funding to women's organisations to a misinterpretation of the Equalities Act 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Government Equalities Office (2011) CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women) report. United Kingdom's Seventh Periodic Report. GEO: London <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/equalities/international-equality/7th-cedaw-report?view=Binary>

<sup>24</sup> Coates, S., Eggleston, L. and Regan, L. (2012) *Impact Of Rape Support Fund On Existing Rape Crisis Centres*. Rape Crisis (England and Wales) (forthcoming)

<sup>25</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2007) *Why women-only?: The value and benefits of by women, for women services*. WRC: London <http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/whywomenonly.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> FORWARD and Imkaan (2011) *The Road to Sustainability: A review of Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee organisations working with women on health and gender based violence in England*. A study commissioned by the Women's Health and Equality Consortium. WHEC: London <http://www.whec.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/07/TheRoadtoSustainabilityExecSummary2011.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/> Accessed 25/03/13

<sup>28</sup> Hirst, A and Rinne, S (2012) *The impact of changes in commissioning and funding on women only services*. EHRC: London [http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded\\_files/research/rr86\\_final.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/rr86_final.pdf)



to more localised funding arrangements, and the imperfect understanding of substantive equality among some decision makers, are having an adverse impact on the viability of some women's support services, especially those for black and ethnic minority women.<sup>29</sup> These findings are supported by interviews held with Women's Resource Centre members, who also highlighted the disparity of gender analysis and knowledge of women's inequality at a local level.<sup>30</sup>

Case study:<sup>31</sup>

*"One organisation was excluded from tendering for a Domestic Abuse Service on the grounds of the requirement for a gender neutral service. This is common issue around the misinterpretation of the Equality Act resulting in women-only services being excluded from tendering on the basis of gender neutrality and supposed equality needs highlighting. By the time we are able to challenge this, the timescales for tendering have been exhausted and the argument has been forwarded that given the cuts and limited funds available a gender-neutral tender meets the minimum requirements!"*

Women-only services are needed to ensure that women in need access any service at all. For example, there are very few services for lesbian and bisexual women across the UK and women's organisations supporting this group are consistently underfunded, but these women are more likely to access these specialist services. Frontline equality organisations are the only ones that can meaningfully engage isolated communities and bring them to a position where they can take part in, and shape wider public and social life.<sup>32</sup>

Case study:<sup>33</sup>

*"We found that the vast majority of lesbian and bisexual women accessed the women-only service, so it is obviously important to have this service to reach this target group."*

Research from 2007 found that cohesion and integration are developed by having services that are open to women from diverse backgrounds and enable them to mix, as well as providing separate spaces for specific minority groups of women so that they can develop a sense of autonomy and self-determination and better

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<sup>29</sup> Hirst, A and Rinne, S (2012) *The impact of changes in commissioning and funding on women only services*. EHRC: London

[http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded\\_files/research/rr86\\_final.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/rr86_final.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2013) *Surviving the Crisis: The impact of public spending cuts on women's voluntary and community organisations*. WRC: London

<http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Surviving-the-Crisis-pdf-3-for-website.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> A representative from Rape Crisis, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2012, in North East Women's Network (2012) *Findings and recommendations from interim case study: The impact of austerity measures upon women in the North East of England*, NEWomen's Network and Women's Resource Centre

<http://www.newwomens.net/index.php/latest-news-leftmenu-50>

<sup>32</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2010) *In All Our Colours: Lesbian, bisexual and trans women's services in the UK*. WRC: London <http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/IAOC.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2010) *In All Our Colours: Lesbian, bisexual and trans women's services in the UK*. WRC: London <http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/IAOC.pdf>

participate in wider society.<sup>34</sup> 'Single interest groups' also play an important role in building cohesion by strengthening marginalised communities and enabling them to engage in wider society and with other communities. The impact of equality organisations can be significant because they are led by, and for, those with direct experience of inequality and discrimination. They empower and fully respond to needs because they understand and empathise with service users' experiences. By supporting individuals to become aware that their experiences of inequality and discrimination are not isolated they enable mutual support. They are critical to achieving equality of opportunity, which depends on more than meeting needs, and crucially on the opportunity to take action and have a collective voice and to represent and strengthen the voice of the specific community.<sup>35</sup>

Women-only services are also value for money. A social return on investment analysis of specialist women's services found that for every £1 invested in those surveyed, between £5 and £11 worth of social value was generated for the women, their families, the State and local economies and communities.<sup>36</sup>

The Government's report has failed to address the critical role of women's NGOs as key institutions in promoting gender equality. Neither has the Government reported on the crisis facing the women's NGO sector which they have not publicly acknowledged or indeed made any plans to intervene in to halt the imminent closure of organisations.

For example, recent research has found that 29% of organisations surveyed had less than 20% of their funding secure for the new 2013/14 financial year. Many organisations with as little as 20% funding secure for the next financial year are at risk of closure. This was supported by in-depth interviews conducted with two organisations with less than 20% of their funding secured. Both women stated that it was very likely that their services would be closed by the summer of 2013 if they could not find alternative funding.<sup>37</sup>

#### **Recommendations:**

- **The Government must recognise and support the need for women's specialist and user-controlled services; and widespread public information should be available on women's services and support**
- **The capacity of the women's sector must be increased to better meet the needs of women and women's infrastructure organisations need support and resources to develop appropriate models for capacity building the sector. For example, there should be funding to carry out**

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<sup>34</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2007) *Why Women-only? The values and benefits of by women, for women services*. WRC: London <http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/whywomenonly.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Nea, B. and Cox, D. (2008) *Gaps and Solutions: Supporting London's Equality Sectors*. HEAR/ROTA: London

<sup>36</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2011) *Hidden Value: Demonstrating the extraordinary impact of women's voluntary and community organisations*. WRC: London [http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/hidden\\_value\\_wrc\\_sroi\\_report\\_2011\\_22.pdf](http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/hidden_value_wrc_sroi_report_2011_22.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2013) *Surviving the Crisis: The impact of public spending cuts on women's voluntary and community organisations*. WRC: London <http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Surviving-the-Crisis-pdf-3-for-website.pdf>

## **regular mapping and produce a directory of women's services in the UK**

- **Appointing a national champion for women's services may be a way to mitigate the threats and misunderstandings around women-only provision**

### **Women's health sector** (See Article 12)

Women often have time constraints as a result of caring for others which may mean they do not receive the care they need, often putting others' health before their own. Women who are suffering domestic violence and sexual abuse also may face barriers to accessing health and social care services. There is a lack of funding for women-only spaces, without which some women will be put off accessing services and women within mainstream services may experience a lack of security in their relationships with professionals. This is especially important for women with mental health needs and complex needs because they have often experienced abusive relationships and abuse of their trust.

Research<sup>38</sup> has found that women's health organisations provide added value in terms of:

- Meeting women's complex needs
- Significant economic benefits that save the state millions of pounds a year e.g. through improving women's job opportunities, preventing re-victimisation or mental/physical health problems arising or worsening<sup>39</sup>
- Providing safe, women-only space that fosters a sense of empowerment, decision making, confidence and life skills to the most marginalised and vulnerable women in society
- Working on a wide range of health and social care issues other organisations cannot or will not address such as domestic and sexual violence, historic abuse, mental health issues, self-harming, drug and alcohol dependency, female genital mutilation (FGM), sexual health services for BAMER communities of women etc.

There must be active engagement with women's organisations (as well as other equalities groups) in commissioning processes – generic, gender neutral services cannot be relied upon to deliver the best outcomes for women. Catering for the health and social care needs of women cannot be an add-on, but must form an integral part of Department of Health policy formulations.

Women's organisations are a crucial way to effectively support women's 'voice', articulating the concerns and solutions of the women they work with in the local community. Consequently, women's organisations are crucial stakeholders, not only in work on gender equality, but in all areas of policy and planning around health.

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<sup>38</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2007) *Why Women-only? The values and benefits of by women, for women services*. WRC: London <http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/whywomenonly.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2011) *Hidden Value: Demonstrating the extraordinary impact of women's voluntary and community organisations*. WRC: London [http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/hidden\\_value\\_wrc\\_sroi\\_report\\_2011\\_22.pdf](http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/hidden_value_wrc_sroi_report_2011_22.pdf)



However, the shortfall in funding facing many women's organisations, despite their impressive track record at delivering services and reaching 'hard to reach' women, is resulting in closures of many women-only services. It has been found that health organisations are at the greatest risk of closure.<sup>40</sup>

**Recommendation:**

**The Department of Health should analyse funding to women's organisations to address arising issues as a matter of priority. Funding and investment needs to be subject to gender budgeting with ring-fenced budgets for small, specialist services**

**Wider voluntary and community sector**

The cuts to the WVCS are part of a pattern experienced by voluntary organisations across the country as there is less money available and an increasing expectancy that the sector will fill the gaps in provision and deliver more for much less.<sup>41</sup> There are estimates that charities will lose up to £4.5bn due to public spending cuts<sup>42</sup> and in a survey of London voluntary organisations<sup>43</sup> 81% said the demand for their services had increased in 2010/11 but 51% have closed services in the same period. The survey<sup>44</sup> also showed that:

- 54% expected more services to close in 2011/12
- 77% expected public sector funding of their organisation to decrease in 2011/12
- 77% were not confident they would be able to meet increases in demand in 2011/12
- 54% had made staff redundancies.

Case study:<sup>45</sup>

*"We are being told about the Big Society, and that all this will be provided by charitable organisations, and people in communities will band together and do it all. That's not happening because all those organisations that have been helping people are under threat left, right, and centre in my community. They are fighting for every pound that they get in."*

Cllr Suzanne Richards, Manchester

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<sup>40</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2009) *Not Just Bread, But Roses, Too: Funding to the women's voluntary and community sector in England 2004-07*. WRC: London

<sup>41</sup> UNISON (2012) "No' to race to the bottom', *UNISON InFocus*, October 2012 [http://www.unison.org.uk/activists/pages\\_view.asp?did=14825](http://www.unison.org.uk/activists/pages_view.asp?did=14825)

<sup>42</sup> Benjamin, A. (2010) 'Spending review: questions over charities and the 'big society'', *The Guardian*, 20<sup>th</sup> October 2010 <http://tinyurl.com/66b7p4j>

<sup>43</sup> London Voluntary Service Council (2011) *The Big Squeeze: the squeeze tightens – The economic climate, Londoners and the voluntary and community groups that serve them*. LVSC: London <http://www.lvsc.org.uk/media/52273/big%20squeeze%203%20final%20report.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> London Voluntary Service Council (2011) *The Big Squeeze: the squeeze tightens – The economic climate, Londoners and the voluntary and community groups that serve them*. LVSC: London <http://www.lvsc.org.uk/media/52273/big%20squeeze%203%20final%20report.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> Oxfam (2012) *The Perfect Storm: Economic stagnation, the rising cost of living, public spending cuts, and the impact on UK poverty*. Oxfam: Oxford <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-perfect-storm-economic-stagnation-the-rising-cost-of-living-public-spending-228591>

We are seeing a systematic reduction in specialist equality services throughout the UK despite the Equality Act 2010 which includes provision for these groups. This can be linked to a wider ideological attitude towards equality and human rights. Although the Government has made supportive declarations, they have closed the UK Women's National Commission and the Wales Women's National Coalition, halved the funding to the EHRC, as well as reducing the department with this responsibility and threatening to repeal the Human Rights Act. (See Appendix: 3 and 6)

This is particularly acute for NGOs working with the most marginalised groups. A survey of Black and minority ethnic (BME) organisations showed that:

- Small BME organisations, or those which are less well established, had to cease delivering services as they were not able to absorb funding cuts of 25%
- Requests for specific types of help such as legal representation, advisory services, counselling and advocacy had increased from 2009/10 to 2010/11, with organisations voicing fears that they might not be able to keep up with demand
- Newly arrived communities had an urgent need to access education and language services, opportunities for which are reducing because of withdrawal of funding from English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).<sup>46</sup> (See Appendix: 12)

Another study found that when planning cuts, one in five Local Authorities failed to carry out an equality impact assessment and/or collect data on local BME organisations to ensure that these groups are not being disproportionately affected by budget reductions.<sup>47</sup> 45% of all BME NGOs have had their funding cut by Local Authorities and other funders since the beginning of the recession in 2008, despite a 77% increase in demand for their services over the same period.<sup>48</sup>

Case study:<sup>49</sup>

*"Due to cuts in mainstream services and benefits, the number of clients needing our support has increased drastically."*

Rochdale Women's Welfare Association

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGB&T) services have also been subsumed into generic services, such as LGB&T youth groups becoming part of Connexions services and lesbian lines being moved to lesbian and gay helplines. This risks losing the unique understanding that these organisations have of the needs and experiences of certain groups and also often limits their space and time. This can

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<sup>46</sup> MiNet (2009) *The Economic Downturn and the Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) third sector*. ROTA: London <http://www.rota.org.uk/content/minet-june-2009-economic-downturn-and-black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-bame-third-sector>

<sup>47</sup> Afiya Trust (2012) *Living in the Margins: An Interim Report on the Impact of Local Government Social Care Cuts in BME Communities*. [http://livinginthemargins.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/interim\\_report.pdf](http://livinginthemargins.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/interim_report.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations (2010) *Report on the Impact of Economic Downturn on Black and Minority Ethnic Third Sector Organisations*. CEMVO: London

<sup>49</sup> Oxfam (2012) *The Perfect Storm: Economic stagnation, the rising cost of living, public spending cuts, and the impact on UK poverty*. Oxfam: Oxford <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-perfect-storm-economic-stagnation-the-rising-cost-of-living-public-spending-228591>

add to feelings of marginalisation and a lack of safety for women as the services may be within buildings where other groups and people also meet.<sup>50</sup>

Case study:<sup>51</sup>

*"I can say that if there'd been a man on the other end of the line when I'd phoned up to ask about the group, I would've put the phone down straight away."*

Losing specialist services can have a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of the particular population which that service served, with a loss of expertise in language, cultural understanding, or understanding of the distinctive circumstances of particular groups.<sup>52</sup> Unless serious and meaningful steps are taken to administer austerity measures differently and preserve core services addressing women's needs, long-term costs will be much greater for society.

### **Recommendations:**

- **Assess all generic service delivery activities and public services, in partnership with women and women's organisations, to increase their knowledge and engagement and ensure that they are relevant and accessible for all women e.g. mandatory training for all front-line staff should include training on women's equality alongside other equality issues**
- **Preventing discrimination against women, alongside other equality groups, should be an integral part of inspection processes and contract monitoring; also policies should be reviewed to achieve equality of outcome and processes that respect the privacy and dignity of women service users**

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<sup>50</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2010) *In All Our Colours: Lesbian, bisexual and trans women's services in the UK*. Women's Resource Centre: London  
<http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/IAOC.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> Respondent from Leicester lesbian focus group for Women's Resource Centre (2007) *Why Women-only? The values and benefits of by women, for women services*. Women's Resource Centre: London <http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/whywomenonly.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Maternity Action (2012) *Guidance for Commissioning Health Services for Vulnerable Migrant Women*. WHEC: London  
<http://www.maternityaction.org.uk/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/guidancecommissioninghealthservvulnmigrantwomen2012.pdf>