

# The State of the Women's NGO Sector

Shadow Report submitted to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in response to the United Kingdom's 6<sup>th</sup> Periodic Report

April 2008

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# Executive Summary

1. The government has introduced a number of positive initiatives to fulfil its obligations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and address discrimination and violence against women. This includes the ratification of Optional Protocol, the Gender Equality Duty and the *Cross-government Sexual Violence and Abuse Action Plan* to name but a few policies.
2. We especially welcome the March 2008 announcement to provide £1million emergency funding to prevent further closures of Rape Crisis centres in England and Wales this year. However, this is an interim measure only and the government must press ahead to develop a long-term sustainable funding model as a matter of urgency. We urge the government to look closely at the model of good practice being implemented in Scotland.
3. However, women's NGOs are facing a serious funding crisis which has already resulted in the closure of women's NGOs and the reduction of services. This crisis denies women's NGOs the financial stability and certainty that would enable them to plan ahead, as well as threatening their service provision.
4. Women's NGOs are critical to the implementation of the Convention. This Shadow Report describes how the women's NGO sector is being undermined and is under threat in its work to address the very issues raised within the Convention.
5. In particular, the Shadow Report describes the:
  - Lack of representation of women's organisations in local decision making bodies.
  - Closures, and threats to the survival, of crucial women's organisations, particularly black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women's organisations, Rape Crisis centres, women's health organisations and domestic violence NGOs.
  - Undermining of women-only services and organisations.
  - Increase in, and impact of, gender neutral decision making by public bodies.
6. Furthermore, we believe that the government (at all levels – locally, regionally and centrally) has had a significant role in jeopardising the women's NGO sector through its policies on funding to the voluntary and community sector and subsequent inaction to stem the decimation of the women's sector. It must move swiftly to intervene in the funding crisis to avoid further closures of much needed, and often life-saving, services for women.
7. The government must also examine its relationship with the women's NGO sector and make specific and targeted efforts to improve its engagement with the sector in all areas of government and at all levels.
8. We believe that current funding policies and practices that women's NGOs are subjected to are discriminatory and contradictory to the promotion of gender equality.

# Introduction

9. This Shadow Report focuses on the relationship between the UK government, and its commitments and obligations under the Convention, and the women's NGO sector.
10. Women's NGOs are key actors in eliminating discrimination against women and promoting gender equality. Women's NGOs are essential to the implementation of the Convention, in both their front-line work and through their campaigning and lobbying activism, and have made significant contributions to changing and transforming legislation, policy and public perceptions. Advocating on behalf of service users remains an important function of the women's sector. With low levels of representation of women in public life, the women's NGO sector is one of the main mechanisms by which women's needs, experiences and aspirations are voiced to Government. However, women's NGOs are facing the worst funding crisis in recent history and the sector's sustainability is seriously undermined.
11. The intention of this Shadow Report is to bring the key issues affecting the women's NGO sector to the attention of CEDAW, namely the:
  - Lack of representation of women's organisations in local decision making bodies.
  - Closures, and threats to the survival, of crucial women's organisations, particularly black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women's organisations, Rape Crisis centres, women's health organisations and domestic violence NGOs.
  - Undermining of women-only services and organisations.
  - Increase in, and impact of, gender neutral decision making by public bodies.
12. In response to the growing evidence of a women's sector sustainability crisis, WRC launched the **why women?** campaign in 2006 to raise awareness of why the women's NGO sector is still much needed and to lobby Government and other funders to end this crisis. The campaign calls on the Government to put gender back on the agenda by acknowledging that women continue to be systematically discriminated against *because* of their gender, and to publicly recognise the essential services and expertise that the women's NGO sector provides to address this.
13. The information in this report is based on evidence gathered by WRC over the last two years as part of its policy work and the **why women?** campaign (which included 69 interviews and 159 in-depth surveys with women's NGOs across England, and seven focus groups with 60 service users of women's organisations). Our sincerest thanks go to all of the women whose contributions have enabled this Shadow Report to be produced.
14. WRC has contributed to and strongly endorses the Women's National Commission's Shadow Report. We also endorse the Thematic Shadow Report on violence against women in the UK. *The State of the Women's NGO Sector* aims to complement these Shadow Reports and, as such, we have avoided, as far as possible, duplicating of information and have concentrated on women's NGO sector issues. Therefore, this Shadow Report looks at articles 1,2,7,8,11,12 and 16 only.
15. WRC is a registered charity which supports women's organisations in England to be more effective and sustainable. We provide training, information, resources and one-to-one support on a range of organisational development issues. We also lobby decision makers on behalf of the women's not-for-profit sector for improved representation and funding. Our 300+ members

work in a wide range of fields including violence against women, employment, education, rights and equality, the criminal justice system and the environment. They deliver services to and campaign on behalf of some of the most marginalised communities of women in the country. There are over ten thousand people working or volunteering for our members who support almost half a million individuals each year.

# Article 1: Discrimination

## Government references to the Convention

16. It is disappointing that the Convention is not mainstreamed in government policies and legislation. WRC has yet to find any references to CEDAW in government consultations, even on issues specifically about equalities, discrimination, human rights or women. For example, the Convention was not referred to in the government's major consultation on domestic violence, *Safety and Justice* (2003), and this was strongly noted by many women's organisations. No references to the Convention were made in the Government's consultation on prostitution, *Paying the Price* (2004), or the Gender Equality Duty (2005-06).

### *Recommendation:*

- *The lack of reference to the Convention by government is sending mixed signals to the women's NGO sector about its commitment to the Convention. The government must step up its efforts to mainstream the Convention through training all relevant government officers and undertaking regular monitoring on its implementation.*

## Knowledge of the Convention amongst women's NGOs

17. In 2002, WRC conducted a brief survey amongst 100 women's organisations about the Convention. Survey findings signaled a lack of awareness about the Convention (53% had never heard of the Convention) and how it can be used (73% had never used or referred to the Convention in their work).

### *Recommendation:*

- *Women's NGOs are crucial to the implementation of the Convention and Optional Protocol and must be enabled to do so. The government should fund a women's NGO to develop and deliver a capacity building programme for women's organisations.*

## Article 2: Policy Measures

18. We are pleased that women MPs continue to have a presence in the government's Cabinet, occupying several ministerial posts in the Home Office, Communities and Local Government, Equalities, Transport and the Treasury. Political will is critical in securing gender equality. Without commitment at the highest levels of government, it is unlikely that gender equality policy will be transformed into best practice throughout central, regional and local government.

### Funding to the women's NGO sector

19. Women's NGOs are at the forefront of challenging and eliminating discrimination against women. The impact of these organisations includes safety for women from violence, supporting women in accessing education, employment and economic independence, improving women's physical and mental health and contributing to social inclusion.<sup>1</sup>
20. Women's NGOs work with and represent some of the most marginalised and 'at risk' women in communities including black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME), refugee disabled, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LBT), ex/offender, younger, older, refugee, asylum seeking and poor women. They provide a range of valuable, and often lifesaving, services including shelter, counselling, advice, practical support, further education, training, campaigning and advocacy. Most women's organisations provide at least three of these services.
21. Women's organisations make up 7% of registered charities and there are 30,000 women's third sector<sup>2</sup> organisations in England and Wales.<sup>3</sup> Women's NGOs provide dedicated and specialist services for women – women who are often inaccessible to statutory agencies and generic NGOs.
22. The overwhelming majority of funding to the women's NGO sector comes from the state (at all levels – central, regional and especially local government). While significant funding is available through charitable trusts, only 2.2% goes to women's NGOs. Public giving/donations to women's organisations are extremely low, or non-existent for most organisations.
23. Women's organisations are not receiving a fair share of government funding. The most recent government research (2004) found that only 1.2% of central government's funding to the voluntary and community sector in England goes to women's NGOs,<sup>4</sup> despite making up 7% of registered charities. In a WRC audit of central government funding, we found that 34% of funding streams give no grants to women organisations.<sup>5</sup>
24. Furthermore, we have seen a decrease in funding to women's NGOs but an increase in funding given to generic organisations to deliver projects to women, indicating that the 'playing field' between (specialist) women's NGOs and (often larger) generic NGOs is becoming increasingly 'uneven' despite government policy on promoting a 'thriving' NGO sector. The bias in funding towards generic organisations signals that some grant/bid assessors do not necessarily have the experience and skills to assess gender equality issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2006a)

<sup>2</sup> 'Third sector' and 'voluntary and community sector' are the terms used to describe registered charities and other not-for-profit NGOs (such as campaigning organisations, small community groups etc) in the UK

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Mcroft and Zimmeck (2004)

<sup>5</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2006b)

25. Despite the government's own guidelines (the Compact) stating that funding should be for at least three years, funding from public bodies and central government departments is often only for one year, which requires ongoing fundraising year-on-year and diverts already stretched resources away from service delivery.
26. Women's NGOs are reporting that it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract funding as only a few funders prioritise 'women' in their criteria.
27. In October 2006, the WRC conducted a straw poll on financial sustainability of women's organisations which found that:
- 67% of women answered that their organisation was less sustainable now than two years ago.
  - 46% of women's organisations had been forced to make staff redundancies or not renew contracts in the last twelve months.
  - 29% of organisations were paying staff salaries out of their reserves.
  - 41% of organisations had to end a project or close a service in the last twelve months due to lack of funds.
  - 63% of women believed their organisation was 'quite likely to', or 'will possibly' close down in the next two years.
28. 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 it is facing the worst funding crisis in recent history and its sustainability is being seriously undermined. The numbers of women's organisations closing are increasing and greater numbers are running on reserves or significantly scaling back their services.
29. Without government intervention, services vital to the elimination of discrimination against women are seriously at risk. Greater commitment is needed from the government in the implementation of gender equality goals in its funding and third sector policies. This commitment involves the acknowledgement of the critical role of women's NGOs.

"I think the whole of the voluntary sector gets by on a wing and a prayer. I see the government going on about devolving strategic services to the voluntary sector and I've said time and time again 'Then pay us correctly and don't give us one-term contracts or we're not going to do your miserable work for you.'" (WRC 2006a)

### Commissioning and procurement

30. Public bodies are increasingly providing their funding to the voluntary and community sector through procurement or commissioning ("shopping" for services) rather than needs-led grant making ("giving" or "investing" in organisations).<sup>6</sup> Because of its prescriptive nature, procurement and commissioning particularly disadvantages women's organisations, and other equalities organisations, because they often work on politically unpopular issues. Commissioning and procurement diminishes the prospect of gender equality because gender equality issues are not central to tenders.
31. Commissioning is failing women's organisations, which are seen as niche service providers, and who are unable to fulfil large contracts because of their size, limited funding and capacity. While the *Partnership in Public Services*<sup>7</sup> report and the Audit Commission<sup>8</sup> have expressed a wish to retain a diverse network of NGO providers, on the ground it would appear that

<sup>6</sup> Unwin (2004)

<sup>7</sup> Office of the Third Sector (2006)

<sup>8</sup> Audit Commission (2007)

commissioners feel it is easier to contract out to larger consortium bids or larger generic organisations that have no long-running experience of working with women.

32. Effective commissioning should mean utilising the existing expertise and user-led service practice that the women's sector holds in abundance. This is increasingly relevant in light of the government's response to *The Corston Report*,<sup>9</sup> which supports Baroness Corston's recommendations for local 'women's centre' provision to avoid custodial sentences and cut rates of re-offending. If the government is committed to promoting a diverse selection of service providers that cater to a variety of complex needs, the sustainability of the women's NGO sector is vital. An intelligent commissioning model needs to be adopted in all areas of the public sector, whereby 'added-value' is incorporated into procurement.

### **National Offender Management Service (NOMS) funding to women's NGOs**

33. Offender management is one of the key areas in which the government is procuring and commissioning NGOs to deliver public services. Women make up 6% of the overall prison population, and around 12% of offenders on community sentences.<sup>10</sup> We note the government's concern about the negative impact of imprisonment, not only on the women themselves but on the life chances of their children.
34. We therefore welcome the Government's launch of Women's Offending Reduction Programme (WORP) in March 2004, which focuses on improving community based services and interventions that are better tailored for women, to support greater use of community disposals rather than short prison sentences.<sup>11</sup>
35. The negative impacts of incarcerating women are further demonstrated in *The Corston Report*.<sup>12</sup> The report has 43 separate recommendations and calls for a radical women centred approach to address the needs of women offenders and those who are at risk of offending. In particular, it recommends the rolling out of community based services as an alternative to prison.<sup>13</sup> However, commissioning jeopardises the successful implementation of *The Corston Report* because it is failing women's NGOs already working in this field. In addition, commissioners consider it more economical to deal with large service providers because management and administrative costs are reduced. Commissioning therefore runs the risk of diluting initiatives for women.
36. The Together Women Programme,<sup>14</sup> a partnership of NGOs, including a local women's centre, promises to be a model of good practice in NOMs commissioning. Opportunities to roll-out similar models should be sought.
37. Research conducted by the WRC in 2006<sup>15</sup> shows that there are many benefits to funding independent community based services for women offenders and those at risk of offending. One of the case studies in the research was a London based women's NGO that offers educational services for women leaving prison and other socially excluded women. Its aim is to develop the skills and confidence that will allow them to take control of their lives and make the changes needed to re-engage with their communities.

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<sup>9</sup> Corston (2007)

<sup>10</sup> Women and Equality Unit (2007)

<sup>11</sup> National Offender Management Service (2005)

<sup>12</sup> Corston (2007)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> <http://fhg693.demonweb.co.uk/TWP/index.html>

<sup>15</sup> Matrix Consultancy and Women's Resource Centre (2006)

### Case study: the economic importance of women's NGOs<sup>16</sup>

The Creative and Supportive Trust (CAST) provides tailor-made education and support to 120-140 women ex-offenders per year. Whilst reduction in re-offending is not an explicit aim of the CAST's work, evidence from client evaluations and other research suggests that reductions in re-offending are highly likely outcomes.

A recent survey of the CAST's service users found that only 14% had re-offended within the last 12 months of the survey period (while they had been attending courses at the CAST). This compares with general statistics where 65% of women re-offend on release and 47% of all ex-prisoners re-offend within one year of release. CAST's survey of its clients indicates a strong preference for women-only services, both within the organisation and from other agencies. Indeed, 44% of clients indicated they would not use the service if it was mixed-gender which suggests that a 'by women, for women' approach is an important factor in enabling better outcomes for women. This was supported in *The Corston Report*.

As indicated in the description of the organisation's work by the Chief Inspector of Prisons, CAST provides a specialist and highly effective service that is hard to find elsewhere. However, the organisation's future is now under threat due to lack of funding.

38. We are deeply concerned that women's NGOs working with women ex/offenders or women at risk of offending are going to become further marginalised in relation to funding of their work. Work by the Fawcett Society shows that the current criminal justice system is designed primarily to meet the needs of men and that the needs of women who offend are not being met.<sup>17</sup>
39. When NOMS was first introduced to the voluntary and community sector, 'women' were not identified as a priority. Also, funding under the NOMS system follows 'risk' and women offenders are not generally seen as being at risk because their crimes are generally low-level and non-violent. Failure to address the needs of female offenders, and failure to support women's NGOs, undermines a range of government gender equality goals.

### **Recommendations:**

- *The government must intervene in the women's sector funding crisis. With women's NGOs, it should audit central and local government funding to assess the status of funding to women's organisations and take action to address arising issues.*
- *The competitive, free-market based funding processes being implemented by the government are having significant impacts on NGOs.*
- *'Women' must be a priority in funding streams and funding assessors and commissioners should be trained in gender equality.*
- *An intelligent commissioning and procurement model must be adopted by commissioners, whereby 'added-value' and equality is included.*

### **The Gender Equality Duty**

40. The government has made a positive step towards tackling women's inequality through the introduction of the Gender Equality Duty (GED) in April 2007. It imposes a statutory duty on public authorities to promote equality between men and women, and to pay "due regard" to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment between men and women. This necessitates the need to disaggregate data by gender in order to identify areas of concern –

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Fawcett (2007)

the lack of which WRC has consistently identified as being a key problem in policy making and funding decision making.

41. We believe the GED could challenge deep-seated, systematic discrimination against women, hence securing the conditions under which gender equality can be achieved in health, education, employment, representation etc. However, we are concerned that there is a widespread lack of understanding about women's inequality and the GED, resulting in the Duty being misinterpreted and in some cases having the opposite of the intended effect. If the GED is to achieve its aim to encourage culture change and improvement in public services, effective training is needed to both raise awareness of gender issues and build public authorities' ability to carry out and mainstream gender analysis.<sup>18</sup> This is unlikely to be an easy task given the indifference of some public bodies to promoting gender equality. Failing this, the GED will not meet its expected outcomes.
42. To meet the requirements of the GED, public authorities need to demonstrate they have identified the different needs of men and women in policy and practice. Consulting with women and women's NGOs is a crucial part of meeting the GED. It is widely acknowledged that women's organisations will have an important role to play in assisting public bodies in developing and implementing their Gender Equality Schemes (a requirement under the Duty) and also in monitoring the implementation of the GED. However, given the gross under-funding and capacity issues faced by the women's sector presently, many women's NGOs are unable to engage. This represents a missed opportunity for promoting women's equality in the UK, as women's organisations would be a valuable asset in implementing the GED.
43. The EHRC is expected to monitor the GED. However, due to capacity issues, the EHRC will be limited in terms of this role. Furthermore, concerns have been raised about the lack of involvement of auditing bodies such as the Audit Commission and the National Audit Office. It is important to note that inadequate monitoring and accountability mechanisms will impact negatively on monitoring the performance of the Duty in achieving gender equality.

### ***Recommendations:***

- *Effective training is needed to improve gender analysis amongst public bodies and government departments.*
- *Women's NGOs must be supported to engage with the GED, including financially.*

### **Gender neutral decision-making: the impact on women-only services**

44. Despite the GED, women's NGOs have been consistently commenting on the lack of gender analysis of, and gender neutral approach taken by, government decision-makers and funders.
45. Gender neutral decision making and the lack of gender analysis is manifesting itself in the funding of women's NGOs. Women's NGOs believe that this is a serious problem amongst decision makers and funders, and that there is widespread assumption that women-only services and women's NGOs are longer needed because the 'battle of the sexes' has been won and women now enjoy equality on par with men. This is resulting in women's organisations being pressured in to delivering services to men and having their funding undermined.

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<sup>18</sup> Hadjipateras (1997) and Porter et al. (1999)

### Case studies: impacts on funding to women-only services

"We have recently put in a bid for funding with the local Skills Council. The tender asked for work with young parents, our bid was work for young mothers. Although we were successful in getting funding, we were asked to consider more work to involve young men and young fathers. Even though we have put 'we were working in partnership with another agency who would work with young fathers', it seems to be a misunderstanding of what we do."<sup>19</sup>

"We are constantly being challenged with the question 'why don't you work with men?', 'why don't you have male workers?' etc... I think that the Government is making a move towards seeing domestic violence as non-gendered. I think they would like to see domestic violence taken into integrated services, men and women working together to promote non-violent relationships for men and women. Our argument would be that there must be separate organisations to deal with men. Men who have experienced violence must have services but we are not the organisation that is supposed to work with them! Supporting People keeps on insisting that we work with men and again it is an attempt to de-gender what we do."<sup>20</sup>

"Our local Government Office originally advised our [Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership] to back an [Independent Sexual Violence Advisor] funding bid from another non-specialist local organisation over ours because we are a women-only service, despite the Home Office guidance clearly stating that specialist services should receive priority and that gender specific services should be given equal consideration. We had to appeal to the Home Office, who intervened on our behalf."<sup>21</sup>

"Many agencies do not recognise the value of a women-only centre. We are constantly being asked why we do not see men. Probation (who give us under £3,500 per annum) are particularly vocal in this and feel that we should be seeing men."<sup>22</sup>

Since 1984, South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre (SERICC) have provided a confidential, independent and specialist women-only sexual violence service. SERICC's funding (approximately £60,000) was cut by the health authority in the mid 1990s because health services were under pressure to make efficiency savings. The commissioner of voluntary services also considered SERICC's funding unfair because there was considered to be "no equity of service provision for men". The organisation narrowly escaped closure of its counselling service because a "forward-thinking individual in a [Primary Care Trust] filled the funding gap" who recognised that the withdrawal of SERICC's services would result in an increased workload for GPs and that women and girls had no other service.<sup>23</sup>

46. Given a choice, many women would rather use the women-only services of a women's organisation. Indeed, many service users would simply not engage with a mixed-gender service. However, with increasing numbers of women's NGOs closing or reducing their services, women are being denied this choice. In 2007, WRC conducted a random poll of 1,000 women from the general public and 97% stated that a woman should have a choice of accessing a women-only support service in cases of sexual assault.<sup>24</sup> Creative and Supportive Trust (CAST), an organisation which works with women ex/offenders and those at risk of offending, found that 80% of service users interviewed expressed that it was very important that CAST was a women-only space and 44% of the students said they would not attend if CAST had not been a women-only space. The survey also found that 64% of users would prefer women-only services in areas such as group counselling, hospital wards, mental health services, housing associations, health clinics, parenting classes and counselling.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2007b) p.81

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Women's Resource Centre and Rape Crisis (England and Wales) (2008) p. 33

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2006a) p.16

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Matrix Consultancy and Women's Resource Centre (2006)

47. WRC research<sup>26</sup> shows that women-only services, organisations and spaces are effective and often produce better outcomes for services users through meeting women's needs through being women-centred. The research, including through focus groups with service users, found that there were many benefits of women-only services including sanctuary, solidarity and empowerment.

***Recommendations:***

- ***There must be greater recognition of the importance, and protection of, women-only space for survivors of sexual violence. Statutory sector funders should respect a survivor's right to choose a women-only space and refrain from supporting and commissioning only generic service provision.***
- ***Funders should be trained in gender equality.***

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<sup>26</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2007b)

# Article 7: Political and Public Life

## Representation of women's NGOs on Local Strategic Partnerships

48. The Government introduced Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) in England in 2000. LSPs are significant as they play a critical role in the Government's move to devolve power to local communities. LSPs bring together representatives from local statutory agencies and public bodies<sup>27</sup>, businesses and NGOs to determine what local services are needed and how they should be delivered. In terms of funding for women's NGOs and local services for women, for the majority of women's NGOs, LSPs are one of the most important decision-making bodies to engage with. However recent research found that representation of women's organisations on LSPs, and women generally, is woefully low.
49. Despite women's organisations representing around 7% of registered charities, only 1.8% of NGO representatives on LSP boards were from women's organisations. The senior positions on LSPs were dominated by men. Women were over-represented in more 'traditional' roles, such as administrators, and just 28% of Chairs on central LSP boards were women. Nearly three quarters of LSPs did not provide any specific support for women to engage in LSP structures or business, and only 5% formally monitor gender representation.<sup>28</sup>
50. Even where there were higher levels of representation of women on LSP boards, issues of importance to women or the gender impact of the work of LSPs were not necessarily raised. It is likely that better representation of women's NGOs, who work specifically on 'gender', could improve this.
51. What was clear from the research, and many LSPs agreed, was that targeted strategies and formalised processes were needed to ensure better representation of women and women's organisations. Failing this, it is likely that women's organisations will spend significant time and resources doing 'gender repair work'.

"In Leicester, there were two 'community of interest' women's representatives on the LSP who were supported through the Community Empowerment Network (CEN), managed by Voluntary Action Leicester. A 2006 review of the CEN resulted in a new structure which placed a much greater emphasis on geographical representation and new representatives were elected who continue to be supported by VAL. The position of community of interest representation has still to be resolved and the women's representatives continue to attend partnership meetings. However, they receive neither support nor any resources in order to fulfil their role. It is worth pointing out that all of the geographical representatives are men and the Chair and two Vice-chairs are all white men." (WRC 2008b)

### **Recommendations:**

- ***Women's organisations are insufficiently represented. LSPs must ensure the full involvement of women's organisations in LSPs at all levels through providing effective engagement and support programmes.***
- ***Women's representation on LSPs, especially at senior levels, is low and can be regarded as discriminatory. LSPs need to examine gender representation, and set targets for improvement. Positive action is needed to encourage and support them, through such mechanisms as the National Improvement Strategy.***
- ***LSPs simply do not know enough about who is represented on them. LSP partners should collect, analyse, use and report on gender-disaggregated data as part of routine performance management.***

<sup>27</sup> Includes major public services like education, health, housing, police and social services

<sup>28</sup> Gudnadottir et al. (2007)

## Local Area Agreements

52. LSPs are responsible for developing and negotiating their Local Area Agreement (LAA) with central Government. LAAs are crucial because they set out the priorities for a local area, and therefore the types of services to be funded for the next three years. They are a prime example of why better representation of women's NGOs on LSPs is urgently needed. Each LSP is required to meet 30 Public Service Agreements (PSAs) set by central Government by choosing up to 35 (out of a possible 198) National Indicators (NIs) which will meet these PSAs.<sup>29</sup> We are pleased that an equalities PSA has been included. Eight of the 198 NIs are of specific concern to the women's NGO sector, covering civic participation and NGOs, domestic violence, sexual violence and maternity services, although, of course, all of the NIs will have a gender dimension and impact.
53. However, it is not until after June 2008 that women's NGOs will have a clear picture of which, if any, of these NIs have been chosen by LSPs. Given the lack of women's sector representation on LSPs, and the general lack of capacity for women's NGOs to engage in lobbying and influencing, we are deeply concerned that key NIs may be omitted from local areas' 'baskets of indicators' and therefore, funding for women's services and women's NGOs will be at risk.
54. We were especially pleased that, for the first time, there are sexual violence targets for local government, particularly NI26: "specialist support to victims of serious crime" which includes Rape Crisis centres. However, given that many local areas have had no previous impetus to include sexual violence, and often have little knowledge of sexual violence and the needs of survivors, we are especially concerned that failure to include NI26 will represent a significant missed opportunity. There is numerous evidence (including the very clear guidance for local authorities in the government's *Sexual Violence and Abuse Action Plan* implementation guidance<sup>30</sup>) as to why NI26 should be included.

### **Recommendation:**

- ***LAA's will have significant impacts on women's NGOs. The Department for Communities and Local Government should collect data on NIs from local authorities and work with women's NGOs to analyse the data and develop strategies to address arising issues.***

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<sup>29</sup> In addition, there are 17 obligatory NIs that all local authorities must include

<sup>30</sup> Home Office (2007a)

## Article 8: Representation

### Representation of women's NGOs at an international level

55. Although outside the remit of the Convention, we feel that it is important to note the issue of international NGO representation. Primarily due to the lack of capacity, knowledge and resources of women's NGOs to engage in international instruments (such as the Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action), very few ever have the opportunity to represent the UK women's NGO sector at an international level.
56. We believe the Government could play an instrumental role in increasing the capacity of women's NGOs to engage with international instruments. We urge the Government to look to international models of good practice. For example, in 2000, the New Zealand Government fully funded three NGO representatives, who were formally elected by the NGO sector, to attend the Beijing +5 Special Session in New York. The NGO representatives were registered as part of the official Government delegation and therefore had full access to the General Assembly and negotiations, which proved invaluable to their ability to actively participate in the parallel NGO session. NGO and Government representatives worked together to disseminate information about the Special Session to NGOs on their return. Funding was also made available for NGO CEDAW representation.

#### ***Recommendation:***

- *The Government should provide dedicated funding for women's NGOs, selected through a democratic process, to attend key United Nations events and work with these NGOs.*

### UK representation on CEDAW

57. We are disappointed that no name has ever been submitted for a place on CEDAW from the UK. We are aware that the term of the current 11 CEDAW members will be expiring on 31 December 2008. A UK representative on CEDAW would help to send out a positive signal to women's NGOs about the government's commitment to the Convention, particularly given the lack of reference to the Convention in its policy making (see Article 1).

#### ***Recommendation:***

- *UK nominations to CEDAW would send out positive message to the women's NGO sector about the UK government's commitment to the Convention. The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Government Equalities Office, in consultation with the Women's National Commission, should identify and promote suitable UK nominees.*

## Article 11: Employment

58. We welcome the increasing number of measures implemented by the government to improve women's employment opportunities and promote equality, particularly for those women most at risk of discrimination.

### NGOs supporting women experiencing discrimination in employment

59. Presently, individuals cannot access public funding for employment tribunals. Complainants unable to meet their own legal costs are thereby dependant upon trade unions or other complainant aid groups in the NGO sector to provide support. In 2003, only 29.1% of workers were in trade unions. Many workers who are low paid, exploited and denied their employment rights are likely to be women in non-unionised work places. We are concerned about access to justice; particularly for women seeking legal remedies for sex discrimination e.g. pregnancy/maternity related claims, sexual harassment, equal pay etc. Many women are simply unaware of or unable to access basic employment rights and this is undoubtedly exacerbated by the closure of NGOs working in this area.

### Discrimination against lesbians and bisexual women

60. The 2003 Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (EE(SO)R), which outlaws discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sexual orientation, have been welcomed. However, despite the Civil Partnership Act (2004), which is also widely welcomed, pension coverage for same-sex couples is not mandatory. Additionally, in a few rare cases, employers in an organised religion may still refuse to hire lesbians, gay men and bisexuals if it's at odds with their convictions.
61. However, we were very dismayed when, in May 2004, Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights (LAGER) was forced to close due to its funding being cut. LAGER was a specialist organisation and the only one of its kind, representing lesbians and gay men for over 20 years and their closure has inevitably impacted on lesbian and bisexual women's ability to access skilled and affordable representation to challenge discriminating employers as per the Regulations.

### Sex discrimination

62. Sexual harassment and sex discrimination continue to hinder the progress of women at work. Over an 18 month period, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) received 140 formal complaints of sexual harassment from female postal workers.<sup>31</sup> With the closure of the NGO Women Against Sexual Harassment in 2001, the EOC was the main source of assistance for women experiencing gender based discrimination in employment. We are concerned that the EOC's successor, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is under resourced and will be unable to provide legal representation to a great number of women who seek its assistance, as was the case with the EOC. Trade unions sometimes stand accused of failing to support their women members and it is not unknown for women to have to face the prospect of taking legal action against employers and trade unions for failing to act on such complaints.
63. The EOC received more calls from women facing problems at work because of their pregnancy, than on any other subject. Approximately 1,000 women per year in England and Wales take legal action after being dismissed because of their pregnancy.<sup>32</sup> Research found

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<sup>31</sup> Equal Opportunities Commission (2003)

<sup>32</sup> *Pregnant Workers Face Hostility*

that more than 25% of employers could not refer to a single statutory entitlement for pregnant women.<sup>33</sup> The average award for injury to feelings in sex discrimination cases involving pregnancy related dismissal is £2,000 lower than in non-pregnancy related dismissal cases. The EOC found that nearly 25% of women who made an employment tribunal claim had been dismissed within hours of telling their employer about their pregnancy and one in five women returning from maternity leave were given lower grade jobs.<sup>34</sup> Pregnancy and maternity related discrimination is occurring despite the fact it is unlawful.

64. We were most concerned when the women’s NGO Maternity Alliance was forced to close in 2006 due to its Government grant being cut. Maternity Alliance conducted much needed work with large employers (such as supermarkets) on pregnancy related issues, including health and safety and employment discrimination. Through its advice line, the Maternity Alliance advised hundreds of women discriminated against because of pregnancy on their rights. Many women, empowered by this information, were able to successfully take on their employers and avoid employment tribunals. The closure of the Maternity Alliance has resulted in many women losing a valuable and much needed service.

### **Recommendations:**

- *Public funding should be made available for complaints to employment tribunals.*
- *The government must ensure that NGOs who are at the forefront of tackling discrimination, such as homophobia and sex discrimination, are adequately funded.*

### **Women employed in the general NGO sector**

65. There are 856,000 civil society organisations in the UK employing an estimated 1.37 million staff, equivalent to 6.4% of the total UK workforce. NGOs, therefore, “are major employer”, equalling that of the primary and secondary school sector and “larger than the banking and accounting industries combined”.<sup>35</sup>
66. The voluntary sector is an important employer of women; 69% of the paid workforce is female. It is encouraging that 46% of chief executives in charities are women,<sup>36</sup> although these women tend to be located in smaller charities. However, like other sectors, chief executives in larger charities are primarily men.<sup>37</sup>
67. The NGO sector is not immune from gender discrimination in employment. The gender pay gap between women and men working in charities in 2001 was 23%.

### **Women employed in women’s NGOs**

68. We believe that one of the unique characteristics of the women’s NGO sector is the emphasis on women’s empowerment. Women’s NGOs raise awareness amongst their service users and offer

“I am an ex-service user. I had my first son in the refuge - that was 11 years ago, when I suffered from domestic violence.... I didn't have my immigration papers, and my husband didn't want to give them to me - he was abusing me physically, financially. I was damaged. From the refuge I was able to get my indefinite leave to remain. I went to university, got my degree, and then I felt like giving it back. Therefore, I work here. So I'm a living example. At that time I didn't know my rights as a woman.....So now, I let women know that they have rights as a human being, as a citizen.” WRC (2006a) p.8

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> James (2004)

<sup>35</sup> National Council of Voluntary Organisations (2008) p.7

<sup>36</sup> Equal Opportunities Commission research quoted in [The Charity Times debate](#).

<sup>37</sup> Acevo research quoted in [Forum for female leaders](#).

opportunities for women to become politicised. Eleven per cent of women currently employed in women's organisations interviewed in a WRC study in 2006<sup>38</sup> were ex-service users. Women's NGOs are important pathways to economic inclusion and opportunity, particularly marginalised and vulnerable women. This is just one of the valuable aspects being lost with the closures of women's organisations.

69. The funding crisis in the women's sector is perpetuating the very gender discrimination that women's NGOs work to eliminate. The Rape Crisis sector is an excellent example of how the lack of government funding is a significant and contributing factor undermining women's employment opportunities in women's NGOs:<sup>39</sup>
- Thirty-five Rape Crisis centres in England and Wales employ just 47 full-time, and 103 part-time staff between them. Five centres have no paid staff. All centres rely heavily on the invaluable contribution of volunteers and many would be unable to deliver the range or level of services to survivors of sexual violence without them. There are 696 volunteers working centres, including 12 full-time volunteers, which is virtually unheard of in the NGO sector.
  - In six organisations, staff worked without pay during times of financial crises in order to continue providing services to survivors. In one organisation, all five paid staff worked without salary for one month. In another centre, a counsellor worked without pay for three months, after being made redundant, to prevent a service being taken away from service users abruptly, which could have had serious consequences for survivors. The level of commitment of staff to ensure the continuation of a quality service with little or no pay was extremely high, even at their own considerable personal expense (forgoing pay).
  - A number of centres stated that staff worked considerably more hours than what they were paid for and would often not claim basic expenses. Some centres also noted that salaries were not increased with inflation. Centres reported that in order to secure funding from government agencies they felt pressured to keep the costs down, particularly through reducing pay well below the market rate to achieve this.
70. This situation is unsustainable and unacceptable given the essential, and often life-saving services, provided by Rape Crisis.

### ***Recommendations:***

- ***The contribution women's NGOs make indirectly to the employment agenda should be acknowledged.***
- ***The competitive, free-market based funding processes being implemented by the government are having significant impacts on NGOs. The government must implement its commitment to longer-term funding and full cost recovery. Salaries should be able to be paid at the market rate relative to skills and experience, and be increased with inflation. There needs to be more awareness that reducing levels of paid staff has a direct effect on the number and quality of volunteers NGOs can support, and the number of service users that can be supported.***
- ***Staff and volunteers should be commended for their commitment to providing services in times of financial crisis and their personal expense should be acknowledged and, where possible, recompensed. The professionalism of staff and volunteers in women's NGOs should be recognised.***

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<sup>38</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2006a)

<sup>39</sup> Women's Resource Centre and Rape Crisis (England and Wales) (2008)

## Article 12: Health

71. Women's health NGOs are largely dependent on state funding, primarily Primary Care Trusts (local agencies) and the Department of Health. However, only 2.2% of all Department of Health funding to the voluntary and community sector in England goes to women's organisations.<sup>40</sup>
72. Indeed, Department of Health Section 64 grants appears to be failing women's health organisations despite the fact that women's health NGOs make up 36% of all women's voluntary and community organisations.<sup>41</sup> There has been an overall decrease in funding for women's organisations, from 2.94% in 2003-4 to just 2.15% in 2006-7. Along with LGBT groups, the women's sector is a long way behind other equalities groups in the funding stakes.<sup>42</sup> There has also been a decrease in funding to women's organisations, but an increase in funding given to generic organisations to deliver projects to women.
73. Women's organisations have specialist knowledge and expertise about women's lives, experiences, and needs. As such, their engagement in decision-making, needs assessment and service delivery is integral to the Department of Health's (DH) aims to improve health and social care, as well as promoting principles of accessibility, inclusivity and equalities.
74. 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. WRC has found that women's health organisations are at the greatest risk of closure. WRC is aware of 12 women's health NGOs that have closed over the last three years.
75. In the long-term, the closure of women's health and social care VCOs increases the use of statutory health and social care services, as service-users often have nowhere else to go and are forced to seek the services of statutory services because their (preventable) problems have escalated or become acute. This undermines the government's wider health reform strategy to invest in preventative care, make health services more responsive to local need, and provide tailored care closer to home.

### **Recommendations:**

- *Health as a gender issue needs to be embedded in all DH planning and policy work. In particular, the DH needs to recognise that the closure of Rape Crisis centres has a direct impact on the numbers of women the state will eventually have to provide care for because of the serious health consequences of sexual violence.*
- *Health agencies need to improve its engagement with and funding to women's NGOs to fulfil their obligations to women under the Gender Equality Duty. The DH should analyse its funding to women's organisations and address arising issues as a matter of priority. DH grant funding and investment needs to be subject to gender budgeting with ring-fenced grant funding for small, specialist VCOs.*
- *Women's health and social care needs must form an integral part of the DH's strategic framework. Statutory guidance on how to proactively fund and 'intelligently' commission the women's sector should be developed.*

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<sup>40</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2006b)

<sup>41</sup> Guidestar

<sup>42</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2006b)

## Article 16: Marriage and Family Law

76. Unfortunately, the prevalence of violence against women in the UK is high. A woman is killed by her ex/partner every three days and one in four women will experience domestic violence during her lifetime. In 2005 there were over 14,000 reported rapes in England and Wales and one in five women will experience sexual assault in adulthood.<sup>43</sup>
77. Domestic violence alone costs £22.9 billion and in 2003/04 the cost of sexual offences was £8.5 billion.<sup>44</sup> Without women's NGOs, this cost is likely to be significantly higher. A recent study on the economic impact of women's NGOs found that women's organisations tackling domestic and sexual violence represent excellent value for money. The economic value of the services they provide far exceeded the funding received by approximately 300%.<sup>45</sup>
78. There are very few NGOs providing perpetrator programmes in the UK. Those that do are finding it extremely difficult to access funding. For example, in London, three NGOs were recently financially 'rescued' by a charitable trust, providing reprieve from closure for another year.
79. Local government responses to violence against women are 'patchy' across the UK. Women's NGOs are the key actors in providing effective, women-led and women-centred support services, yet many organisations often find their sustainability undermined because of the lack of investment in their services by public bodies (despite their keenness to refer to women's NGOs).

"Local Authorities lean on women's charities so they can 'outsource' their domestic violence responsibilities, which ought to be funded by the local government. They give the charities no credit for this. For example, Suffolk Social Services have a leaflet entitled *Breaking the Pattern* and a website of the same name. The assure women that help is at hand, and yet the phone number they provide (pretending that it is their own) is a Women's Aid number". WRC (2008b)

### **Recommendations:**

- ***A cross-government Violence Against Women Strategy should be in place by March 2009, and should include a strong commitment to sexual violence survivors and practical actions to improve funding to Rape Crisis centres and other violence against women services, particularly organisations led by and for minority groups of women such as BAME women.***
- ***The funding of programmes for perpetrators needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. This funding must be "new" money and not taken from existing violence against women funding.***

### **Rape Crisis centres**

80. The 2007 *Cross-government Action Plan on Sexual Violence and Abuse*<sup>46</sup> (and accompanying implementation guidance) is a progressive strategy which is warmly welcomed. However, knowledge, understanding and implementation of the Plan (and other central government policies, legislation and strategies across government departments and between levels of government i.e. central, local and regional) can only be described as 'patchy' at best.

<sup>43</sup> Women's Resource Centre et al. (2007)

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Matrix Consultancy and Women's Resource Centre (2006)

<sup>46</sup> Home Office (2007)

81. A key action in the *Action Plan on Sexual Violence and Abuse* is to increase victim access to health and support. It acknowledges the vital and significant contribution that the sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse sector makes in providing valuable longer-term support and therapeutic services to survivors of sexual violence and abuse.
82. Yet funding for Rape Crisis centres is at absolute crisis point and the subject of a highly public campaign. It has been almost 12 months since the "Crisis in Rape Crisis" came to public attention.<sup>47</sup>
83. In March 2007, Rape Crisis centres across England and Wales waited anxiously to hear about their applications to the Victims Fund, central government's sexual violence grant scheme. The one year funding was due to start in April 2007, but wasn't released until Summer. Even then, only 18 of the 38 centres received Victims Fund money. The Compact Advocacy Group took up the issue of late notification and payments and short-term funding. The government, it argued, had failed to comply with its own Compact standards and was placing centres at risk. Many Rape Crisis Centres depend on this fund to exist, even though the funding is grossly inadequate (with only £1,25m available for England and Wales in 2007/08).
84. In addition, the Victims Fund has seen a decrease in funding to women's organisations but an increase in funding given to generic organisations to deliver projects to women. In 2006, funding to women's NGOs from the Victims Fund decreased by 20% since 2004/05, yet funding to generic organisations to deliver sexual violence services increased by 6.6%.<sup>48</sup>
85. However, apart from Compact non-compliance, the Victims Fund fiasco exposed a far more serious issue – Rape Crisis centres, en masse, were facing financial meltdown. The *Map of Gaps*<sup>49</sup> research revealed that most women who have experienced sexual violence do not have access to basic support services of a Rape Crisis centre.
86. Research by WRC and Rape Crisis (England and Wales)<sup>50</sup> launched in March 2008 has revealed the extent of this funding crisis. The study found that, in the last five years, one in five centres in England and Wales has been forced to close its doors. Of the remainder, 69% reported that their current level of funding was unsustainable. The constant and ongoing struggle to find adequate resources is impacting heavily on their ability to continue to provide essential services to survivors of sexual violence.
87. It is conservatively estimated that 80,000 women experience rape every year in the UK and the impact of sexual violence can be long-lasting and profound, affecting survivors' physical and mental health, relationships, work, families and communities. In this context, Rape Crisis centres play a vital role; providing women and girls with advice, counselling, advocacy and long-term support. Rape Crisis centres cannot meet the extremely high demand for their services – if the average number of days a service user will spend on a waiting list for all the centres, this would equal 1,929 days (5.3 years).
88. The combined annual income of centres in England and Wales was just over £3.5 million. In 2004-05 the Government spent twice this amount each week on advertising and public relations. The median annual income for centres was £81,598, only marginally more than the cost, to the state, of one rape.
89. The Government's current focus on reducing the unacceptably low rape conviction rate is to be welcomed, as are Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs), which are designed to ensure

<sup>47</sup> See the excellent New Statesman campaign on the 'Crisis in Rape Crisis' [www.newstatesman.com](http://www.newstatesman.com)

<sup>48</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2006a)

<sup>49</sup> Coy et al. (2007)

<sup>50</sup> Women's Resource Centre and Rape Crisis (England and Wales) (2008)

high quality criminal justice responses to survivors of sexual assault, including forensic examinations and medical care. However, whilst SARCs play an essential role, they can only ever be a part of the solution.

90. Rape Crisis centres are independent of the government and the criminal justice system and, unlike SARCs, provide long-term support and women-only spaces to survivors with recent and/or historic experiences, including adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The majority of women who accessed Rape Crisis centres last year presented with experiences of sexual violence that happened in the past.
91. Securing a criminal conviction is not the only outcome that survivors of sexual violence say they want or need. In fact, only 10-15% of survivors want to report to the police. What is urgently needed is "parallel justice", which concentrates on both criminal justice and social justice. There must be a focus on the support needs of survivors of sexual violence, alongside the need to hold perpetrators of such crimes to account, and this is where adequate and sustainable funding to Rape Crisis centres is essential.
92. In the research, Rape Crisis centres gave examples of statutory agencies refusing to fund them because they were women-only, or pressuring them to deliver services to men. The government acknowledges that "sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse are two of the most serious and damaging crimes in our society", and that sexual violence is "both a cause and consequence of gender inequality", with most perpetrators of sexual violence being male, and most victims being female.<sup>51</sup> Yet many funders cannot understand why women-only services are needed, even though evidence shows that many women will not use mixed-sex services.
93. Rape Crisis services remain marginalised and 'separated off' with an historic underinvestment and more limited funding base than mainstream domestic violence services. The funding for sexual violence counselling, support and advocacy services to meet the needs of women and girls remains patchy and unstable yet sexual violence and abuse remains an important cause and consequence of gender inequality. Many Rape Crisis centres live on the 'knife's edge', not knowing whether their work will continue or if they can afford to keep staff.
94. There have been a series of failures by on the part of the government that has led to the decimation of the Rape Crisis sector in the last few years. We are deeply concerned that some will have to close their doors, perhaps as many as half of all remaining Rape Crisis centres. This is unacceptable, especially given that Rape Crisis centres provide, literally, life-saving services. Over the last 12 months, the issue of the Rape Crisis funding crisis has been passed from pillar to post, with neither central nor local government wanting to take responsibility for funding centres. During this time, Rape Crisis centres had over 134,000 contacts with survivors, their families and friends and other agencies. Their services have made significant contributions to the government's employment, housing, health, mental health, education, crime and community safety, gender equality children and young people's agendas.
95. We warmly welcome the 19 March 2008 announcement by the Minister for Women, the Rt. Hon. Harriet Harman QC MP, of forthcoming emergency funding of £1m for Rape Crisis centres. This funding will stop the imminent closures of Rape Crisis centres this year. However, what is needed now is a firm political commitment to provide adequate, sustainable and long-term funding to Rape Crisis centres. The Scottish model of providing 'ring-fenced' rape crisis funding is an excellent funding model, as this has not only helped to build the capacity of existing groups, but has also ensured that new centres have opened to address the geographical gaps in service provision for survivors of rape and other sexual violence.

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<sup>51</sup> Home Office (2007) p.i

## **Recommendations:**

- *Support for women and girls to rebuild their lives after rape must be a right, not a privilege determined by a postcode lottery. Waiting times should be eliminated – all women should have immediate access to services. Every woman and girl should have access to a Rape Crisis centre. This means increasing the number and capacity of Rape Crisis centres. Increased service provision for survivors should be achieved through increased funding. Following the Scottish model, a cross-government ring-fenced 'Rape Crisis Fund' of at least £5m needs to be established before the end of 2008. This should include money from the Department of Health.*
- *The inequality between Rape Crisis and other nation-wide services providing support to victims of other types of crime must be eliminated.*
- *To improve the quality and consistency of services, grants and Service Level Agreements (SLAs) of one year or less should be avoided. Three-year cycles for grants and SLAs should become the norm not the exception.*
- *Statutory agencies making referrals to Rape Crisis need to invest in those services.*
- *Charitable trusts should acknowledge that Rape Crisis centres are at crisis point and consider re/opening specific streams for rape and other forms of sexual violence.*
- *Funders must take proactive steps to outlaw the 'hand to mouth' existence experienced by many Rape Crisis centres. Funders who delay decisions because of their own disorganisation should accept responsibility for the impact this has on the sustainability of services.*
- *A realistic, Compact compliant funding base for the national umbrella group Rape Crisis (England and Wales) needs to be implemented as a matter of urgency, and should follow the Scottish model.*
- *The government acknowledges that sexual violence is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality, yet there is a gap between policy and practice that needs to be closed as a matter of urgency. The support needs of survivors of sexual violence must be prioritised by government through supporting and sustaining appropriate services.*
- *The large amounts of consultative work undertaken by Rape Crisis centres should be recompensed accordingly.*
- *The impact of sexual violence is long term and far reaching. Survivors need access to long- term counselling and support. Since most service users were defined as having 'complex needs' which were often not being met by statutory services, a more diverse range of funding is needed (health, education, employment etc).*
- *The Department of Health needs to recognise that the closure of Rape Crisis centres has a direct impact on the numbers of women statutory health services will eventually have to provide care for because of the serious health consequences of sexual violence.*
- *The Inter-Ministerial Group on Sexual Violence needs to learn about and promote the value and sustainability of the Rape Crisis sector.*
- *There must be greater recognition of the importance, and protection of, women-only space for survivors of sexual violence. Statutory sector funders should respect a survivor's right to choose a women-only space and refrain from supporting and commissioning only generic service provision.*

## Domestic violence organisations

### Supporting People funding to women's refuges

96. In April 2003, the government established the Supporting People (SP) programme for local government. Local councils then use this funding to contract housing support related services from the private, public and NGO sectors.<sup>52</sup> It was introduced to coordinate and simplify the funding arrangements. In 2003/04, £57.1m of SP funding was spent by local authorities on services for 'women at risk of domestic violence', rising to £57.4m in 2004/05 and £59.3m in 2005/06. The vast majority of domestic violence SP funding is spent on refuge accommodation but also floating support and other community services
97. Although there is a general shift from grants to contracts with public bodies across the voluntary and community sector, the refuge sector is overly reliant on SP contracts, placing them in a vulnerable position. On average, 54% of providers' annual income comes from SP contracts, whilst the average annual income from contracts with the state across the whole voluntary and community sector is 38%. Therefore, any decreases in the price of contracts will have significant effects on providers.
98. Many refuges have stated that SP has offered their organisation a greater sense of financial security. However, the funding shift from a grants based funding system to the SP programme (a competitive, free-market based funding system) has restricted and redefined the services refuges are able to deliver and has significantly increased associated bureaucracy at the expense of time spent with service users.<sup>53</sup>

### Mergers and take-overs of refuges

99. Women's NGOs, such as Women's Aid organisations, are still the primary providers of refuge accommodation in the UK. However, this situation is changing and the SP programme has enabled 'super-providers' (i.e. organisations with contracts across multiple areas) to emerge, particularly as increasing numbers of housing associations enter the market, including through taking-over specialist Women's Aid organisations.
100. In London over the last three years, at least seven refuges have been taken over by larger providers: two by larger women's organisations, one by a BAME housing association and four by general housing associations.<sup>54</sup>
101. In addition, many refuges are deeply concerned that SP contracts are awarded to the providers offering the cheapest services at the expense of organisations with track-record and expertise.<sup>55</sup>
102. BAME women's refuges, in particular, are being pressured and/or forced in to take-overs (sometimes optimistically referred to as mergers). Imkaan,<sup>56</sup> a national, second tier BAME women's NGO that supports and advocates for BAME and refugee refuges, has a number of members coming under pressure to 'merge' with generic refuges. Research by Imkaan highlighted a "lack of cultural competency and understanding amongst SP officials and the process itself which had a detrimental impact on the way in which the performance of BMER

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<sup>52</sup> Supporting People strategic client groups include those at particular risk in relation to housing including offenders, older and younger people, teenage parents, women at risk of domestic violence, disabled people, those with drug, alcohol issues or mental health support needs, rough sleepers etc

<sup>53</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2007a)

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

<sup>55</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2007a)

<sup>56</sup> [www.imkaan.org.uk](http://www.imkaan.org.uk)

refuge projects were accessed".<sup>57</sup> This is being exacerbated by the desire to cut costs and the 'single group' funding issues (see below).

### **The impact of the 'No recourse to public funds' rule**

103. Women subject to immigration control cannot prevail of public funds in the UK. In terms of domestic violence, this means they are not eligible for housing benefit support to contribute to their rental expenses (including in refuges). It is widely acknowledged, by both refuges and public bodies, that the lack of recourse to public funds for women with insecure immigration status (who are experiencing domestic violence) places these women at great risk and often presents them with a stark choice – to leave and face possible destitution and homelessness or stay with the perpetrator/s and risk continued, and possibly escalated, violence.
104. It is acknowledged that many refuges that accommodate women with no recourse place themselves at risk financially. A small scale study conducted by the Women's Aid Federation of England<sup>58</sup> identified that "through unclaimed monies accrued, refuges lost total revenue of £147,000. Many individual refuges carry 'bad debts' and are penalised by their Registered Social Landlords as a result".<sup>59</sup> An analysis of the audited accounts of London refuges (from April 2003 to March 2006) showed that this point is highly significant – after SP funding, rents from service users is the second largest source of income, accounting for, on average, 24% of refuge providers' annual incomes.
105. As a result, refuges are turning away women with no recourse to public funds. WRC's 2007 survey of London refuges<sup>60</sup> found that refuges turned away 222 requests for support from women with no recourse to public funds. BAME refuges were disproportionately more likely to accommodate and provide general support to women with no recourse.<sup>61</sup> Research by Imkaan found that housing associations were generally unwilling to take on women with no recourse.<sup>62</sup>
106. The government has recently proposed to reimburse refuges the costs of accommodating women with no recourse to public funds once a service user's immigration status is confirmed. However, refuges would be unable to cash-flow a woman's stay, particularly given the length of time it can take to process applications and have decisions made. The proposal is unworkable.

### **'Single group' funding**

107. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is currently consulting on its draft *Cohesion Guide for Funders*.<sup>63</sup> The draft guidance (for England funders only) is primarily focussed on specific ethnic groups which the government is worried can hinder integration and cohesion and "could encourage insularity and resentment in other ethnic groups. The draft guidance does state, however, that it "does not preclude work...services specifically targeting women".<sup>64</sup>
108. We are deeply concerned about the impact of this potential guidance on BAME women's NGOs, despite statements made by the DCLG, and indeed the Secretary of State for CLG the Rt. Hon. Hazel Blears, that services for women, such as domestic violence services should

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<sup>57</sup> Mouji (2008)

<sup>58</sup> [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

<sup>59</sup> Butler (2002)

<sup>60</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2007a)

<sup>61</sup> The majority of these women would have tried to access at least one other refuge, possibly more, after being turned down from the first refuge approached. Therefore, this does not represent the total number of women trying to access services, as it is highly likely that there were multiple requests from the same women.

<sup>62</sup> Mouji (2008)

<sup>63</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2008)

<sup>64</sup> Ibid p.5

continue to be funded. Such a disastrous policy will encourage funders to take a 'one size fits all' approach without the necessary regard for the consequences.

109. WRC's research clearly shows that organisations led by and for BAME women are not only necessary but are essential and effective. BAME women's NGOs reach the most vulnerable and socially excluded women in communities, many of whom would not access statutory services or generic organisations. Far from encouraging "insularity", BAME women's NGOs empower women to develop a sense of autonomy and self-determination, leave violent relationships and enter the job market etc.
110. There are at least three cases of BAME women's domestic violence NGOs where local councils are considering cutting grants because the organisations are specifically focussed on BAME women, despite recent research which found that only one in ten local authorities has a specialist BAME service.<sup>65</sup>

#### Case study: Southall Black Sisters<sup>66</sup>

Southall Black Sisters (SBS), an award winning and internationally renowned women's NGO, is under the threat of closure as a result of the London Borough of Ealing council's decision to withdraw its funding of £100,000 (on average). The local authority's decision is based on the view that there is no need for specialist services for BAME women and that services to abused women in the borough need to be streamlined, as part of the central government's planned move away from single group funding. According to SBS: "This view fails to take account of the unequal social, economic and cultural context which makes it difficult, if not impossible, for BAME women to access outside help or seek information about their rights. In effect, the council proposes to take away essential life saving services provided by SBS."

After significant lobbying by SBS, supported by many other women's NGO, Ealing council gave SBS a two month reprieve in late March 2008: "The interviewing panels are unable to come to a decision between the four bidders. We can only assume that we were so good, in terms of scoring, that we may be at the top but of course we don't meet all the council's criteria, i.e. we are not prepared to provide a service a borough wide service for that sum of money, and they may be worried that we will want to scrutinise their decision making process. At the moment we don't know what's going on. We are also going to judicial review." However, it is unlikely that SBS will succeed in their bid for the funds and services, therefore, are likely to be cut or severely reduced.

SBS has made significant achievements. Its successes include securing concessions to immigration laws in relation to domestic violence. SBS was also instrumental in *R v Ahluwalia*, which changed the definition of 'provocation' in cases of battered women and domestic violence laws in the UK.

According to SBS: "Under this misguided 'one size fits all' approach, unequal structural relations based on class, gender and race are ignored. So, in our situation, due in part to budget constraints, Ealing Council has made full use of the backlash against multiculturalism and feminism to 'restructure' its services so that there is only one service provider of domestic violence.... At the same time, in a somewhat contradictory fashion, the implementation of 'cohesion' strategies in Ealing and around the country are resulting in the promotion of single faith (Muslim) based groups that are provided with funds to build capacity to address a range of social issues. For a number of reasons, this is an extremely worrying development. It also spells the death knell of secular groups like SBS. Our main concern is that social issues like domestic violence and forced marriage in faith based groups will be addressed from within a religious framework which will be disastrous for women's rights within minority communities. It will close down the options that are available to the most vulnerable in our communities and will violate their fundamental human rights."

<sup>65</sup> Coy et al. (2007)

<sup>66</sup> Quotes taken from *Help Save Southall Black Sisters*

## **Recommendations:**

- *'Intelligent' commissioning should be implemented. Supporting People and other local authority funding should be geared towards improving the capacity (e.g. staffing) of current services and preventing the risk of reduction or closure of services.*
- *Grant giving enables NGOs to identify needs and are more flexible than commissioning programmes. Funders should retain grants programmes along with shifting funding to commissioning programmes.*
- *Single group funding is undermining essential BAME women's NGOs. The proposed community cohesion guidance for funders should be rejected outright. All funders should have greater awareness of violence and discrimination against women and the intersections with other forms of discrimination such as racism, disablism and homophobia and the women's NGOs that address these issues.*
- *The government must end the double standards in its approach to domestic violence and women subject to immigration controls which allows some women the right to seek protection but not others. The 'no recourse' requirement for abused women who have insecure immigration status should be abolished. In the interim, the government should provide a special fund pending long-term solutions.*

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