

**BETWEEN OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES: WOMEN'S COMMUNITY AND  
VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS IN LONDON**

**July 2013**

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## Introduction

*We have to go back to our roots to what are we about,  
how did we start, we cannot forget that.*

Vivienne Hayes, WRC

Women are underrepresented in areas of civic and political life, despite policy such as the Gender Equality Duty (2007) and more recently the Equality Act (2010). Although women organizations are specialist in their own areas and are often successful in establishing solid links with local communities, their ability to influence decision making is limited. Recent studies highlight barriers women organizations face as they try to achieve effective social change (WRC 2010). At the same time governance measures, such as the localism agenda, underpin the current Government's plans to devolve greater power to local communities and there is a growing concern that decentralisation will have a negative impact on gender equality (NCIA 2011; WRC 2012). Whilst localism as a concept seeks to empower local communities, without a focus on equality it may perpetuate female disadvantage.

This report aims at achieving the following:

- Gathering information on specific needs of women organizations in order to ensure that they are represented within local authorities and they are able to cope with a reduced amount of financial resources
- Assessing how recent governance measures have impacted women's organizations in London and will
- Mapping existing women's organisations in London in order to evaluate any barriers to access and needs
- Identifying good practices and proposing recommendations which might contribute to the future sustainability of the sector

Furthermore, the on-line survey aims at ensuring that women's organizations are aware of the policy changes occurred after the Equality Act (2010) and know what they can expect from public bodies which, under the PSED (Public Sector Equality Duty) require public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation. Under the PSED public authorities also have to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it (EHRC 2011). Mapping the awareness of current changes in legislation by women's voluntary and community organizations will help identify specific needs in equality, gender training and gender mainstreaming at a time when the EHRC has pointed to a lack of compliance of the 2010 Spending Review with the PSED due to lack of transparency in mainstreaming gender as no department has responsibility assessing the cumulative impact on women of the measures proposed. In other words, the guidance provided by the Treasury to government departments and local authorities has failed to address all the obligations foreseen under the Equality Duty. Without the duty to promote equality of opportunity, in some cases ministers may have inadequate information as to the potential impacts of their decisions (Gage 2012).

The research project informing this report comprises of a mixed-method approach to gather data on women's organizations and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the women's sector in London. These women-only organizations range from BMER (British Minority Ethnic and Refugee) to VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls) and include first and second tier women's organizations.

## **1. The Women's voluntary sector in London: an overview**

The project looks at women's voluntary and community organizations in London which comprise the women's (third) sector. 'Third sector' usually refers to organizations that 'share the common characteristics of being non-governmental organizations which are driven by their values and which principally reinvest any financial surpluses to further social, environmental or cultural objectives. The term 'third sector' encompasses voluntary and community organizations, charities, social enterprises, cooperatives and mutual both large and small (Department for Business Innovation and Skills 2013). This project looks specifically at women's voluntary and community organizations, which are referred to as 'the

women's sector'. This includes both first tier and second tier women's organizations. First tier organizations are front-line service providers which usually have a solid link with local communities, while second tier organisations are normally umbrella organizations that provide support to other voluntary and community sector organisations, belong to a number of partnership and influence policies. The Women Resource Centre (WRC) is the largest umbrella organization in the UK women's sector. They summarize the composition of the women's sector as follows:

*Led by and for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (LBT) women, disabled, poor, young and older women and women of minority faiths, the women's sector is a multi-layered safety net for women from all walks of life (WRC 2013:5)*

Women's voluntary and community organizations main aim is challenging gender inequality and overcoming discrimination through a set of strategies to empower women. These strategies are at times life-saving services which are offered to women with complex needs requiring flexible and targeted support which often extend to their families and the wider community, ranging from internet training for women returning to work to providing refuge accommodation for women who need protection from a violent partner (WRC 2013). Women's needs require a more holistic approach if compared with other types of service charities and the women's sector provides a unique way of understanding women specific issues in contemporary globalized, multicultural and neo-liberal societies. The solid and continuous commitment of the women's sector accounts for multiple and intersecting aspects of women's identity that might contribute to their vulnerability, from migration status to religion, age, sexual orientation, class and cultural background or ethnicity; for this main reason the research project informing this report uses intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989, Yuval-Davis 2006) as a theoretical framework to orient the questionnaires, the interview schedules and the interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative data sets.

In addition, as far as the UK is concerned, this report considers the ways in which the austerity orientated economic policies of the current coalition government are impacting on the women's sector. London is a microcosm for the changes that have affected the women's sector over the last decade given the fact that the current austerity regime is only the tip of the iceberg of these changes and only represents one aspect of the progressive re-organization of the funding system started in the early 2000s. The women's voluntary and community sector has been weakened in time by a shrinking number of available income sources for women's organizations, changes in funding structures and introduction of wide

ranging spending cuts making it difficult for many smaller organization to survive (WRC 2013).

A recent study by the umbrella organization Women's Resource Centre (2013) has highlighted that the increasing pressure on women's organizations means that both staff and service users are affected in terms of stress and low morale. Furthermore, many organizations had to reduce their service provision (75%) make staff redundant at senior level roles such as policy and fundraising (58%) with more redundancies to be expected in the coming financial year. This picture is made even more concerning by the fact that these roles are necessary in order to make women's organization's voice heard at a time when 97% of these organizations are facing an increased demand for their services. Commissioning has also contributed to increase competition among women's organizations in the voluntary and community sector which now have to compete with other voluntary, statutory and private sector organizations in London. Inevitably commissioning implies that larger, generic organizations such as for example housing associations are competing over the same statutory resources and are often able to offer less specialized services at lower prices. This happens at a time when many women's organizations are also losing their core funding, hence creating an impasse situation for the women's sector which threatens their very existence.

This report will focus exclusively on the women's sector in London and will draw on results from a quantitative on-line survey to women's organizations in London and eight qualitative interviews with key stakeholders in the sector, including first and second tiers organizations ranging from BMER (British Minority Ethnic and Refugee) organizations to VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls) organizations. The results will highlight local, national and international networks that research participants refer to, both in the quantitative and the qualitative parts of this study. The report also throws light on the ways in which on the one hand women's organizations play an important role in establishing solid links with local communities by providing specialist services, and on the other hand contribute to influence policy by sitting at different tables and partnerships and working in collaboration with both statutory and non-statutory institutions. Whilst the existing academic literature on women's organizations is scarce, large organizations with research capacity such as WRC are constantly producing reports that provide a comprehensive yet non-academically informed account of the state of the art in the women's sector. This includes the impact of the cuts on the sector and suggests ways in which to overcome the increasing obstacles that the sector is currently facing (Fawcett 2013, Women Budget Group 2013, WRC 2013).

This study makes use of the available sources produced by the women's sector and some emerging academic research in the field (Emejulu and Basset 2013) to explore how do women's organizations in London get to influence policies, what kind of barriers to representation they experience, to what extent the recent austerity agenda has impacted the sector, and what are the strategies envisaged for the survival of the sector.

## **State of the art of the women's voluntary and community organizations**

Despite several reports and dissemination material produced by women's sector itself, the women's voluntary and community sector is under studied in academia and the existing studies in this field are either in the development field, hence focussing mainly on the Global South, or outdated (Goetz 1997; Pelmutter 1994; Riordan 1998, 2000). A great amount of grey literature on services, activities, campaigns, training, networks and various tables of negotiations has been produced and disseminated by the women's voluntary and community sector. However, this is fragmented and at times difficult to access. Academic work has rarely been focussed on women's organizations and their specific role in making women's voice heard and in providing services for more vulnerable women. The existing academic literature specifically addressing the disproportionate impact the current economic crisis is having on women (Ghosh 2010, Marchand and Runyan 2010, Seguino 2010), tends to focus on women as workers or service users yet without mentioning the devastating impact the combined effects of austerity measures and changes in the commissioning system are having on the women's sector. This section aims at providing an overview of academic work on women's voluntary and community organizations highlighting gaps in the literature and identifying future research pathways in the field.

From the 1980s onwards the number of services and infrastructures focussing on women-specific culture and needs was growing throughout Western Europe, gradually assuming a formalised and legal structure. A large number of women's centres presented strong links with political parties, the private sector and a range of institutional powers (Bono and Kemp 1991). Due to the professionalization of the 1970s women's movement, some of the groups which were created within the feminist movement became more institutional, started to formalise their service provision and were co-opted by academia and other professional fields. The emerging women's sector was caught between increasingly rigid institutional structures and a declining social movement (Vacchelli 2009).



Although a key moment for the shaping of the women's voluntary and community sector is the 1980s, the history of women's organizations and their strategies to influence policy in the UK goes back to the inter-war period in the last century (1928-1939) when influential women's groups in the UK, whilst refusing to define themselves as 'feminist' fought for women's rights as newly enfranchised citizens (Beaumont 2000). A study on women's organizations in South Africa (Hassim and Gouws 1988) problematizes civil society as domain that already excludes women and asks questions about the institutionalization of women's movements and whether the very concept of civil society, which is itself loaded with Western-centric connotations, can be easily applied to the South African context. This argument resonates with Nancy Fraser's (1990) critique of Habermas' definition of public sphere, which inevitably excludes those groups that tend to disagree with dominant discourses, i.e. these 'subaltern counter-publics' where feminist agency is situated. A more recent study on women's organizations in Turkey during the 1990s (Esim and Cindoglu 1999) is also concerned with the institutional positioning of the women's sector and presents a negative view of the sector in Turkey where mainly urban middle-class professional women offer services to lower middle-class women in a populist manner with no real interest in social justice and in redistributing wealth. The European project FEMCIT (2012) provides evidence and analysis of the complex dynamics of gendered citizenship in a multicultural context focussing on the role women's movements played in transforming European societies and European culture since the 1960s and the impact it had on our everyday lives and relationships.

The studies of Siobhan Riordan (1998, 2000) focus specifically on women's organizations in the UK and argue for a strengthening of women's organizations in order to attain gender equality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; this research has been relevant in identifying imbalances in the way statutory resources are distributed by also creating an innovative monitoring system which can be used as a gender mainstreaming tool. However, this research was carried out at a time when women's organizations were mainly financed by local authority on the basis of the service they were providing. Yet the commissioning system which has been introduced in the last 10 years by neoliberal governance measures is changing the ways in which women's organizations are able to resource means for providing their services hence the findings and recommendations, as well as the monitoring practices started by Riordan's studies in the field are now obsolete. In other words, the very assumption that most women's organizations might be more or less eligible to receive statutory funding is no longer viable in 2013.

The shadow report by the UK CEDAW working group entitled 'Women's equality in the UK- a health check' (2013) has assessed the UK's progress in implementing the UN CEDAW

(Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women). The report confirms that 'in general policy changes have been regressive for women's rights. The Government has done little to promote public awareness of CEDAW or to mainstream gender equality across Government and inequality remains in many areas of society' (p.4, 2013). Moreover, the report points to multiple and intersectional discrimination taking place against women and a lack of continuous monitoring and periodical evaluation of laws and measures to ensure gender sensitive framework of equality. The areas that need addressing according to the shadow report include:

- Continued failure to address the high level of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and the embedded causes of this, and to sustainably fund specialist dedicated women-only services for these women
- Reduction in legal support and access to justice for women suffering discrimination and violence
- Welfare reforms which are pushing more women into poverty and insecurity
- Inadequacies of healthcare support and provision for women
- Incomplete support for women with 'no recourse to public funds' refugee and asylum seeking women
- Continued discrimination against women in the labour market in terms of opportunities and equal pay
- Continued under-representation of women in politics and decision making positions and the lack of success of measures attempting to address this.

Currently the women's sector in the UK is led by groups and partnerships that seek to influence policy in two broad areas: (i) BMER (Black, Minority Ethnic and Refugee) and (ii) VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls).

### **a. Black women (BMER)**

Organizations of black women in Britain could be described as hidden from history as their activism tended to be subsumed within the categories of either 'black people' or 'women'. Much of what has been written on black women's organizations dates back to the 1980s when both the women's movement and the black movement made substantial impact on voluntary and community organizations (Davis and Cooke 2002). The difficult position of

back women lies in the fact that they are at the heart of both movements and for the first time in the 1980s they established organizations of their own. Julia Sudbury (1998) documents survival and regeneration of some black women's organizations after the funding crisis of the late 1980s and early 1990s, however there is limited information on black women's organizations (Hill-Collins 1991; Lorde 1994; Mama 1993). The organizations of today form around issues that adversely affect lives of black women in Britain. Organising is a means of increasing social inclusion, combating the isolating and debilitating effect of racism that can prevent black women from benefiting from main-stream service provision.

As the booklet 'Why black women organize?' by Sonia Davis and Veronica Cooke (2002) explains, the definition of black women as 'black' corresponds to a precise political strategy which reflects a political identity consolidated over time; the definition 'black women' takes into account the historical political connections between women of African Caribbean and South Asian descent. This decision is in stark contrast to its use elsewhere which tends to differentiate women from African and Caribbean origins from other women from Asian or other minority ethnic backgrounds. The term black and minority ethnic (BME) is now established within the jargon of local authorities, and used by some to make the distinction between African Caribbean and South Asian communities. Instead, the term 'black' defines a political identity and an underlying commitment to anti-racism by black women's organizations. The women's sector in London uses the acronym BMER to signify Black and Minority Ethnic and Refugee, adding emphasis to the migration status of the minority group in question.

The sector as a whole has been quite dependent, encouraged by the previous government, to be involved in delivering public services. Delivering of services is a huge source of income for many women's sector services. Today black women's organizations are the most vulnerable as a result of restructuring the commissioning system. Various policy mechanisms failing to support the BMER women's sector include (i) the Community Cohesion policy which encouraged local authorities against the funding of single-issue groups and (ii) the Gender Equality Duty which was anticipated to be a mechanism for preserving women-only services and in practice has been used by some local authorities to implement a gender neutral position. In addition, the Supporting People funding which was the main source of commissioning for BMER refuge providers is no longer ring-fenced for housing support services, which translates into less institutional protection for BMER organizations that now have to compete with large generic associations and agencies.

The WRC 2013 report on impact of the crisis on the women's voluntary and community sector argues that specialist women's organizations, such as BMER women's organizations,

LGTB and disabled women are hit harder by the funding crisis. This is made difficult by the fact that public bodies tend to misinterpret the case for specialist services made by equality legislation such as the Equality Act and as a result public bodies now question the legality of women-only services. At a time when important pieces of Equality Legislation such as the Public Service Equality Duty is being reviewed, the Act's unequivocal disposition about legitimacy and appropriateness for public bodies to fund women-only services is under scrutiny. From an intersectionality point of view moreover, the report states very clearly how organizations working with multiple inequalities are mostly hit by the recent austerity measures.

The 'joined up' politics of Britain envisage voluntary organization sitting in partnership, being equal decision makers in local politics, alongside the traditional power brokers of local government and health authorities to consult with local black and minority ethnic communities about their needs. However,

*[W]orking across two or more aspects of inequality, such as gender and race, can make organisations more vulnerable when cuts are being implemented in both areas (WRC 2013a, p.7).*

In conclusion, a sector which is highly involved in delivery of specialist services such as BMER women's organizations is struggling to survive and urgently needs to develop resilience strategies in order to survive and keep providing fundamental support to BMER women at local level.

## **b. Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)**

Presenting VAWG as separated from BMER women's organizations is a merely logistical choice. The work of BMER women's organization and the work of women's organizations focussing on VAWG are often intertwined and this is particularly true for issues that are specific to BMER women's organizations. The organization Imkaan (2010) has recently published the report '*The road to sustainability*' from a research commissioned by WHEC (Women's Health and Equality Consortium) focussing on small specialist BMER women's organizations working in the area of violence against women and girls (VAWG) to include domestic and sexual violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and 'honour based' violence. The research has pointed to the adoption of a different approach to commissioning

in a way that integrates the expertise of specialist VAWG groups to compete on an equal footing. This would include for instance capacity-building provision to support the development of partnership models of working between smaller niche organizations.

At international level, the UK has signed almost all international Treaties and Conventions regarding human rights and non-discrimination, including the above mentioned CEDAW and DEVAW (Declaration of Elimination of Discrimination Against Women) and several Directives and Conventions at European level. The UK is therefore bound by international obligations to protect women from violence, 'to exercise due diligence in the prevention of violence, and to ensure women's 'right to live in dignity' (page 22, Daphne Report 2010).

At a national level, in early 2000s responses to VAWG were incoherent and the consultation paper *Safety and Justice* (2003) referred to DV (Domestic Violence) rather than VAWG thus representing a step back from an earlier policy document (*Living without Fear* 1999) which, instead, already acknowledged the needs for integrated measures against VAWG. The Labour government published various documents, actions and delivery plans including a *Cross Government Action Plan on Sexual Violence and Abuse* led by an inter-ministerial group created in 2003 and in 2008. The government published an action plan to tackle violent crime, which includes specific actions on DV and sexual violence. Although various measures have been identified for the prevention of violence in these action plans - including improvement of early identification and service provision - they mainly focus on criminal justice responses to DV.

From 2010 onwards there has been important government work on recognition of VAWG as a central issue for combating discrimination against women and girls. As appears in the well-researched website of the WRC, on July 16th 2010, Theresa May's speech at the Women's Aid National Conference announced the Coalition Government's strategic vision to combat VAWG made public in the policy document entitled *Call to end violence against women and girls: strategic vision* (2010). At about the same time the Mayor's strategy to end VAWG in London was also published, '*The Way Forward*' (March 2010) which aims at improving the services available to women and girls who have been subjected to violence, including investing in Rape Crisis Centres; helping women and girls who have been subjected to violence to get help and support. In addition, '*Tackling VAWG: A guide to good practice communication*' (2011) is a Government Equality Office guidance paper and toolkit to inform government communication in the area of VAWG and supports the Government's VAWG strategy where the government recognises that effective and strategic communications will play a key role in shifting public attitudes towards VAWG.

In the same years other important reports have been published in relation to VAWG, *'The Stern Independent Review'* is an investigation into the way rape complaints are handled by public authorities in England and Wales, from the moment a rape is first disclosed until the court has reached a verdict. The government have published a response to this review. Furthermore, *'The Alberti Review'* is a series of recommendations for the NHS to better support victims of violence. It stresses that increased awareness, training and education is necessary for NHS staff to respond to VAWG effectively. Another review *'Sexualisation of Young People Review'* (February 2010) examines how sexualised images and messages may be affecting the development of children and young people and influencing cultural norms. The review also examines the evidence linking the sexualisation of young people with violence. One year later, a cross-governmental national strategy on VAWG was introduced with obligations for government on ending VAWG *'Call to end violence against women and girls: action plan'* (2011). There is clearly a centralized effort to address domestic violence against women and girls and the women's voluntary and community sector are increasingly taking up this challenge, partly because this is mainly where resources are allocated.

There are a myriad of women's organizations in London committed to the cause of combating Violence Against Women and Girl. These range from well organized second tier organizations such as AVA, to campaigning organizations such as IMKAAN, IKWRO and Imece. Imece organized a successful conference on domestic violence in June 2010 whose acts were published in a conference report entitled *'Towards a consistent and coordinated response to domestic violence experienced by minority ethnic, refugee(BMER) and Roma women in Europe'*. The work behind the conference was founded by the European fund Daphne whose research report, *'Empowering Women or Perpetuating Victimhood: Minority Ethnic and Roma Women's Experiences of Domestic Violence Policy and Service Provision'* (2010) was the outcome of a comparative study between the UK and Hungary. The research confirms the changes in service provision highlighted above, i.e. the fact that recently there has been a shift in DV service provision at the national and local level. The implications range from increasing emphasis on criminal justice responses to DV to a process of re-tendering by local authorities that inevitably favours large providers of refuge services. Moreover the report points out that funding specialist outreach services have been increasingly replaced by in-house generic outreach services.

These set of changes reflect what has been happening in the women's voluntary and community sector in general and they pose a threat to specialist services that provide a holistic package of safety, support and empowerment to vulnerable women. The new measures and policies in VAWG fail to take into account differential impact on minority

ethnic women, and inevitably erode provision for particular groups of women further entrenching discrimination. Gender mainstreaming had been identified by the Daphne report (2010) as a strategy to engage and involve generic and specialist women's organisations in order to limit the detrimental effects of such policies. The research shows that when women receive holistic support from specialist agencies, not only do they feel safe, they also feel empowered. This points to a need for more academic work in the field of VAWG which is not limited to DV. Moreover additional academic work would be needed to strengthen policy and legal mechanisms able to protect women's organizations long standing expertise and excellence in providing holistic services to women.

### ***The VAWG consortium in London***

The VAWG consortium, currently facilitated by the WRC, is a pan-London membership of women's organizations which has shared expertise and learning over the past two years by ensuring the diverse needs of survivors of all forms of violence are met with a holistic and high quality provision. The Consortium has been recently commissioned by London Councils to provide specialist support to those people who have experienced gender violence and includes organisations working in the area of prevention and with male perpetrators and survivors; it represents a sector- led response to the reduction in funding for the women's sector and embeds feminist anti-racist principles and ethos, with an emphasis on the way in which the service is delivered. How and who delivers the services within the women's sector is as important as the service itself. The aim of the Consortium is to build consensus in London's VAWG sector and influence policy with evidence based research by also creating stronger referral pathways and developing best practice across London. Also the Consortium is hosted and administered by the WRC which is the key stakeholder in the women's sector nationally.

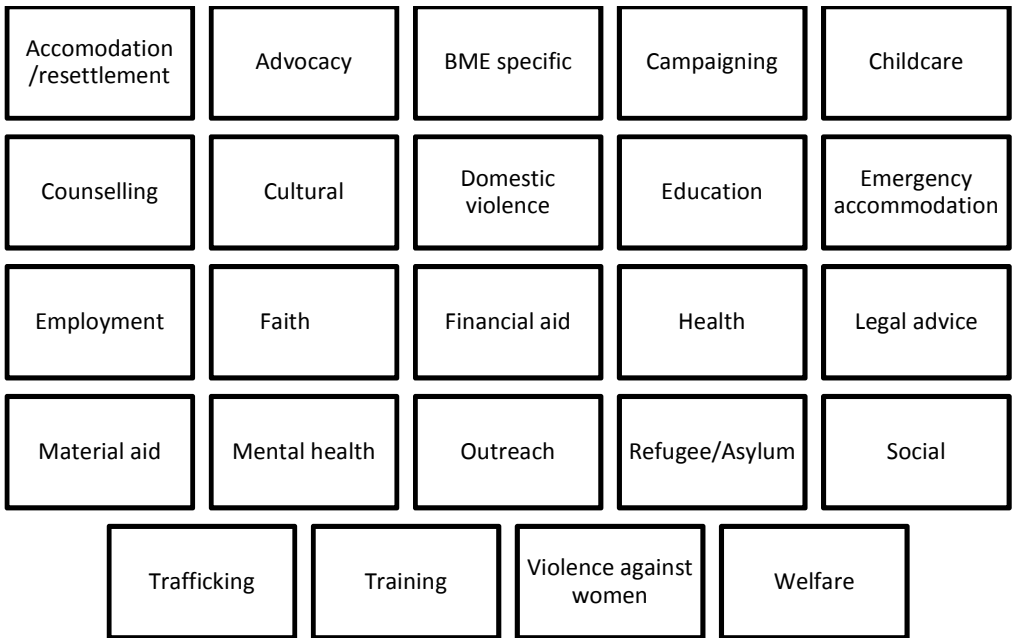
## **2. Methodology**

The research project made use of a mixed method approach in order to meet the primary aims of the research: mapping existing women's organisations in London, evaluating barriers to access and needs of women organisations and assessing specific needs that might benefit from gender training. Intersectionality was used as an interpretative framework for

both designing the questionnaires and for analysing the data. Intersectionality is the result of multiple discrimination whereas different levels of oppression (class, gender, race for instance) are not to be understood as the sum of these levels. For instance, minority ethnic women are often subject to racial and gendered double discrimination as levels of discrimination cannot be separated from each other in practice (Brah and Phoenix 2004). In other words, intersectionality refers to the manner in which structural inequalities including gender, race, class, immigration status, etc. converge to create qualitatively different experiences of subordination for particular groups of women (Crenshaw, 1991). As a result, their experience of oppression is not simply the sum of its parts, as implied by the concept of ‘double discrimination’: the oppressions are experienced as simultaneous and interconnected (Crenshaw 1991).

**Phase 1: Mapping of existing women’s organization in London**

A database of organisations was created by drawing upon existing lists from the Women’s Resource Centre (WRC), National Alliance of Women’s Organisations (NAWO), information held by the various London Borough’s and by Councils, and various enquiries with existing women’s online networks, feminist networks and signposting projects. The resultant database highlights the name of the organisation, the work it does and relevant contact and website details. Just over 700 organisations were identified as providing services to women out of which 300 could be considered as being a ‘women-only organisation. The organisations provide advice, information and support services for women across a wide range of themes:





## **Phase 2: Distributing an online questionnaire to the organisations collected in the database**

The questionnaire made use of both closed and open questions to be quantified using an online software package. A total of 66 responses were received by a range of women's organisation across London and across the areas highlighted above.

## **Phase 3: Interviews with key informants in the London's voluntary and community organizations women's sector**

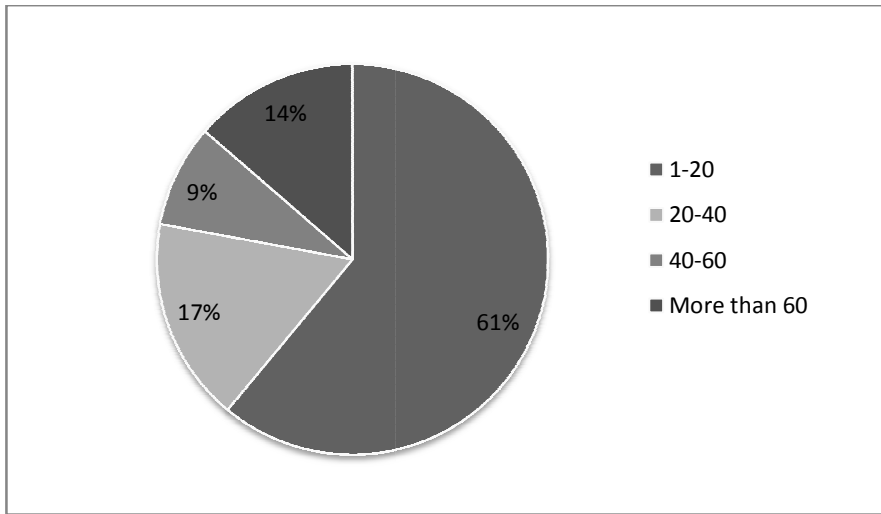
The qualitative part of the research consisted of eight semi-structured interviews in order to gather further insights on the state of the art of women's organizations and their needs in contemporary London. Stakeholders were selected according to the kind of area they cover from both first and second tier organisations, focussing particularly on those stakeholders who are experts in policy and advocacy work and are able to articulate the changes brought by the Equality Act and/or Localism Act for the women's sector. While the semi-structured interview asked for data such as type of organization, interests, barriers to access and specific needs, the interviews with stakeholders contributed to provide a solid policy context and were able to frame the problems and the future scenarios faced by the women's sector in London in an effective and insightful way.

## **3. Survey data**

### **About the organisations**

The majority of organisations which responded to the survey have a staff and volunteer workforce of between 1-20 people (see Fig 1). The organisations fund their activities and pay their staff via a combination of funding, the most frequent types being local authority funding, charitable trusts, private/independent trusts and foundations, donations and membership fees/subscriptions (see Table 1).

**Figure 1: Size of Organisation: Staff & Volunteers**



**Table 1: How do you fund your activities and pay your staff?**

	Response %	Response Count
Local Authority funding	33.3%	19
Charitable Trusts	31.6%	18
Private/independent Trusts & Foundations	29.8%	17
Donations	28.1%	16
Membership fee/subscription	24.6%	14
Income generation activities e.g. subscription, journals, training	19.3%	11
Fundraising	15.8%	9
Central Government funding	14.0%	8
Big Lottery Fund	10.5%	6
PCT funded	5.3%	3
Sponsorship	1.8%	1
European grant	1.8%	1

The services offered by the organisations part of the women's sector in London range from generic information and advice to specialist and tailored support. Table 2 shows the services offered by organisations in the way respondents have described them. The most common service is around information advice and advocacy and within this area the focus is predominantly on violence against women and girls, followed by specialist advice on immigration, asylum and refugee issues. The second most frequent service provided is training and employment. Within this there is a strong emphasis on language and ESOL as

well as IT, vocational and basic skills training. Some organisations offer training to external parties such as clients, professionals, member organisations and to schools and other public bodies.

**Table 2: Services offered by organisations (self-described)**

	<b>Response Count</b>
Information, advice, advocacy	29
Training and employment	28
Counselling/mentoring	16
Educational services	13
Networks	12
Social/recreational/cultural services	12
Campaigning	8
Accommodation	6
Health services	5
Outreach work	5
Publishing e.g. newsletter	5
Research	5
Capacity building	4

Organisations were asked to define any other areas/specific interests that better describe their focus, assuming that gender is one of the main areas of their work. Table 3 below shows the most common focus was around education/training followed by domestic violence and health and wellbeing. Race, ethnicity and age were the predominant strand groups, with the majority of organisations focussing on race, ethnicity, refugee and asylum seekers followed by a similar proportion whose focus is youth. Much smaller percentages were attributed to work focussing on LGBT issues and older age and an even smaller proportion focussing on class and religion. Just over half the respondents (55.2%) would describe their organisations as 'feminist'.

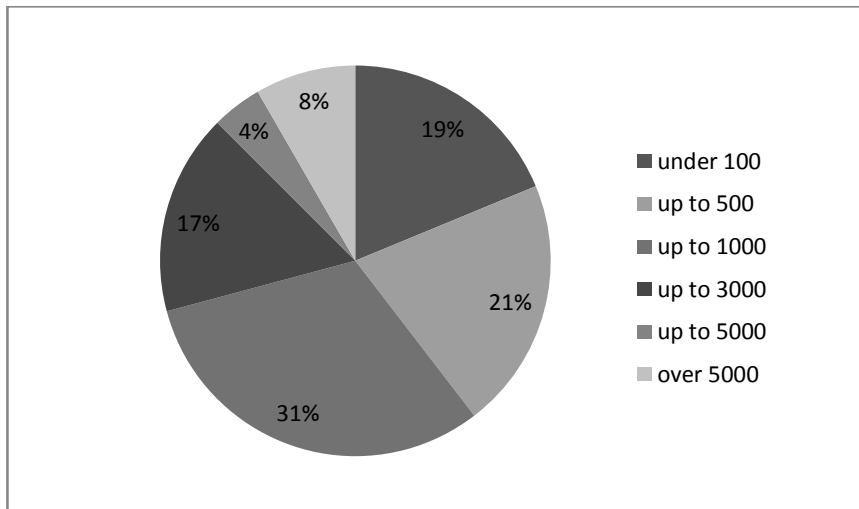
**Table 3: Work of the organization aside from gender**

	<b>Response Percentage</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Education/Training	52.5%	32
Domestic violence	49.2%	30
Mental health /Counselling	39.3%	24
Health and advice	34.4%	21

Race/ethnicity	29.5%	18
Youth	27.9%	17
Sex work/trafficking	22.9%	14
Refugee/asylum seekers	22.9%	14
Older age	18.0%	11
LGTB	16.4%	10
Religion	9.9%	6
Class	9.9%	6

Organisations were asked how many women use their services. The majority of organisations have up to a thousand women service users over a year; 31% report up to a thousand women use their services annually, 21% state that up to 500 women use their services annually and 19% state they have under 100 women service users (see figure x below). Among the organisations that provide services to very few women are accommodation/refuge services with high a turnover of users (and a limited number of rooms). Those who provided services to 5000 women and above are typically membership organisations.

**Figure 2: How many women use your services on average over a year?**

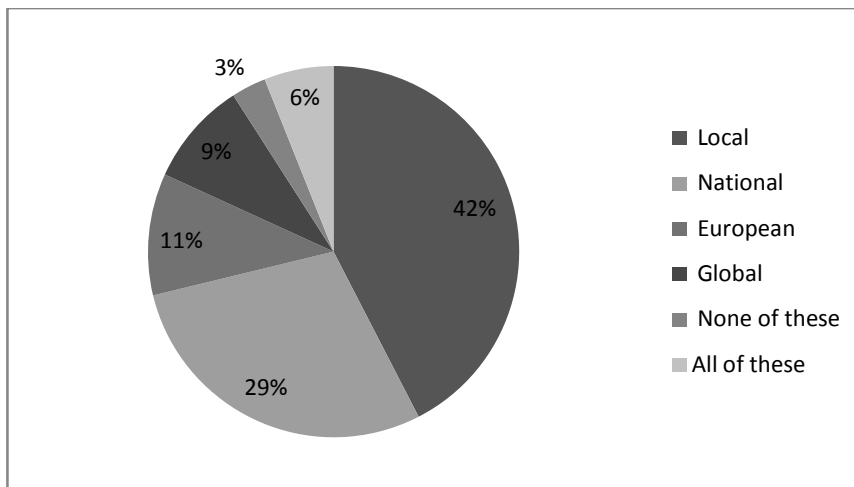


Nearly all the respondents state that they collaborate with other organisations (93.1%). This includes:

- organisations similar to them, working with a common focus but perhaps in a different geographic location on various collaborative projects;
- umbrella organisations/networks that facilitate sharing of best practice, dissemination of information and joint funding applications;
- organisations providing expertise or a service the respondent does not provide such as housing, education and health services;
- larger organisations such as established charities e.g. Age UK; local authority and government organisations;
- academic institutions;
- voluntary and private sector groups.

Just under half of the groups surveyed said they are part of an umbrella organisation (43%). The most common umbrella organisations are: Women’s Resource Centre (WRC), National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA), Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (THCVS), National Association of Women’s Organisations (NAWO), Advice UK, Imkaan, Voice for Choice, Migrants Rights Network and Race on the Agenda.

**Figure 3: Institutional scale of the organisations’ work**



When considering other organizations, institutions or networks the respondent organisations are involved in, just under half the respondents state their work is local (42%). 29% work on

a national scale and 11% at a European scale and only 9% consider their work as having a global reach (See Fig.3).

### **Impact and barriers**

Just over two thirds of the 66 organisations feel they have an impact on policies (69.1%). The type of impact they have revolves around the following:

- **Campaigning and lobbying** – an active policy or campaigns team, lobby local and national politicians, respond to White Papers, provide input/case studies to campaigning organisations
- **Fostering relationships with service providers and decision makers** - such as with parliamentarians and service providers, sit on a number of groups, forums and networks
- **Providing advice to policy makers** - contribute to consultations, are interviewed by policy influencing organizations, take part in parliamentary group consultations, respond to surveys, provide evidence based research to inform policy formulation and development, compile policies
- **Providing direct funding to influence policy making** - provide information to people who want to have an impact on policy, fund groups to empower women leaders/politicians

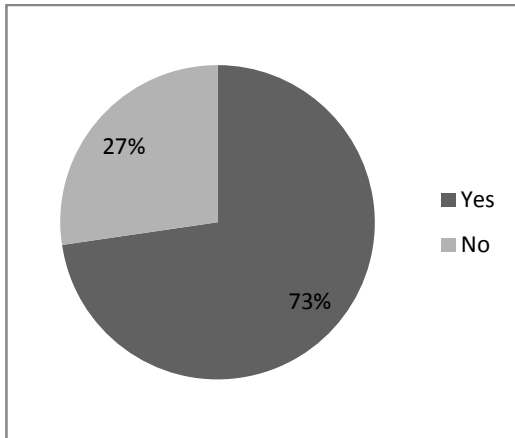
When asked about barriers to local decision making processes and consultations, 47% of organisations say they do face barriers. The majority of organisations feel they lack the resources, capacity and time to influence and be a stronger part of local decision making such as a lack of volunteers, being overburdened with requests to respond either to a formal consultation or ad hoc enquiries. Many state they simply do not receive enough notice to be able to participate such as being parts of funding proposals. This is expressed by an organisation working in women's health:

*We are aware that the newly established CCGs have a mental health lead but we have not been able to get hold of any despite our efforts. Our capacity to pursue these individual relationships with these new commissioners and stakeholders, in all 14 London boroughs who provide a service, is limited, as we are a voluntary sector*

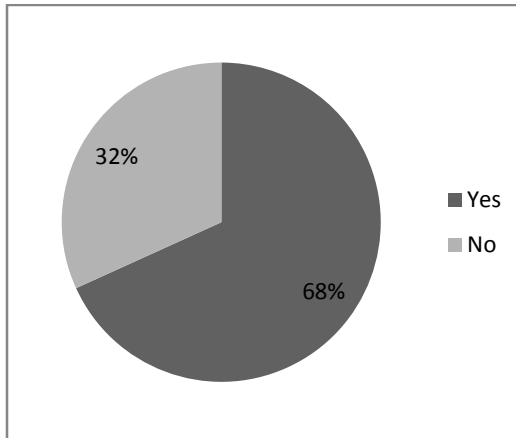
organization. In addition, our partners, such as London Probation Trust, do not have an automatic seat in Health & Wellbeing Boards and we are concerned that the health and wellbeing needs of women in the criminal justice system may not be understood by local decision makers. The work that we do with offenders may also not fit neatly, from a CCG point of view, within a particular area of provision as their needs are multiple, complex and require multi-agency response, coordinated by specialist services. We are concerned that during these changes and lack of presence in the forums that influence decision making, less specialist services such as ours will be supported and more women will fall through the net (Mental health charity).

Some organisations feel marginalised, ‘We are not always invited to key consultation meetings’ (BME Women’s Org.). Others feel disillusioned by past disappointments, ‘that affects future responses when we feel we are not listened to’ (BME Women’s organisation).

**Fig 5: Are you currently experiencing financial barriers?**



**Fig 6: Did this get any worse because of any austerity measures?**



Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the majority of respondents are currently experiencing financial barriers (73%) and feel these have been made worse by the Government’s austerity measures (68%). Most of these organisations state this is because of cuts to funding:

*Funding for supporting people (it is a core funding since it funds our refuge) was cut substantially this year, our core costs for management were cut by 67%, which we were luckily able to secure from another funder, otherwise this could have had a significantly negative impact on the overall business of the organisation (BME women’s organisation).*

*Grant funding is increasingly impossible for organisations like us who are not charities (because we need to retain the right to lobby government!) and not immediately seen to benefit people directly (pro-choice campaign group).*

This is also made worse by an increased competition for funding, 'Less opportunities, more players' (Women's youth org.), and a decline in donations from the public and private business together with a rise in demand for services.

Change in local and national policy direction was also felt to have a negative impact on funding, and particularly so where someone local may have been championing a specific agenda:

*The UK government stopped funding us because DFID (Department for International Development's policies and personnel interested in supporting our work changed (women's health information org.).*

*We lost financial support due to change in mayoral candidate and cut back on funding community led initiatives (Muslim LGBTQI support group).*

The obvious impact of the loss of funding has been the loss of services:

*We used to have funding for campaigning and networking and publicity, we don't have those now, so we had to cut down from the time we spend on those things (BME women's organisation).*

*Cuts to legal aid cripples the outreach work service we offer our asylum members (Muslim LGBTQI support group).*

*Cuts to ESOL training September 2011 meant we had to cut our crèche service impacting on many women. This has impacted our ability to provide a variety of services and to ensure those services are free (women's education and training organisation).*

*Students who were benefiting from free education to support their reinsertion in public life will no longer be eligible to some tuition costs making it harder for them to develop (women's education and training organisation).*

Organisations were asked if they are experiencing barriers in accessing the local community because of particularly sensitive women's issues they may deal with. 77.4% of organisations say they do not experience such barriers.

Organisations that do face barriers are aware of issues within the community that may affect access; cultural and religious attitudes and issues of domestic abuse may act as a barrier to accessing a local community.



*Rape & Child Abuse is an emotive subject and since the majority of leaders in the community are men, there is a tendency to turn a blind eye and pretend it is not as prevalent as it is (rape and sexual abuse support organisation).*

*Domestic violence is often hidden in some communities and women still find it difficult to access services (domestic abuse support organisation).*

*Internal issues alongside Islamophobia, misogyny and racism in the wider community (Muslim support organisation).*

*The first women's organisation within the Malawian community threatening the male dominating leadership (BME women's organisation).*

Other organisations doing similar work may impede access:

*Issues around other organisations making assumptions about what Muslim women want and could engage with and rather than joining things up they block us (arts and heritage organisation).*

Those organisations who say they do not face any barriers in accessing the local community because of sensitive women's issues say this is because of the time they have been in the community, the level of trust they have built up and what issues they choose to be vocal about.

*We have good links with local community due to the amount of time we have been here and the work we do which is more often than not appreciated by local families (BME led training and development organisation).*

*There are many barriers with the kind of campaign we run but we have a large silent majority of support (Pro-choice campaign group).*

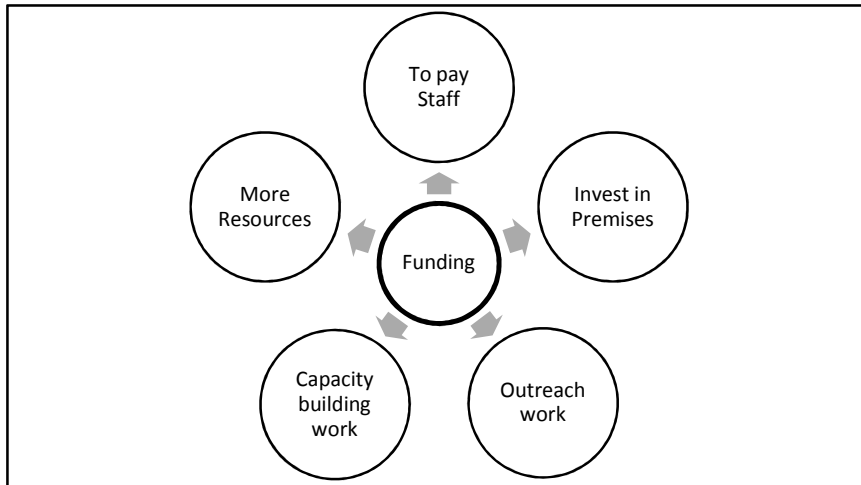
*We don't have barriers because we keep our mouth shut about things that maybe we shouldn't. If we opened up about those things a lot of women wouldn't be allowed to come here. It's a tightrope. We have built very good and unique relationships with local communities including many hard to reach women especially through our education and training services for women (training and enterprise organisation).*

Organisations were asked to summarize what they would need in order to maximise their impact, their responses were:

- More involvement in decision making
- More volunteers
- Support from larger organisations
- Information about becoming a social enterprise
- Training
- Greater partnership work
- Core funding

Not surprisingly funding was by far the most urgent need, specific areas where funding is needed are shown in Fig. 7.

**Fig 7: Areas of funding required to maximise impact**



### **Impact of legislation**

Although the majority of organisations state they are aware of the policy changes brought by the Equality Act (79.2%), the majority do not know what they can expect from public bodies in terms of rights to participate and have a voice (53%).

Organisations stated they may have to push local authorities in allowing them to participate, may not be able to attend meetings due to capacity and a general lack of concern for the equalities agenda.

*We are aware but we often have to push for this actually taking place. The fact that Latin Americans are not officially recognised as an ethnic minority does not help (BME women's organisation).*

*Hard to attend all meetings locally because of a lack of staff - has a negative impact on me because I am less informed (BME elders and women's organisation).*

*The need to promote equality and reduce discrimination, to consult and involve equalities groups, the need to audit equalities issues when assessing the impact of new policies (women's voluntary and community sector support organisation).*

Other reasons for this include not knowing who has responsibility for policy changes, a lack of awareness about the details of the policy changes and local implications, vague

knowledge about specific actions such as the right to challenge and contesting local authority's decisions. Some organisations stated additional training around this would be useful.

In contrast to a high awareness of the policy changes brought about by the Equality Act, much fewer organisations are aware of the changes to the Human Rights Act (1998) and the implications for community organizations (39.6%). Some organisations receive basic information via membership of larger networks but the majority do not and may feel less informed.

As a result 60.4% feel they would benefit from gender training that highlights Equality and Human Rights issues. Those who feel they would not benefit (26.4%) state it is because they may not have a high take-up amongst volunteers especially for those volunteers who, *'do not understand English as well as their mother tongue and one person ends up translating for everyone'*(BME women's org.). For other organisations it *'is not a major focus at the present time - we are too busy'* (women's housing organisation).

## **Interviews with stakeholders**

This section summarises the findings emerged from the in-depth interviews with key informants with a professional knowledge of the women's community and voluntary sector in London. In total eight key informants representing both BMER and gender violence issues were interviewed and their roles were: (i) Director of AVA (ii) CEO of WRC (iii) Director of NAWO (iv) Director of LAWRS (v) Facilitator of HWF (vi) Coordinator Asylum Aid Women's Project, (vii) Director of IKWRO (viii) Capacity building worker at Imkaan (See Appendix 1 for information about these organisations). All these women generously accepted to give up some of their busy time to be interviewed and their highly qualified, informed and practical knowledge of the issues affecting the women's sector in London represents an invaluable contribution to the qualitative part of this report.

## **(i) Governance and structure**

The majority of key informants we interviewed tend to work across governmental tiers to include local, regional, national. Some of them also have European and international networks such as for instance the European Women's Lobby.

In particular one organization, AVA, operates a vertical rather than horizontal networking approach. This is done by acting as a sort of conduit from the top to the bottom and the other way round. This way of networking is particularly interesting as it's an 'inductive networking' aimed at implementing policies in a way that takes into account the needs of people at the ground:

*So, there are a lot of organisations, like if you work at our level it's perfectly possible for you to only hang out with other people who think and work strategically; whereas we try to do it that way. What is still considered to be the radical position is that if you're trying to improve public services you should ask the public what they want and then you work with frontline workers to see if it's possible to give it to them, and then you write your policy and develop your strategy – not the other way round (AVA).*

Other organizations such as WRC operate mainly at national level by also supporting regional women's organizations around the country. Although their focus is not international they have many international visitors from all over the world who visit in order to find out about their work, sometimes they are government officials to learn about women and gender, some other times it is NGOs from other countries to find out how things are in the UK and how learning is shared.

*So occasionally we have been invited to international conferences. They come because we are an example of good practice in the sector, they come to see what works. We recently had a group from turkey, Turkish women NGOS who were looking to see how we do refuges (they call them 'shelters') and they wanted to know how things work here because they are at the beginning of that journey. We also had government's officials from Sweden, China, South Korea, American students, from Saudi Arabia, high commissioners of the Maldives...(WRC).*

NAWO on the other hand has a more structured scalar networking and a part from having sister regional organizations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, they contribute to the coordination of the European Women's Lobby (EWL). Their approach is focussed on 'bringing home' regional and international experiences in order to influence the UK government on several issues; for instance the campaign on migrant women by the EWL is then brought to the UK asking how it can be picked up and developed in the UK context.

Another layer of NAWO's work is international and it has to do with its links with the United Nations and its commitment to 'bring the UN home'.

*People already understand why is the European convention on human rights important? What does it do for me? What is that thing about trafficking? Why does that matter? You know, what does the European parliament really do? Why should I care? Those kinds of issues. So it is about bringing it, getting UK women to exercise influence on our government which is so ridiculous in relation to Europe. So there's that, and we have a very good relationship actually with the European parliamentary office in Europe house in London (NAWO).*

Asylum Aid's Women Project are trying to insert refugee women's issues in the mainstream and seek to coordinate the protection from violence against women and prevention work made in the country of origin of refugee women with what the UK does at the moment of reception:

*Then international networks to come back to that, we sort of link up with two sets of international, one is European and one is proper international and so European we are part of well, as a form of thing we are a member ECRE which is the European Council of Refugees and Exiles and that is a network on refugee issues across Europe so we are an active member of that group (AAWP).*

Comparative international research is also a way to create international networks as for instance did Asylum Aid's women project with the piece of research 'Gender Related Asylum Claims in Europe', which was subsequently re-published by the European Parliament Women's Committee and became a fully-fledged European Parliament report.

*So we went to present it to the European Women's Committee at the European Parliament in January and now when I quote it, it is great cause I don't have to say we published it, I can say the European parliament published it, it has more status (AAWP).*

Other European and international networking includes the European Women's Lobby and Amnesty International on 'engendering the European asylum system'.

*So the idea of being involved with the European networks is partly that if we can improve the way things are done across Europe, in terms of directives then that should have a knock on effect for us. The problem is the UK has opted out of the European directives but also if the UK compared to the other countries despite everything that I have said is good (AAWP).*

As evident from this section, the women's voluntary and community sector in London, and in particular organizations that have more capacity, tend to also have international networks that transcend national boundaries. Other smaller organizations on the other hand tend to just cater for their communities at a local level as they provide specific services.

## **(ii) Influence on policy**

Most of the second tier organization's work is influencing policy. Second tier women's organizations such as WRC influence policy in a variety of ways such as responding to policies consultations, producing evidence based research, inviting decision makers to sit at strategic partnership's tables, going to meetings where they represent the views of the women's sector, initiating, leading and supporting campaigns, establishing partnerships such as the London VAWG consortium organization.

Lobbying and stakeholder meetings such as for instance with UKBA when trying to influence asylum policies, are also key ways to influence policy and its implementation, to include training and guidance. Other ways include parliamentary processes (such as the Home Affairs Select Committee Enquiry into Asylum) communication, fund raising, support. Asylum Aid's Women Project's coordinator highlights the importance of the 'Charter of Rights of Women':

*We do one of our key publications is a newsletter called 'Women's Asylum News'. It goes out to thousands of people and the focus is on the issues affecting women asylum seekers not only in this country but also things that are happening abroad that could cause them to end up as refugees so human rights abuses etc. And so one of the things that I do apart from the direct lobbying/ campaigning work is that I coordinate something called the 'charter of rights of women seeking asylum' that we started five years ago now and the idea for that is to try and influence the Home Office, it used to be the UKBA, to create a gender sensitive asylum system and to do that end-to-end so all the aspects that affect women and to do that not just on our own as Asylum Aid but with loads of other people so there is now 337 organisations that have endorsed the charter (AAWP).*

The director of AVA reflects that there have been some changes in the ways in which the women's sector is currently managing to influence policy. Yet there are very few differences between the previous and the current governments as far as the implementation of important laws, such as the one about sex education in schools which is only covered in biology. According to the position of the VAWG sector, schools should also provide mandatory sex and relationship education which focuses on the emotional aspects of sexual relationships.

According to the coordinator of the Hackney's Women Forum (HWF), it is counter-productive that second tier organizations dispose of too many monetary resources as they do not have enough links with grassroots, front-line women's services that are most in need of resources. Moreover, she argues that second tier organizations are poor value for money and the kind of assistance they offer to smaller organizations is not particularly efficient. Despite being itself a second tier organization, HWF's perspective on giving too many resources to second tier organizations is a critical one. The interviewee provides an example from the general voluntary sector second tier services:

*The last government put in I don't know how many hundreds of millions, capacity builders, all these kind of builders, and all they did was build up these CVSs and they built up their empire and then they get all the stuff and says we are going to do young people, we are going to do health, we are going to do women, we are going to older people whatever, and yes there was lots of policy and going to meetings with the council, meeting with the health NHS and all this kind of stuff but in terms of real work on the ground with the people of the community it didn't happen, it didn't happen. And it's the small organisations that suffered and did not get the money (HWF).*

The quote above highlights the fact that there is a discrepancy in the voluntary sector between those organizations that manage to influence policies, and normally dispose of more resources, and those which are smaller, more committed to provide fundamental services on the ground and yet lack resources.

With regards to the women's sector, another important way to influence policy is what LAWRS does through their work on recognition. Latin American women have not been sufficiently recognized for instance they do not appear in ethnic monitoring forms and therefore are not targeted by government's policies.

Other challenges in making their voice heard include making MPs understand that specialist organizations are needed and that the current commissioning system will inevitably leave many women in a vulnerable position. For instance, women who have been victim of domestic violence may not go to mainstream services such as refuges provided by housing associations, they will need counselling in their own language and a whole set of support interventions that women's organizations are able to provide as opposed to generic services. This is even more the case for BMER women:

*If you think of VAWG the last thing she'd do is to go to a mainstream organization so it's about making this point with policy makers to make them understand that they*

*need to preserve specialist equality among organizations, we have been doing this work in conjunction with IMKAAN and WRC. We have been doing some work to show the particularity of BME women's organizations and showing their added value and how much they struggle. The whole issue of labour exploitation due large number of women being exploited within the Latin American community suffering from in-work poverty and the issue of migrants' rights, the complexity of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers' situation and all these women who have additional layers of discrimination (LAWRS).*

The key informants interviewed for this study agree that one important way to influence policy is enacting strategies that successfully integrate women's issues at institutional level. For instance, Asylum Aid's Women Group started a major campaign in order to integrate women's asylum issues into to the VAWG Home Office strategic partnership which has 100 action points ranging from criminal justice issues to international development but does not deal enough with making the asylum system as gender sensitive as possible.

### **(iii) Barriers to participation**

Barriers are understood as forms of indirect discrimination. Barriers to participation are multi-factorial and this section will point to the barriers discussed by the stakeholders in the course of the interviews. Lack of participation in local communities has been identified as one of the potential barriers to participation for women's organizations:

*...if we don't get past that thing about women's participation we're going to be in real trouble, because the power, all the decision making processes are getting closer and closer to communities, and if you can't actually participate in those and your voice never gets heard then people will just turn around and say well, you had your chance; where were you (AVA).*

From a more structural point of view, the WRC points to the general lack of gender analysis that includes systems and structures and results into a lack of acknowledgement of the uniqueness of women's organizations and their value. The underlying discursive structures and the patriarchal values they purport such as 'equal and competing needs' are identified as barriers as they fail to recognize the targeted and specialist services provided by the women's sector which is based on generations of expertise in providing specialist women's services. The issue of accreditation is problematic as it reinforces the risk generic organizations start providing services in a way that is acceptable from a normative perspective but by any means reflect the level of experience, attention and knowledge that the women's sector has developed over several decades of offering holistic women targeted services.



### ***Abolition of the WNC (Women's National Commission) and restructuring of the women's sector***

The QUANGOs review started by the Conservative government and the abolition of the WNC (Women's National Commission) is seen as a barrier because it hinders a coordinated access to representation and resources. Another stakeholder adds the lack of central co-ordination as a result of the abolition has created fragmentation in the sector.

*One of the biggest problems is that we have no voice into government. The WNC was abolished when this government come is as part of the bonfire of the QUANGOs, it's very hard to get the ear of government, there's hardly any cross-government inter-ministerial groups...(WRC).*

*I think the main reason the UK's women's sector is fragmented is from the loss of the women's national commission. The loss of the women's national commission which I have called in writing "an act of vandalism" has led to, I think that's exactly what I said, that it is an act of vandalism which has led to the fragmentation of the women's sector, of the entire women's sector (NAWO).*

### ***Politicisation of migration***

The politicization of the migration debate and the subsequent impact on the policy environment is seen as a barrier to women's participation:

*...One has to apologize to be a migrant it's just amazing and it not acceptable (LAWRS).*

*The highly politicized migration debate is a big barrier and the policy environment is a big barrier because you are working with people who day by day are losing their rights (LAWRS).*

*...the topic on asylum is quite toxic so trying to persuade anyone to do anything different is very difficult and it is not the best topic to get supporters for (AAWP).*

This results in further barriers due to a culture of disbelief fomented by the media where people in decision making roles are negatively affected by the migration debate. This has an obvious negative impact on policies or the lack of policies. This is particularly relevant for refugee women -one stakeholder (AAWP) suggests that more women's cases are overturned on appeal because some of the initial decisions were made in this politicised environment fostering the hostility towards this group.

### ***Lack of services specifically targeting refugee women***

Linked to this is a lack of services specifically targeting refugee women and this has been identified as a barrier in the asylum process.

*Yes, definitely a barrier because it means if we try to get them to change their policies they are always aware of how will it look...and so that makes it harder to get policy changes that are positive towards asylum seekers (AAWP).*

### ***Political correctness allowing Sharia law courts in the UK***

Perhaps exacerbated by the politicisation of migration and religion, political correctness allowing Sharia law courts in the UK has been identified as a barrier to women's organisations working for equal rights. This is seen as a very specific barrier for the campaigning organizations like IKWRO whose main battle is against honour killing:

*The issues of political correctness which allow lots of the Sharia courts happen in the UK working actively and discriminating women and human rights actually, breach of human rights and ignorance from government, ignorance I mean keeping a blind eye maybe I don't know what is the best word in English hopefully you can find words. So it is another barrier for work for us (IKWRO).*

The existence of Sharia law courts in the UK also represents a barrier for certain women of Muslim origins who are discriminated on the basis of their gender, religion and whose basic human rights are constantly disrespected.

### ***Poor awareness of equality issues***

Another barrier which emerged from the interviews with stakeholders is a perceived general lack of awareness of equality issues, more so outside London, and this can be a barrier facing women's organisations and their participation in the sector. Stakeholders argue that there is a lack of understanding as to why BMER or strand specific services are important and instead are seen as 'a luxury rather than a necessity' (Imkaan). This translates into an overall lack of specialised services in areas where female service users may face multiple and intersecting discrimination.

### ***Language***

This is particularly the case for language specific services. The language policies place emphasis on being able to speak English in order to qualify for services is a barrier to services users. At the same time ESOL provision has been reduced, so these policies may be discriminatory towards migrant/ethnic women.

*It's just been announced last week about job seekers have got to be able to speak English you know, you know, that is certainly a disadvantage to women you know that have been in the home, certain cultures that don't want the woman out of the house, out of the community, the Pakistani community, the Bangladeshi community, the Turkish speaking communities, those women from those communities are really going to get it in the neck because the English language competency is not there (AVA).*

Emphasis on language skills and a decline in ESOL provision is causing de-skilling, this is a barrier to participation especially for Latin American women who during the period they are learning English will have a much narrower scope of jobs available to them and in turn may feel trapped:

*(...) I sat on the recruitment panel for Latin American Women's Rights Service, and looking through all the CVs and there's all these fantastic CVs of women who ran organisations and private companies across the whole of Latin America and then they move to England and their CV goes, cleaner or McDonald's because they don't speak English and because their qualifications are not recognized in this country (LAWRS).*

### **Visibility and race**

One stakeholder suggests that within the BME women's sector there is a lack of awareness of the need for black women in prominent leadership or training roles:

*I think there is a lot of generic services who have participated in training who do good work with black women but don't understand the difference between being a white person doing good work with a black women, and having black women being supported by a black women in a black women's organisation and that leadership, how important having that BME leadership is for empowerment (Imkaan).*

There is a feeling among some BME led women's organisations that there need to be more black women delivering training or becoming leaders of organisations as this not only combats negative stereotypes of them among the 'white' population but inspires and empowers other black women services users.

Some stakeholders state that racism is a strong barrier to participation for both their organisations and service users. One example given is outside the more diverse areas of London, where BME women are 'not expected' to be present/represented. Furthermore, one stakeholder feels that black services may be losing statutory funding as a result of attitudes to visibility and race:

*I think racism is probably the biggest barriers to participation...a lot of our members who sit in regions are often the only black women in a room, it's a very different experience in London obviously where I think services have a stronger position because they are never the only one, you know usually there is at least going to be another black women service in the room and also there will be other BME people in the room, not being listened to, not being invited increasingly as black services are losing statutory funding they are being pushed out of domestic violence forums and other partnership work (Imkaan).*

The interviewee believes that at least in London there are enough BME people in forums so that individuals do not feel isolated. However, this is not the case for locations in the UK outside of London where there are not as many BME people sitting at negotiation tables. This has huge implications around how decisions are made, how policies are influenced and how much an issue is championed if a black woman is not present.

*There is a lot of exclusion of black services from those kind of spaces and what that means is that there is no black perspective being heard and I think for the black women we support that then takes on this whole other level because it's not just the women you support being excluded but it's also the person supporting them. The worker, the support worker doesn't know what's going on so her capacity to support that woman then significantly changes, so I think that is a big barrier is racism (Imkaan).*

Another stakeholder suggests being a less recognized minority group in London coupled with barriers related to gender means that some communities may become invisible, this is advanced by LAWRS by pointing to multiple barriers related to their group's invisibility.

*For us it would be multiple barriers because we are still an invisible minority. In every council meeting we go we have to respond to remarks such as 'ah but Latin Americans are such a small percentage' even if this not the case in reality, so one barrier is that of invisibility which is the biggest barrier for us and our organization (LAWRS).*

### ***Changes to commissioning***

Changes to the commissioning system and the resulting cuts are a barrier for women's organisations, at a time when the number of female services users are increasing and resources decreasing. Many women's organizations have been forced to close because of lost funding or have drastically reduced their services despite an increasing population in need. Furthermore the changes in commissioning combined with changes to the welfare system are exacerbating such barriers:

*Main problems of our organization is ensuring financial sustainability for the future...at a time when it's so hard to raise funds because of the cuts and all the changes in the commissioning system that has been terrible for all of us we are experiencing much higher levels of demand than ever. (LAWRS)*

According to IMKAAN the cuts are a barrier especially for organisations who are service providers as well as campaigning organizations which have to lobby and carry out policy work at the same time. Organisations may be stuck in a vicious circle where their ability to provide a one to one hand holding approach is replaced by the necessity to do policy and campaigning work to raise fund for the very services they are unable to do:

*...obviously services are losing their voice they are not prioritising going to the GP with a woman who doesn't speak English for example instead of going to the local network meeting to go where they might be able to influence on policy because they have to, because there is no one else to do it but the impact of that is how empowering is that work when you know, the individual relationship is part of the empowerment but kind of getting that voice out and heard is really where the fundamental change happens in society and that piece of work is struggling to survive and no one wants to fund that work either (Imkaan).*

### **Lack of resources and capacity**

The shortage of resources and capacity of some organisations means the one-to-one relationship with the service users and the policy work an organisation does is continuing to suffer as administration and caretaking work has to be prioritised over frontline work. This is repeatedly mentioned as a barrier:

*It's really hard because partly we don't have the staff, we don't have the human resources it's a vicious circle. If you don't have enough money to employ people that means you don't have the staff to spend the time researching and writing the [funding] proposals...(NAWO).*

*...what it means is you now have support workers who have cleaning rotas and they have to clean the refuge and do a day of admin and do a day of answering the phone and all that stuff takes away from the frontline work and also means that there is definitely less or no time for that kind of deeper campaign work (Imkaan).*

Another organisation feels that because they have to prioritise what work the limited funding covers, they are unable to focus on more administrative or corporate functions such a building marketing strategy. This is a further barrier for some women's organisations that as a result lack a solid rationale able to explain their importance in a clear way such as

marketing their organisation and demonstrating the impact of their work and this may impact their ability to secure funding:

*I definitely think we've got to be able to describe the change that we make to women's lives and I think because we haven't done so it has kept our work in the dark hence we are not first in the queue when the goodies are being given out. You know what I mean. It's just seen as dismissive...little hole women's work...(HWF).*

Similarly, smaller organisation with less capacity can easily be seen as 'less powerful' and within the vicious cycle described above, stay small:

*...big wants to talk to big, no-one wants to deal with small, they all want big. Voluntary sector in terms of woman we are smaller organisations. The Hackney Women's Forum has been around seven and a half years you know, averaging 10K a year. Who wants to talk to the likes of us? What do we make? We can't have any skills, we can have any expertise, we can't have any experience, the assumption is small is rubbish, small is amateur, you know. Big is professional. Big is better. Big is powerful. So that's the other barrier. We are not perceived as having any power. Even at the grass roots community level when we do in fact have power (HWF).*

### **Thematic consultations**

One last barrier to participation is that consultations are currently carried out thematically rather than on a local basis, for example local authorities may decide to consult with women who work in prostitution or women who have experienced FGM. However not all boroughs in London identify the same problem as priorities in fact they might either be unaware of a problem in their area or they might not think to hold a consultation about a particular issue. The interviewee from AVA recounts that recently, in a London Borough, decision makers did not feel they wanted to hold a consultation on human trafficking and prostitution as they believed this particular issue does not affect their borough which by and large is a wealthy and middle-class borough. However, evidence of a large number of brothels was found in that London Borough, much higher if compared with other boroughs in London and consequently the London Borough in question started to raise awareness about prostitution and human trafficking among its inhabitants. As this anecdote shows, thematic consultations have been identified as a barrier because generalizations and stereotyping about certain boroughs make it difficult to accept national data as valuable and as a result these issues often remain unaddressed.

#### **(iv) Intersectionality**

Organizations working with BMER women's voluntary and community organizations are particularly aware of instances of multiple discrimination and how it is played out in London. Imkaan point to the fact that London is more diverse if compared with other cities and yet black women's organisations struggle more than others. According to AVA, there is not enough emphasis on race yet there is even less emphasis on other protected characteristics and little attention is paid to how other grounds of discrimination operate in conjunction with race. Discrimination according to race or religion can even shift over time as it's evident by the example provided here with regards to assumptions about domestic violence which have, over time, shifted from Black to Muslim men:

*When I first started doing training around domestic violence people would ask me coded racist questions like: 'aren't some cultures, men from some cultures more violent than others'. Basically what they used to mean is African Caribbean men; and then come September 2011 suddenly they all meant Muslim men. Overnight Muslim men became more violent and African Caribbean men were let off the hook. No one asked me about the supposed greater levels of violence from African Caribbean men anymore, not ever, never, never do they ask me that; and I used to get asked that all the time (AVA).*

No-recourse to public funds is a policy that can interfere negatively with domestic violence and can exacerbate multiple discrimination. The HWF interviewee describes an episode which is highly illuminating on the need to prioritise the need of those women who don't have access to public funds and have been victims of domestic violence:

*What we do have is, in terms of women have no recourse to public funds, when there was a review of domestic violence services that Hackney Council held eighteen months ago, because they were looking at what services need to be cut, what was good was all women's organisations - we were all speaking from the same hymn sheet and they asked us what are the priorities in terms of women who are affected by domestic violence issues in a broader sense and we mentioned women who have no recourse to public funds women who seek asylum... Yes, those were identified as our priority groups as well as young women, because you have high levels of violence that are perpetrated against them. As a result of that official review, domestic violence services was retained by the Council but some other London Burroughs they just disbanded and washed their hands of it (HWF).*

Asylum policies intersect with other axes of vulnerability that contribute to potential discrimination, for this reason a successful lobbying strategy has managed to create a Violence Against Women Steering Group at the Home Office and an Under Represented Group within it composed mainly by BMER groups. Several organisations within the women's sector are active in it according to the Asylum Aid interviewee.

Some practices such as using on-line applications for jobs or benefits do not take into account the conditions of women on the ground and the intergenerational, global north-south digital divide:

*Yes, you can make staff uniforms but at the end of the day people have individual, unique situations and problems that need to be explained and expressed to another human being face to face or on the phone. Not a computer (HWF).*

Latin American women are discriminated on multiple grounds. LAWRS argues that specialist providers are particularly needed because of the kind of multiple discrimination experienced by Latin American women. This ranges from services to targeted help with the language and includes culturally sensitive services to be able to assist this group:

*Multiple discrimination and intersectionality is all we say to people so you are talking to parliamentarians you say to them look these women are discriminated on the grounds of gender, race, migration status and there are other layers of complexity they are undocumented forget about it...It's much more complicated than a single ground and these women are discriminated not just because they are women. Migration, language, kind of visa such as spouse visa are all factors that might contribute to their vulnerability, any kind of visa has vulnerabilities attached in this country). On the top of that there might be not understanding the system, not understanding the language.... It has to do with the fact that despite being here from the 1960s and 1970, the numbers have really gone up in the last 10 years and we are still not recognized (LAWRS).*

Statistics that do not represent minority groups' real conditions on the ground can also be discriminatory, as is the case for Latin American women who are among the highest growing communities in the UK yet they are isolated and they concentrate in the cleaning industry which tends to be less monitored by official statistics and leans towards informal economy where they are either highly exploited by agencies or don't have regular contracts. 85% of this group are in employment and 11% are below the minimum wage (McIlwaine, Cock and Linneker 2011). This particular group is also characterised by a low uptake of services and 1 in 5 is not registered to the GP which raises great problems for an equal access to health care for instance.



*Also, very low number of benefit claims so opposite to what the press claim, only one in five Latin Americans claim any sort of benefits, very low 20%. I am writing a blog because the case of Latin Americas contradicts what the Government say about BME groups such as that minority groups have high percentage of unemployment and we don't, that minorities tend to use services more and Latin Americans don't and the rhetoric keeps blaming ethnic minorities for everything (LAWRS).*

A truly intersectional approach should be able to see people both as groups and as individuals and consider case by case taking into consideration the national and cultural specificities. The Women's Project at Asylum Aid highlights the case of women from DRC to raise the issue of disconnect existing between what happens on the ground and certain government's initiatives:

*I think sometimes you get concerns around how specific countries are being dealt with so for example at the moment we know that the foreign secretary is running this big initiative, preventing sexual violence and conflicts initiative in countries like the DRC but when you look at the statistics of asylum seeking women from the DRC coming here, apart from the fact that there is not many of them, 67% are being refused so it's like 'what's is that about'. So there is some sort of disconnect going on there. So they've said they are going to do an audit of those cases of women from the DRC to try and see what is going on there (AAWP).*

The same interviewee points to a good practice in the direction of acknowledging multiple discrimination and admits that the problem hasn't been tackled yet:

*I think that what we could do but we haven't because we don't have the resources really, something much more detailed around very specific groups and people like the Poppy Project and EAVES have looked at about the way women who have been trafficked and depending on where they come from it is different, that sort of issue but we haven't actually, we have only got as far as looking at the general issue at this stage (AAWP).*

## **(v) Impact of the crisis**

There have been significant changes to how voluntary and community organisations are funded, from needs-led grants (made up of a combination of public donations, grants from charitable trusts and local public bodies) to commissioning, which focuses on outcomes and efficiency of service delivery. Voices within the women's voluntary and community sector suggest this is perhaps the most significant change they have experienced in recent years and have not only affected their structure but also how they deliver services. Combined with the cuts, challenges to the sector are severe.

*We were never a brilliantly funded sector anyway even a small cut – and we've had big cuts – but even a small cut has disproportionate impact on women's organisations (LAWRS).*

Similarly, a report by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC 2012) about the impact of commissioning on women-only organisations highlighted the increased risk to the sector. One such risk is how local councils are coping with an increased workload combined with a lack of resources and expertise around commissioning:

*There has been less and less central government funding, which is not necessarily a bad thing because they didn't know how to administer it properly. But they have transferred the power to commission those services to local government, but taken away the money to enable them to do it. So, although you'd rather have local government in charge to commission those services obviously they need to have some money to do that (AVA).*

Women's organisations must now compete for contracts with large generic voluntary and community organisations, statutory organisations and companies from the private sector, as well as other women's organisations. This has resulted in some organisations losing contracts to 'larger' or more 'mainstream' suppliers.

*For example, about six years ago there was a meeting of women's run refuges across London, and they collectively decided that they would not bid for any contract at less than £25 an hour because that was the minimum required to produce what we think is a minimum quality service. And then comes along the generic housing association, which is currently bidding at £15.70 an hour. So, even though there is that agreement and solidarity there, it doesn't matter when somebody else is going to come in and undercut you. So, all of those attempts to sort of have those consortia and those informal agreements and stuff they don't work in practice (AVA).*

Payment by results, which provides funding to organisations once they have achieved a specific set of outcomes, presents a great financial risk for organisations. Most women's organisations are too small to individually compete with these new competitors, who are often large, well-resourced organisations (WRC 2013a).

*...[In 2008] 197 VAWG organisations shared a pot of 80 million – which is just over half of Barnardo's annual income and 3 shared a pot of 17 million. So, we were quite poor. Within those charities that shared the pot of 17 million one of them had a £6 million contract with government which they have subsequently lost. And it's those kinds of shifts that are more of a threat to us than the cuts, in that if this was to provide support and for women who are trafficked into the UK – and that has gone*

*from the women's organisation to the Salvation Army. So, that kind of shift is actually more of a threat to us than the cuts (AVA).*

The commissioning of services by 'cost' or 'value' has fuelled accusations that it is merely an ideological front for privatisation and cost-cutting.

*And more and more you see contracts for delivering services from the statutory sector, a higher and higher percentage of the contract is based on cost. There was one I was told about the other week for providing a refuge service where child protection was 5% and cost was 60%. So, yes, the cuts are contributing to that sort of process (AVA).*

The EHRC report highlighted that issues of importance to women are less likely to be prioritised as funding arrangements become increasingly localised. Furthermore, women's organisations describe a diminishing of the legitimisation of their role as specialists.

*We had, as a sector, never been seen as specialists and experts; we are just another body sat around the table. So, if you're sat in a room with ten people who have an interest in resolving trafficking but only one of them is on the side of women your voice or vote isn't given any more weight than the person who just started work on trafficking last week from a criminal justice perspective. So, our expertise and specialism is not valued. And that is more of a threat to our sector I think than the cuts (AVA).*

The service models of specialist women's organisations may not fit easily into mainstream or generic commissioning frameworks. The resultant lack of recognition for specialist services is seen as a real threat to the future of these services and the quality of provision.

*Across London we now have three major refuge providers; one of whom is a generic housing association employing women on minimum wage. Yes, the cuts are contributing to that process; but that kind of lack of appreciation and value of what we bring to the table I think is more of a threat...Providing a refuge and working with women who have been experiencing domestic violence isn't seen as any kind of specialism; any old housing provider can do it is the thinking of the people who hold the budgets. That I think is the biggest threat (AVA).*

*But the idea that you can, with no track record in working in this area, win a contract isn't seen as potentially dangerous by commissioners. And that I think is more worrying because that's not something that's going to get better as the economy recovers (AVA).*

The impact of the crisis has been particularly harsh on BME women's organizations and this is different from the 1980s when there was more recognition of the specificities of BME women's groups and the fact that generic services were not meeting their needs.

*I think because of tendering processes really and I think also the kind of increase in conservatism, so particularly for BME services to retain their position, it's been quite difficult because there was a time I think when it was easier, well definitely in the 1980s when a lot of Black Minority Ethnic services were set up, there was a real recognition that there was a need and that was quite a widely known recognition because it was quite clear that generic services were not meeting the needs of the black minority ethnic women (Imkaan).*

Before the crisis, BME women's groups were already struggling to articulate their specificities and why they needed specialist services. They were battling service mainstreaming and its 'one size fits all' approach and preaching that no single organisation can be all things to all people, but that there is value in a diverse civil society where organisations are able to work together towards shared goals.

*I think what we have seen...but I do think it is before the crisis services have been struggling, already and then the crisis obviously has this much more direct impact on funding and before the crisis people were struggling to kind of articulate their identity in a way that makes sense to people who are not black and minority ethnic and to articulate the need, what the need is for black and minority ethnic women around violence. Why it is different? Why it needs to be a specialist service? Part of the problem is that our rivals are not just each other [in the specialist sector] (Imkaan).*

Working across two or more aspects of inequality, such as gender and race, can make organisations more vulnerable when cuts are being implemented in both areas. Similarly, the impact of the crisis has been harsh on smaller organisations. Many of whom exist in an almost 'hand to mouth' environment of constant funding applications. Others feel they may be too niche. They may not have entered consortiums for fear of threatening the integrity of service provision; however by doing this their very survival is challenged particularly in an environment where the larger consortia and organisations that call upon niche services are themselves at risk.

*But my biggest fear – because we're quite niche and we do stuff that other people don't do so I think we'll survive for a while – my biggest fear is that we will exist to support a sector that has gone. You can't be second tier if there's no first tier (AVA).*

*It is grim out there at the moment. You're right that there ought to be a way of countering that through solidarity, consortia, partnerships; but it doesn't always*

*happen in practice. Part of the problem is that our rivals are not just each other (AVA).*

Organisations believe that commissioning has contributed to a huge increase in competition, both within the women's voluntary and community sector and externally with other voluntary, statutory and private sector organisations in London. In particular, competition from larger, generic organisations has caused a lot of concern for the women's sector, who do not have the capacity to compete at the same level and have little experience of these 'newer' players outside the women's sector. Competition for funding is also a competition for status, for media space, for access to decision makers and even for market share in disadvantaged communities. The community sector, already fragmented by its diversity, is further divided by this intensified competition.

#### **(vi) Survival of the sector**

Many women's organisations are faced with the task of downsizing and having to let staff go. At the same time there are increasing demands on their services as poverty deepens and public services are diminished. They are faced with rationing or reducing much needed services to people in increasing need and have to make choices as to who can access the services, who benefits and what to prioritize. During the interviews with stakeholders, interviewees have been asked to highlight a number of strategies to oppose the current austerity crisis and they pointed to the following:

- Promote consultation within decision makers
- Recognise specificities of the sector
- Promote unity and partnership work
- Utilise data to demonstrate impact
- Maintain a diversity of provision in relation to the problem of mainstreaming

Working with decision making is important for the survival of the sector according to AVA who feels there is often a duty to consult at most stages of decision making. This consultation would not only raise issues that are specific and important for women in the community but enable women's organisations to create an essential space for themselves as consultations experts.

*So, it's about educating commissioners about what consultation means in a meaningful way, and that you have to hold women only meetings or consultations in order to get women to talk about some of the issues that matter to them that they're never going to do in mixed company. You can kind of ask for things to be held at the right time of day and in places that women can get to with transport and childcare and all the rest of it – but that's more difficult than it is to just do it separately. So, one of the things that we can do as an organisation is to go and do that survivor consultation and give it to commissioners, going look, this is what women think (AVA).*

According to WRC it is important to recognize the specificities of the women's community and voluntary sector which needs more recognition in terms of what it can do better than general services which are not able to tackle multiple needs:

*There is this massive problem with the women's sector. When you look at the refuge sector, because anybody can compete and contract one of the service, there is no acknowledgement of what is it that women's organizations do that's unique, that acknowledgement of that 30-40 years of experience and expertise that we have – again because of the analysis of women's discrimination is missing, that's what our work is based upon it's a very strong analysis of women's discrimination and what that looks like, a lot of women's services around rape and sexual violence, domestic violence honour violence etc. we contextualise in the language of inequality or discrimination, imbalance of power. A housing association is not going to provide a service that contextualises that because that informs how we work with women, empowering, non-judgemental, supporting them to be independent, tackle not just one need (WRC).*

Unity is very important for the survival of the sector, particularly where competition for smaller pots of funding is increasingly fierce. This has fostered an environment of survival and short-term crisis management and has had a detrimental effect on the capacity to frame problems beyond the short-term.

*One of the things as a sector is that we need to build our unity, we will really have to because we are under a massive attack and it's very difficult because everybody is so under resourced and just trying to stay alive really. It's quite difficult to look externally or think about the long term future because people are just trying to survive and keep their services open and that poses a great risk to our strategizing, becoming creative, thinking about wide concerns but for me anyway, I think it's absolutely crucial that we try to come together, that we work in partnership and I think there are some increased activities around women and when you are up against a wall you think that you need to do something (LAWRS).*

Getting more robust on data collections and demonstrating impact is vital to the survival of the sector particularly at a time of output based commissioning.

*There's some interesting work that actually we ought to have done about a decade ago that's finally being done, which I think is being helpful, about getting a lot more robust around our data collection and being able to measure our impact and focusing on outcomes and not on outputs. And that's been a long slow shift; and it's been speeded up by the current economic climate – and that's not a bad thing either (AVA).*

Importantly this process is challenging practices of more established organizations, especially when more efficient ways of providing services are identified.

*It's causing there to be a number of rethinks about some sacred cows. For example I've just had a meeting this morning with a large refuge provider who's absolutely feminist to the core, who are going near the sacred cow of refuges and saying actually is this fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century; is this a model of service provision that women actually need. No one would have gone near that. There are still some sacred cows in our sector that no one would go near (AVA).*

The very definition of the women's sector is narrowing down to just violence against women, in order to survive it is essential to maintain a diversity of provision that encompasses services that have now been scrapped such as health, employment etc.

*What I think is really interesting about the women's sector over the last ten years is that it has become very, very 'violence against women' sector. There used to be a lot of women's health organisation – gone; there used to be organisations working around sexual harassment or improving women's rights in the workplace – gone. We've become domestic and sexual violence, and that is the kind of women's sector now. There are obviously some out there (AVA).*

The history of the women's sector and some organisations today would still agree that competition could be helpful to stimulate better and more efficient ways of working particularly if this results in better service provision:

*I think it's helped us being a bit sharper to have some of that competition. I don't think all competition is a good thing, and on balance I would say the competition has been more damaging than helpful; but it has been helpful in some ways, just to sharpen people's practice up a bit and just to be more rigorous in their thinking, and not to assume that being a women only feminist service is enough. So, a large part of our sector underwent quite a revolution in 2003 when commissioning was first brought in for refuges under 'Supporting People'. And a lot of refuges went to the wall there because the service they were providing wasn't good enough (AVA).*

However there is a danger that stimulating competition is detrimental to BMER or smaller niche organisations and will result in power struggles between the mainstream and

organizations working with minority and niche groups and this does not necessarily help the women's sector to survive.

*For instance when thinking about partnership work, when it comes to power management and you are competing with mainstream organizations, they have more power than you do because they are bigger they are mainstream so they are claiming that they will do everything so you're just with a percentage of the population because you are focusing yourself towards a certain kind of work but of course the kind of women that we work for are far more vulnerable than the mainstream there is this power game but the whole issue is try to manage that and we'll try to do it alongside all the ethnic minority organizations and this alongside some supportive mainstream organizations such as the Women's Resource Centre or Imkaan, they have been very supportive (LAWRS).*

This suggests that (apart from a small amount of 'healthy' competition) working together and partnership work is fundamental for the survival of the sector especially as it creates a platform for longer term survival strategies.

*One of our aims is to fight these power dynamics through partner work so that we can sit at the same table and so that when we sit in a partnership we are equal- it hasn't been easy but we have got there, we are still fermenting (LAWRS).*

*I think we should work together. We actually do work together quite a lot, we know each other and I think we should work in a less divisive and less competitive way so we should help each other and we should ensure each other's survival. We should devise better strategies (LAWRS).*

One such strategy to make the sector more sustainable could be to work in partnerships where smaller organizations could be brought together with larger providers. This would maintain targeted provision which is very much needed:

*Partnership and to try and maintain the provision to women and girls, that's because the very small orgs are the first to go, so by bringing them together with some larger providers there's more of a chance of them surviving. It's a strategy to maintain the diversity of provision. In this way women get their needs met, as we know from research that a Turkish speaking woman would rather go to a Turkish speaking organization and a Latin American woman would rather go to a Spanish or Portuguese speaking organization, so we support what we called 'by and for' so that the organization is led by the women who is targeting. It's about specific communities but the trend is now to commission one large generic organization. For me a feminist response is to form partnership rather than competing. Ask women, we have to have an alternative! (LAWRS).*

Many women's organisations have been challenged about their women-only services even though the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Gender Equality Duty (2007) clearly stated that single-sex services were lawful, and even preferable under many circumstances. The



recent Equality Act (2010) does not change this. The Act makes it clear that female only services are legal and appropriate in certain contexts; it is still legal and appropriate for public authorities to fund (and provide) women- services. 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). Within this context, combating the erasure of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) is also very important for the survival of the women's sector:

*The review of the public sector equality duty is going to highly affect us because we use the PSED for everything, I mean when I am doing any sort of policy and advocacy group I always use the PSED and the equality legislation as an argument for cementing my point so I am quite worried about new proposals to water it down. For Latin Americans it is important and getting rid of it will have huge consequences to our work. We have signed the petition and trying to disseminate the word, for the government is probably too demanding to have to comply with this but we are absolutely against that going, for us it's a very good tool even if sometimes is misunderstood (LAWRS).*

There is a danger that an agenda for survival could prevail over other agendas, protest could remain unvoiced and advocacy limited in order to sustain funding relationships, particularly in a society where the very concepts of 'equality' are being challenged. For the survival of the women's sector, stronger lobbying is needed around the idea of equality. This is particularly true for women in the asylum system:

*A lot of our lobbying is behind the idea of equality and so it is around the idea that women seeking asylum should have the same rights as women who are here, should have the same standards of treatment so we did a whole campaign called 'every single woman' which is based on comparing what happens to women in the asylum system and women who are victims of violence against women who are in this country going through the criminal justice system. So there is whole range of stuff, there is a whole range of standards and policies and practice within the police and crown prosecution service within prisons that have got much more of an understanding about women's rights and the needs and rights of women when they are victims of violence or if they are in prison, that's a parallel to being in detention and our argument is that there should be a transfer of learning from those agencies to the asylum authorities and so that's very much based on the sort of, the thing about equality as in equal access, equal opportunities, not about everyone having exactly the same but recognising these parallels, so I think this pulling back on the idea of equality is a problem for us conceptually (AAWP).*

Sustainability of the sector therefore depends on several factors which include the capacity of the women's sector to adjust to the recent changes by becoming more efficient in delivering their services, by deploying different strategies and embrace partnership group, by

campaigning against legislative change which plays against equality, making use of data to demonstrate impact, fight to maintain diversity in provision whilst also actively promoting active consultations with decision makers. Although this challenge is not an easy one, organisations feel it can be overcome.

## 4. Research findings

Research findings are drawn separately from the survey and from the interviews with stakeholders. The two sets of findings will be then merged in the recommendations.

### a. Findings from the survey

- Of the surveyed women's organisations in London the most common focus aside gender was around education/training and least common focus on class and religion. Race, ethnicity and age were the predominant strand groups represented.
- Just under half of the groups surveyed are part of an umbrella organisation
- Although nearly half the respondents state their work is local, many work on a national (29%) European (11%) and global (9%) scale.
- Just over two thirds of the organisations feel they have an impact on policies.
- Nearly half the organisations state they do face barriers to local decision making processes.
- The majority of organisations feel they lack resources, capacity and time to influence and be a stronger part of local decision making.
- The majority of organisations are currently experiencing financial barriers (73%) resulting in a loss of services. They feel these have been made worse by the government's austerity measures because of cuts to funding, increased competition for funding and changes in local and national policy direction.
- In order to maximise their impact, organisations state they would need: more core funding; more involvement in decision making; more volunteers; support from larger organisations; information about becoming a social enterprise; training on equality and other human rights issues and greater partnership work.
- Although the majority of organisations state they are aware of the policy changes brought by the Equality Act, the majority still do not know what they can expect from public bodies in terms of rights to participate and have a voice.

## **b. Findings from interviews with stakeholders**

### **Governance structures**

With regards to 'Governance structures' it emerges that the majority of key informants tend to work across governmental tiers to include local, regional, national. Some of them also have European and international networks. Organisations express that second tier organizations tend to work more at national and international level, while first tier organizations, which are normally service providers, target their service locally. Second tier organizations are also able to influence policy by lobbying and working in partnership to a larger extent when compared with service providers.

### **Influence on policy**

In terms of 'Influence on policy', this is done in conventional ways such as lobbying, and taking part in consultations and in less conventional ways such as campaigning, implementing charter of rights, working on recognition and seeking strategies to integrate women's issues at institutional level. One critique which has been raised with regards to influencing policy is that not all second tier organizations are equally effective in making the voices of smaller organizations' heard. Clearly the organizations' size, their resources and political clout is key in determining their ability to influence policy.

### **Barriers**

Barriers identified by the interviewees for this research project are heterogeneous hence difficult to summarize. However barriers can be understood on the one hand as barriers to participation that women themselves experience, on the other hand there are barriers which are more structural and are about the difficult access to political representation which many women's organizations experience. Barriers of the first kind include: cultural; lack of services that target refugees; language and de-skilling; UK toleration of Sharia Courts which ultimately impacts individual women and their ability to participate and benefit of equal rights. Structural barriers include: lack of gender analysis; thematic consultations are a barrier in that they are too compartmentalized and could be locally based rather than thematic to favour inclusion at a local level; abolition of the WNC; lack of funding to BMER organizations; black women in leadership/training roles. Many of the listed barriers cut across the structural and personal dimensions in accessing rights and political participation.

### **Intersectionality**

Intersectional issues that emerge from interviews with the key informants range from race to religion, migration status and other grounds that affect migrant women in particular. For instance, race is a complicated issue on the one hand it is one of the major grounds of discriminatory practices however when statutory organisations hear diversity they only understand race and in some cases this obscures other axes of potential discrimination. Religion is also a relevant ground especially in that Muslim people are increasingly discriminated according to some key informants; migration status can be discriminatory with regards to NRPF which prevents the use of important services such as domestic violence support. Newness to the system that migrants experience means that they are not familiar with the way things work in the new context, that their lack linguistic proficiency and subsequently experience de-skilling.

### **Impact of the crisis**

The economic crisis of the late 2000s had a decimating impact on the women's sector in London and this has to be understood in conjunction to other institutional shifts which were already in place before 2008, such as changes in the commissioning system. Overall this has led to increased competition among organizations in order to access funding. According to the interviewees there has also been a change of disposition whereas organizations behave more and more like businesses and this obscures intersectional issues. Intersectional issues are in turn also obscured by mainstreaming of one particular agenda over others, such as VAWG due to the availability of funding in that area. In the current climate, specialisms that are derived by decade of expertise of the women's sector are no longer recognised as a logic based on cost savings wins over expertise, as it happens in the case of refuges where big generic organizations such as housing associations are commissioned contracts for refuges thus bypassing women's organizations holistic and intergenerational knowledge in this field.

### **Survival of the sector**

As a result of the above, women are losing voice. Some of the strategies devised by the research participants include promoting consultation within decision makers; recognising specificities of the sector in terms of long standing expertise; promoting unity and partnership work; utilising data to demonstrate impact; maintaining a diversity of provision in relation to the problem of mainstreaming just one area.

## 5. Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged from stakeholders' interviews and survey findings:

- Promotion of longer term solutions and follow up that avoid a 'quick fix' approach made worse by short term funding. This would involve working on longer term funding proposals, measuring impact, tailoring services to meet long term needs.
  
- Need for coordinated and partnership work in order to:
  - combat inequalities between women's organizations
  - address risks of diminishing organisations rooted in strong feminist anti-racist analysis and methodology
  - ensure survival of women's sector
  - address competition created by commissioning
  - get a wider range of people/organizations to support the cause
  
- Optimize use of existing resources
  - Use resources of larger organisations and negotiate access to free space
  - Share marketing experience
  
- Need for more networks which are inclusive and offer opportunity to meet more often and regularly as this would make coordination easier
  - London specific meetings – facilitated by organizations like the WRC
  - Shared list of events
  - Ensuring organisational leads/heads know of and speak to each other
  
- Ensure better representation (service users and staff) on forums/networks
  - Young women
  - Recent migrant women
  - Eastern European women
  - LGBT women
  - 'Invisible' women e.g. Latin Americans

- Need for a regular women's community and voluntary sector gathering to help build community intelligence and provide opportunities to talk and network on projects
- Volunteering programmes - working with and maintaining a volunteer workforce had been identified as a good practice , that could be extended to other women's community and voluntary organizations
  - Link volunteering programmes with training programmes e.g. ESOL, counselling
- Ensure financial sustainability
  - Able to respond to increasing demand
  - Ensure funding priorities around better access to services
- Policy and advocacy work to respond to the politicisation of migration debate
- Address the impact of the Localism Act (2010)
  - Interpretations of equalities has led to an undervaluing of BME women's services
  - No strict Home Office funding guidance around funding violence against women and girls services
  - Secure funding for where there are gaps in services and where there is a high level of need
- Focus on sexual education and domestic violence including primary prevention activities around sexual health and pregnancy. Lobby government for prevention of violence against women and girls.
- Implementation charters similar to the successful Women's Asylum Charter as they have the advantage, via the Charter endorsement system, to mobilize a large number of organizations to create consensus around certain issues and have an immediate multiplier effect which also saves time and resources for instance when a report is released and is supported by all the organizations which had endorsed the charter. This happened for instance when Oxfam, Amnesty, British Red Cross, TUC, Liberty etc. for a total of 337 organizations were listed as supporting organizations (as they had previously endorsed the charter) when a report by Medical Justice on women in detention was released.

- Acknowledging intersections between women's issues (i.e. ethnicity, social class and how they are combine when tackling violence against women and girls )
  - Promote importance of BME services provided by BME women
  - Create women's projects within generic organizations (as Asylum Aid successfully did)
  
- Increase outreach work to new migrant communities to make sure women's needs are addressed
  
- Advertising for services on local papers should be free
  
- Combating violence against women and girls needs to be on a national political agenda as it reduces saves lives, it reduces crime rates in communities, it helps raising awareness of VAWG in the communities whist at the same time helping women from minority community to integrate into society
  
- Specialist refuge for Middle Eastern women with interpreters for women accessing the UK with spousal visa (at the moment this women are not accepted in refuges and are left to violent situations)



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## Appendix 1: Stakeholder Organisations



[www.avaproject.org.uk](http://www.avaproject.org.uk)

AVA is a national second tier service working to end all forms of violence against women and girls. Building on the success and achievements of the GLDVP the key aims of AVA are:

- To challenge, enable, encourage and support all agencies and communities to contribute to achieving our vision of a world free from violence against women and girls.
- To offer a range of high quality and expert services to facilitate specialist and generic agencies to contribute towards our vision.
- To identify and fill gaps in the field, find innovative solutions to current and emerging situations and inspire an effective strategic approach to reducing and preventing violence against women and girls.



[www.thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk](http://www.thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk)

WRC is the leading national umbrella organisation for the women's sector, working towards linking all aspects of the women's movement. We support our members to be more effective and sustainable through training, and we lobby the government on their behalf on a range of women's issues. We hope to act as a role model within the women's sector, as an organisation run on feminist principles and supporting other women's organisations to live feminist values. Overall, we are working towards transformational and substantive equality for women. We achieve this through being a thought leader in the women's sector, joining-up-the-dots of women's inequality to push for empowerment its true sense: supporting women and women's organisations to achieve their full potential.

**Vision:** All women are empowered and have substantive equality

**Mission:** Supporting and standing up for a diverse and thriving women's sector



[www.nawo.org.uk](http://www.nawo.org.uk)

The National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO, founded 1989) is an umbrella organisation for over 100 organisations and individuals based in England. All members are concerned to ensure women gain access to their human rights, and to make equality between women and men a reality. Its diverse membership includes: single issue to specialist organisations, faith groups, health centres, arts-based organisations and others offering services and campaigning across a range of women's concerns.

**NAWO works in partnership with other women's organisations:** To ensure that women's voices are heard and attended to nationally, in Europe and internationally  
To ensure that gender is mainstreamed throughout all government policies and in their implementation

**Cornerstones of NAWO's work:** The Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA).

**NAWO Commitments:** The implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) The improvement of government provision for women The assessment of all policies and their impact on women and men



[www.lawrs.org.uk](http://www.lawrs.org.uk)

The Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS) is a human rights based organisation which supports the immediate and long term needs of Latin American women migrants in the UK. Over 4,000 women use our services every year to benefit from practical and emotional support, to learn new skills and to improve their own opportunities. The difference we want is for Latin American women in the UK to be free from violence, abuse and exploitation, to be economically secure in the UK, to achieve their full potential and to fully exercise their human rights.

#### **Mission**

LAWRS' mission is to provide tools for growth to empower Latin American women in the UK to pursue

personal and social change.

### Values

Our values are integral to the work we do and influence the approach, actions and the outcomes that we seek to achieve.

### HWF



**Hackney**  
women's  
forum

[www.hackneywomensforum.org.uk](http://www.hackneywomensforum.org.uk)

### Making our voices heard

The aim of Hackney Women's Forum is to promote women's equality and human rights. The Forum is run by volunteers and a facilitator, as and when project funding is secured. It works in partnership with local government agencies on women's issues, co-ordinates consultations and puts on events. It provides channels for women in Hackney to raise issues and become involved in local decision making and planning.

### Purpose of Hackney Women's Forum

Mission The mission of the Hackney Women's Forum is to promote and advocate for women's equality and human rights.

#### Aims

1. Encourage and support women's involvement and participation in the local planning and decision making bodies.
2. To promote and advocate for women's equality and human rights in policy and decision making in Hackney.
3. To support the leadership and organisational development of the women's voluntary sector so women's organisations can more effectively tackle gender inequalities.
4. To facilitate the exchange of information and learning from diverse communities to better understand difference and promote the inclusion of all.



**Asylum Aid**  
Protection from Persecution

[www.asylumaid.org.uk](http://www.asylumaid.org.uk)

Asylum Aid was founded in 1990 to provide desperately-needed legal representation to those fleeing persecution abroad. We have provided legal advice to more than 30,000 people in the last twenty years, and we are committed to continuing this work.

### Asylum Aid's Aims

- To provide free and accessible legal representation of the highest quality, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable and excluded asylum seekers
- To campaign vigorously for a fair asylum process based on inviolable human rights principles. We always ensure that what we say is firmly rooted in the work we do
- To work co-operatively with our colleagues in the asylum and refugee movement, so that our work has the strongest possible impact
- To sustain a stable, independent and purposeful organisation which benefits all the people who need our help, and all the organisations with which we work

#### **Asylum Aid's Values**

- We believe that human rights are unconditional, and that our commitment to promoting equality and justice should govern and inform every aspect of our work
- We believe that Asylum Aid should work to the highest professional standards to realise this commitment
- We believe in working collaboratively to advance our aims and to ensure that refugees can influence the direction and perspectives of the organisation

The values at the heart of our work are also described in our policy briefings, and in recent Annual Reports.



<http://ikwro.org.uk/>

IKWRO was founded (as the Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation) in 2002 by our Executive Director, Diana Nammi. Since our foundation, as testament to the success of our work and in response to the need for culturally specific support, advocacy and counselling for women from the Middle East and Afghanistan, our services have been extended to several vulnerable communities in the United Kingdom.

IKWRO's mission is to protect Middle Eastern and Afghan women and girls who are at risk of 'honour' based violence, forced marriage, child marriage, female genital mutilation and domestic violence and to promote their rights.

We provide direct services for women and girls, including advocacy, training and counselling. We also provide advice and support to professionals from bodies such as the

police, social services and schools to help them to understand issues affecting minority ethnic women and we campaign for better laws and their effective implementation as well as for appropriate resources to uphold the rights of women and girls and ensure their safety.

*imkaan*

<http://imkaan.org.uk/>

As a second-tier, human rights organisation, with national membership, Imkaan represents the expertise and perspectives of frontline specialist women's services that work to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls.

Imkaan's work is focussed on the needs and aspirations of black and minority ethnic women. Imkaan uses the term 'black' in the political sense, to encompass all women whose herstorys originate from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and South America, and indigenous peoples of Australasia, North America and the islands of the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Ocean.

Our approach is rooted in an understanding not only of the gendered nature of violence against women and girls, but also the way intersecting factors such as age, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability can affect girls' and women's journeys and experiences. As such we actively promote the leadership, autonomy and self-determination of black and minority ethnic women and girls.

At Imkaan, we recognise that violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a fundamental violation of our human rights and one that has implications within a range of human rights frameworks. We are committed to utilising (and expanding) existing human rights approaches in our work to end violence against women and girls. Imkaan aims to create safe spaces for black and minority ethnic women and girls, to define our perception of human rights, identify our own priorities and to strengthen our voices at national and international levels.