

## Written evidence submitted by the Angelou Centre and Women's Aid Federation of England (COR240)

### *COVID 19 and Domestic Abuse: Follow up information from the Angelou Centre and Women's Aid Federation of England*

#### 1) What is the funding gap between the resource available to services and what they need to meet current demand?

##### **Funding required**

1.1 In 2019 Women's Aid Federation of England estimated that £393 million would be required annually to securely fund specialist women's domestic abuse services in England. This £173.8 million for the national network of refuge services and £219.5 million for community based services – including advocacy, outreach, floating support, support for children and young people, therapeutic support, and community work. These estimates do not cover funding required in Wales<sup>1</sup>.

1.2 In 2020 Imkaan estimated that £57million is required to ensure that the network of specialist services led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women is sustainable and stays open and can provide refuge spaces, outreach support in the community, specialist advocacy, counselling and support to children.<sup>2</sup> The disproportionality in funding for black and minoritised led by and for specialist organisations is compounded further by regional inequities and exclusion from commissioning frameworks.

1.3 These estimates do not include the wider investment needed for national helplines and support services, dedicated sexual violence services, specialist work with migrant women, perpetrator work, training for professionals, multi-agency working arrangements, or awareness raising.

1.4 In response to COVID 19, the VAWG sector called for at least £65 million of the Treasury's £750 million package of support for charities to ensure specialist VAWG services could cope during the pandemic. We called for a flexible and fair funding pot which would be simple for services to access, alongside ring-fenced funding for services led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women, Deaf and disabled women, and LGBT+ survivors.

##### **Funding gap**

1.5 During 2020-21 the government has delivered:

- £37 million in emergency funding for domestic and sexual violence services in England and Wales in May 2020<sup>3</sup>.
- An additional £11 million in funding for domestic and sexual violence services in England and Wales in November 2020<sup>4</sup>.
- £7 million for responses to perpetrators in England and Wales in November 2020<sup>5</sup>.

1.6 This amounts to £48million for services supporting victims of domestic and sexual violence in England during 2020-21. However there hasn't been national data collected on the level of funding which have been awarded to specialist domestic and sexual violence

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<sup>1</sup> Women's Aid (2019) Funding Specialist Support for Domestic Abuse Survivors Bristol: Women's Aid

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.endviolenceagainstawomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Treasury-Letter-CSR-1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/emergency-funding-to-support-most-vulnerable-in-society-during-pandemic>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/funding-boost-for-rape-and-domestic-abuse-support>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/funding-boost-for-rape-and-domestic-abuse-support>

services (as opposed to victims' charities and other generic organisations), or to specialist services led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women, disabled women or LGBT+ survivors.

1.7 There are no consistent national data collected on funding from local authorities, police and crime commissioners or health bodies for domestic abuse or other VAWG services so it is not possible to know how much they spent during 2020-21. There have also been additional funds delivered by the Welsh Government.

1.8 In the next financial year 2021-22, the government has pledged:

- £125million in funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to local authorities to fund the statutory duty for accommodation based services
- £40 million in funding from the Ministry of Justice for domestic and sexual violence services, which will largely be delivered through PCCs.

1.9 The £165 million announced is clearly a fraction of the required estimates outlined above. There remains no clarity about how funding will be directed to specialist domestic and sexual violence organisations, or 'by and for' services – particularly those who are not commissioned.

### ***Impact of funding shortfall***

1.10 Before the pandemic, funding was the number one concern for the sector. Services run with piecemeal funding from multiple funding streams, reporting on numerous outcomes and targets to different funders, with short-term and restricted budgets which do not cover the full costs of delivery and competitive tendering practices which fail to recognise their specialism and expertise. This has a wide range of impacts for the sector:

#### *Funding doesn't meet demand for support from survivors*

- Demand is still higher than the provision available, with 57.2% of refuge referrals declined during 2019-20, and 18% of all these turned down due to lack of capacity in the refuge.
- The number of spaces in refuge services in England still falls short of the number of spaces recommended by the Council of Europe by 1,694 spaces, which represents a 30% shortfall. An additional increase of 361 to 4,251 spaces by 1 November 2020 is due to temporary emergency funding which will soon come to an end.
- Nationally black and minoritised led specialist organisations work with the majority of survivors who have no recourse to public funds or uncertain immigration status (averaging 60% of led by and for services client base) but receive little or no additional funding for this work.
- Since April 2020, for every available bed space available at the Angelou Centre for women without recourse to funds there have been 12 applicants. Imkaan have identified a 1,172-bed shortfall in refuge accommodation for black and minoritised women
- Black and minoritised led services nationally have seen a 50% sustained increase in referrals into their services, with some workers seeing their case loads increase threefold.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Funding doesn't cover the costs of service delivery*

- 55% of domestic abuse services in England responding to Women's Aid's Annual Survey in 2019 were running an area of work with no dedicated funding at all.<sup>7</sup>
- Less than half of services responding to a Women's Aid survey in June survey had experienced an overall increase in funding/income during the pandemic.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Imkaan Research Document Impact of COVID 19 on Frontline Black and Minoritised Women and Girls Services, submitted to the Home Affairs Committee 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Women's Aid (2021) The Domestic Abuse Report 2021: The Annual Audit, Bristol: Women's Aid.

<sup>8</sup> Women's Aid. (2020) *A Perfect Storm: The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Domestic Abuse Survivors and the Services Supporting Them*. Bristol: Women's Aid

- Organisations will frequently use reserves to cover un-funded work. Some services have no reserves to rely on as a result of facing year-on-year cuts, and one Women's Aid member service have told us that they are on the verge of bankruptcy.
- At the Angelou Centre, on average, complex cases during the pandemic took an additional 40% of caseworker's time due to the failures and delays in systems and additional barriers presented by remote working.
- The staffing shortfall in the first 6 months of the pandemic for Black and minoritised led services was the equivalent of 471 full time staff, with 70% of organisations urgently needing additional funding or capacity.
- 70% of referrals to the Angelou Centre that stated that women being referred into the service had no recourse to public funds was incorrect, with over 120 women in the initial 6 months of the pandemic failing to gain access to support or statutory services based on an incorrect assessment of their immigration status.

*Non-commissioned services are particularly at risk*

- More than a fifth of refuge services in England received no local authority commissioned funding in 2019/20 (60 out of 269 refuge services).<sup>9</sup>
- A much higher proportion of specialist 'by and for' Black and minoritised women's refuge services are not commissioned. 57.5% (146 out of 254), of spaces in these services were provided by non-commissioned refuge services.<sup>10</sup>
- Of a sample of 59 domestic abuse services responding to Women's Aid's Annual Survey 2020, 67% of community-based services were commissioned by their local authority for community-based support. Whilst the figures cannot be broken down to show how many of these services are 'by and for' Black and minoritised women's organisations, it is clear that they will disproportionately be represented in the non-commissioned group.
- The pre-existing funding shortfall before the pandemic for Black and minoritised women's organisations was already 39% due to commissioning, austerity measures which disproportionately targeted women's sector, once the pandemic struck, 25% of Imkaan's members said they would not survive without additional funding.
- The 12 Black and minoritised women's organisations who are part of the Northern NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds) Network (North West, Yorkshire, North East, Scotland) received an average of less than 4k per service from their local authorities in the first 6 months of Covid despite a 60% rise in referrals from statutory services. These organisations cover over 20 local authorities. Only one of these services is commissioned by their local authority.

**2) If the current Government funding support is not carried over to 2021/22, what will happen in terms of service provision, and how quickly**

- A lack of Government funding into 2021/22 will have a severe knock on impact on smaller community based and Black and minoritised services with generic and commissioned services having more capacity to address income gaps. Imkaan member organisations were 6 times less likely to obtain funding compared to the generic counterparts. That is, when they were not excluded from funding altogether because they delivered support to specific groups of black and minoritised women.
- This is not an issue for all services, but we have heard of many organisations who have been able to increase provision (and often staff) to deal with additional demand resulting from COVID 19, but whilst these services continue to be needed and demand remains high – there is no funding to sustain these services beyond March 2021.

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<sup>9</sup> Women's Aid. (2021) *Fragile funding landscape: the extent of local authority commissioning in the domestic abuse refuge sector in England 2020*, Bristol: Women's Aid

<sup>10</sup> Women's Aid. (2021) *Fragile funding landscape: the extent of local authority commissioning in the domestic abuse refuge sector in England 2020*, Bristol: Women's Aid

- The lack of financial certainty means that staff retention is extremely difficult, and some services are losing staff to local authorities and housing associations who are able to offer more security.
- Vast regional differences mean that there is currently an ‘access’ desert in certain areas of the country for migrant women due to the sparsity or lack of Black and minoritised specialist organisations in areas such as Cumbria and Northumberland.
- Welsh Women’s Aid have reported that the delays in the administration of emergency COVID 19 funds at each step of the process meaning services received funds much later than originally expected and have had to rush recruitment and spend. A number of services have put in requests for extension of the spend period and have been told there is no flexibility on the March deadline, however instead of flexibility they have been told to wait until next year and re-bid for underspend or new grants. This is an unsustainable approach, it will mean the possible loss of newly recruited and trained staff, a significant impact on workforce morale already stretched by increased complexity and severity of caseloads, and potential gaps in provision. Services also noted that this will increase costs for them as tender processes are expensive and time consuming at time when capacity is at a premium.

### **3) What trend in demand for services is forecast for 2021/22, and what further funding does the sector need to support the demand for services?**

3.1 Nationally it is not yet possible to precisely forecast demand in 2021/22. However, on the basis of the experiences of services in 2020/21, and academic research which is predicting a surge in demand when lockdown measures lift, we can anticipate the demand for specialist support will remain high and likely increase. In May and June 2020 Women’s Aid saw around a 50% reduction in the number of refuge vacancies in England available in comparison with 2019 – showing that easing of lockdown had clear impact on demand. It is critical to recognise that funding was not meeting demand before the pandemic, and without the level of sustainable investment outlined in the response to question 1 women and children will continue to be turned away from the support they need in the next financial year.

3.2 Specialist Black and minoritised services are reporting that despite several lockdown eases there has been no reduction in the 50% surge in demand for services, with organisations such as the Angelou Centre seeing a 30% rise in high risk/complex needs cases. A late injection of charitable funding into the sector in Autumn 2020, (to be spent by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021) means that the majority of by and for/community based services face a ‘funding shelf’ from 1<sup>st</sup> April with 1 in 4 led by and for services concerned about closure of their services in 2021.<sup>11</sup>

### **4) What is it possible to say about the demand for services and the requirement for funding support in the medium term, eg. in financial year 2023/24?**

4.1 Data from a sample of 9,000 survivors in England shows that the average length of abuse experienced before accessing a domestic abuse support service was six years.<sup>12</sup> Women and children experiencing abuse now might not reach out for help for years to come, and this must be factored into the funding delivered for the VAWG sector over the next five years. This is particularly the case for survivors of sexual violence and abuse, who typically access services a year or more after it has happened.

4.2 Our sector anticipates that demand for support will rise significantly and that there will be more complexity to the issues survivors will seek support for. There will be severe and lasting effects of the escalation of abuse, and increased barriers to support, that women and

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<sup>11</sup> Imkaan Research Document Impact of COVID 19 on Frontline Black and Minoritised Women and Girls Services, submitted to the Home Affairs Committee 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Women’s Aid (2021) The Domestic Abuse Report 2021: The Annual Audit, Bristol: Women’s Aid

children have faced during this time. For example, the Live Fear Free Helpline delivered by Welsh Women's Aid has shown an increase in complexity & severity of cases which increased the average call duration between 23-37% in first two quarters of 2020.

4.3 This is likely to particularly the case for women who experience structural inequality, on basis of race, ethnicity, disability and other factors. COVID 19 has disproportionately impacted Black and minoritised and disabled communities, at the same time that Black and minoritised and disabled women experiencing violence and abuse face serious barriers to safety, support & justice.<sup>13</sup> This means that survivors have increased needs, and require more in-depth and longer support from specialist services – which will impact on the nature of funding required in the medium to long term.

4.4 We continue to call for a secure, national multi-year funding settlement for the specialist VAWG sector which: ensures all forms of specialist service provision for survivors, children and young people and perpetrators are resilient for the future; provides equity of provision for survivors across the UK nations; and delivers ring-fenced funding for specialist services led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women, Deaf and disabled women and LGBT+ survivors,.

## **5) Time limits for reporting domestic abuse**

5.1 There is a six month time limit on prosecutions for 'summary only' offences such as common assault, which are tried at a Magistrates Court. This time limit can pose real challenges for survivors of domestic abuse, who may not be able to report the abuse they've experienced for months or years after it's happened. It can also bar the police and the CPS from prosecuting 'common assault' as part of a wider pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. A survivor contacting Women's Aid told us that her abuser returned during the first lockdown, and she reported the abuse she experienced in August 2020 to police. However, because she didn't have medical evidence the charges were downgraded to common assault – but the six month statutory time limit means she was too late to report and all charges have now been dropped. This is despite the fact that that the assault was one part of the pattern of abuse and control she had experienced over a number of years. As she says:

*“That time frame seems completely unjust and just not realistic for a lot of people. Assault occurring in an abusive relationship is not the same as an isolated incident. They should not be viewed the same. It doesn't allow for the mental abuse/control aspect of the issue.”*

## **February 2021**

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<sup>13</sup> Imkaan, The Impact of the Two Pandemics: VAWG and COVID-19 on Black and Minoritised Women and Girls, May 2020