

3. Current funding challenges

The previous section showed the variety of sources of funding on which the women's sector relies including central, devolved and local government, grant-making organisations, statutory bodies, donations and the European Union. Previous research has shown that in recent years women's organisations have been struggling very hard to secure adequate funding.³⁴ This is due to the shift to commissioning of services, reduced local government budgets and less targeted funding from national government.³⁵

41% of the organisations surveyed for this briefing reported a reduction in their income in the last year (with a further 31.7% reporting no change). At the same time 80% of the organisations saw an increase in demand for their services in the same period.

Austerity, through cuts to public services and to social security, has increased the number of people seeking support from voluntary organisations.³⁶ This has not been matched by an increase of funding available for these organisations so a major challenge has been to cope with higher demand on the same or lower budgets.

This section looks at characteristics of the current funding landscape and the challenges they pose to women's organisations, including the impact of austerity on the organisations' financial survival and capacity to respond to demand.

3.1 The impact of austerity

Austerity measures since 2010 had an impact on the availability and accessibility of statutory services to vulnerable women, availability of funding for women's organisations, and on the demand for support and services from the voluntary sector by the most disadvantaged people.

Local authorities

At the same as time as the Coalition Government decided to devolve power over certain services to local areas, overall funding by central government was cut. Central government funding for local government fell by over 50% between 2010/11 and 2015/16³⁷ and then by a further 30.6% in 2017/18.³⁸ Funding for the police was cut by 20% between 2010/11 and 2014/15,³⁹ with consequences for victims of domestic and sexual violence, including cases dropped due to problems collecting evidence and a reduction in police funding for specialist support services.⁴⁰ For health, although spending was protected, there was actually a fall of 1.3% in age-related per capita spending, a result of increased demand due to a growing and ageing population.⁴¹

Reduced local funding

Cuts to funding for local authorities and other statutory bodies have had an impact on their funding for local services.

This is reflected in how commissioning was handled: with the overriding criteria for choosing between bids often being cost rather than quality of services, failing to implement the Social Value Act 2012 (see Box H on p 16).⁴²

For women's organisations, these cuts in local budgets had two main competing consequences, namely reduced funding and increased demand.

A consequence of the cuts has been the closure of many small local women's organisations, particularly organisations specialised in supporting black and minoritised women⁴³ (see Quote 4), women with disabilities and lesbian women.

Black and minoritised women services at higher risk

Quote 4

"Women services are not prioritised – there is even less commitment to support women groups and minority ethnic groups to grow, which is where we are placed.

Regard for women's needs in general seems to be diminishing. I think this is worse for poor women and women from minority groups.

34. WRC (2015) Women's organisations; the 'net beneath the net' (<http://bit.ly/2EXacGX>); WRC (2016) The impact of austerity measures on women's voluntary organisations and the response of the women's sector (<http://bit.ly/2DgN5GR>); WRC (2018) Hearing women's voices: Why women 2018 (<http://bit.ly/2MR7vWm>)
35. The Bureau Local (16 October 2017) 'Revealed: Thousands of Vulnerable Women Turned Away as Refugee Funding is Cut' (<http://bit.ly/2NXPIBp>); EHRC (2012) The impact of changes in commissioning and funding on women-only services (<http://bit.ly/2MP2qOp>)

36. WBG and Runnymede Trust (2017) Intersecting inequalities: The impact of austerity on Black and Minority Ethnic women in the UK (<http://bit.ly/2JLave5>) p 41; WRC (2016) The impact of austerity measures on women's voluntary organisations and the response of the women's sector (<http://bit.ly/2DgN5GR>)
37. IFS (2016) Council-level figures on spending cuts and business rates income (<http://bit.ly/2nyfPKf>)
38. Local Government Association (2016) Local Government Finance Settlement: Technical Consultation 2017/18 (<http://bit.ly/2qAj5MQ>)

There is already a lack of services for BME women in Scotland experiencing domestic abuse. Two main Women's Aid groups provide refuge and outreach support for women, children and young people. It is vital that funding remains at a level where holistic support is available to vulnerable women from experienced specialist staff."

Commissioning and funding cuts drastically reduced the amount of funding available for local specialist services. The Bureau Local found that over three quarters of councils have reduced the amount they spend on domestic violence refuges, with total spending on refuges reduced by a quarter (24%) since 2010 (from £31.2m in 2010/11 to £23.9m in 2016/17).⁴⁴ In a year alone, there was a cut of 31% in funding to the sexual and domestic violence sector, from £7.8m in 2010/11 to £5.4m in 2011/12.⁴⁵

Increased demand due to public service cuts

Cuts to women's organisations' funding were accompanied by an increase in the demand for their services. Many statutory services introduced or raised their eligibility thresholds to accommodate only the very worst cases, following severe public spending cuts. So frontline third-sector organisations are being forced to pick up the slack on these cuts, receiving people with unmet support needs that are turning to voluntary organisations as their last resort (see Quote 5).

Quote 5

"Our client base has become more complex, so we are dealing with clients now with mental health issues that ten years ago we would never have seen walking through our door because they'd have gotten psychological services delivered to them but they haven't now so we're seeing them.

So the stress of managing this system that is broken – the statutory services around it are broken and we are fractured – and yet we're being told that the voluntary sector is where things in terms of health and social care need to be. So there's going to be more and more things pushed our way. The resources are not following. And what I know is they are being pushed our way because we're known to be so much cheaper.

I think if I stepped into the shoes of somebody from the statutory sector, they don't have a choice. They've been

slashed to the core and actually they don't have the means to deliver the services. So where do these clients go? The only other place for them to go is the voluntary sector."

Quote 6

"There's sometimes an understanding that the voluntary sector will do it for nothing, that you can do it on the cheap."

Demand is also increasing from other sources. Increased spending on prevention and awareness-raising campaigns on violence against women and girls, and high-profile cases such as the #MeToo movement and the Saville case, are leading more people to report abuse and seek help, as reported by women's organisations interviewed for this report. This is a positive development, but without funding available for core support services to match the demand the result has been longer waiting lists for women's organisations' services.

BOX E Delivering for more people with the same resources

A sexual violence support organisation has seen an increase of 40% in their helpline calls in the last few years, even though they saw a reduction on their income from 2017/18 to 2018/19. The quote below mentions the struggle of trying to deliver high-quality services under increased demand and with the same resources:

"The increase in demand without an increase in resources has created its own pressures. I've had quite high turnover, which is very unusual for this organisation, in my senior management team, and I know it's stress that's done that. When you're in this world because you're committed to these value-based services to really vulnerable people and you see waiting lists growing and growing and growing with no hope on the horizon that you can tackle it, except cutting the services or making them less robust – or increase our thresholds and mirror what the statutory services have done."

39. IFS (2015) Funding the English and Welsh Police Service: from boom to bust? (<http://bit.ly/20IJF0G>)

40. The Independent (9 April 2017) 'Thousands of domestic violence victims withdrawing from legal action after Government cuts' (<https://ind.pn/2Nt6N6V>)

41. IFS (2017) UK Health Spending: Briefing Note 201 (<http://bit.ly/2QPddek>)

42. NCVO (9 Feb 2017) 'Review of the Social Value Act' (<http://bit.ly/2QoLqAZ>)

43. Imkaan (2016) Capital losses: The state of the specialist BME ending violence against women and girls sector in London (<http://bit.ly/2N5Pwvs>)

44. The Bureau Local (16 October 2017) 'Revealed: Thousands of Vulnerable Women Turned Away as Refuge Funding is Cut' (<http://bit.ly/2NXPIBp>)

45. APPG on Domestic and Sexual Violence (2015) Report of Inquiry into the Changing Landscape of Domestic and Sexual Violence Services (<http://bit.ly/2xvDs1M>)