

**FUNDING  
INTERSECTIONAL  
VIOLENCE AGAINST  
WOMEN AND GIRLS  
(VAWG) SERVICES JULY 2019**



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*imkaan*



Imkaan is a UK-based, Black feminist organization and the only second-tier women's organization in the UK dedicated to addressing violence against Black and minoritized women and girls. The organization has nearly two decades of experience of working around issues such as domestic violence, forced marriage and 'honour-based' violence. Imkaan works intersectionally at local, national and international levels, within a clear rights-based agenda, and in partnership with a range of organizations, to improve policy and practice responses to minoritized women and girls.

This policy brief is part of a series produced by Imkaan for EU/UN Women's Programme on Ending Discrimination and Violence against Women: 'Implementing Norms, Changing Minds'. The Programme aims at ending discrimination and violence against women and girls (VAWG), with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged groups of women, in six Western Balkans countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo\* and Serbia and Turkey.

The policy briefs have been informed by Imkaan's interviews and focus-group discussions with minoritised women's organisations across the Western Balkans and Turkey from September 2017- April 2018. The content of the policy briefs have been further refined through a capacity-building workshop delivered by Imkaan for seventeen 'by and for' activists from the region in Sarajevo, Bosnia in April 2019.

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## ***WHAT ARE SPECIALIST 'BY AND FOR' ORGANISATIONS?***

'By and for' VAWG organisations are independent, specialist and dedicated services run 'by and for' the communities they seek to serve<sup>1</sup>. 'By and for' specialist services may be delivered by a range of equality-led organisations including organisations working with women with disabilities, women's organisations, LGBT organisations and Black and minoritised<sup>2</sup> (BME) women's organisations.

The provision of specialist services designed 'by and for' minoritised survivors of violence is rooted in a nuanced understanding of survivors' needs, experiences, and local and personal contexts. These organisations work on the basis of an intersectional<sup>3</sup> approach, understanding that for minoritised women, violence perpetrated against them by a partner and/or family or community member is routinely compounded by other intersecting sites of oppression such as racism, ableism, homophobia, prohibitive immigration laws, and poverty.

## ***THE VALUE OF SPECIALIST 'BY AND FOR' VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAWG) SERVICE PROVISION***

Within this understanding, specialist 'by and for' organisations are able to respond to the complex, intersecting needs of women and girls within a broader context of structural inequality. Many of these organisations have emerged from and continue to be an integral part of larger social-justice, feminist and anti-racist movements. Integral to the identity of such organisations and their staff is a grounding within social-justice movements, an ethos of collaborative working and solidarity, as well as a deep commitment to engaging with the intersecting lived-realities of women and girls facing violence. The vision, mission and ways of working of such organisations are framed by minoritised women's needs and unique experiences of oppression. Minoritised women themselves determine organisational priorities and strategic direction. Importantly, the presence of minoritised women is reflected in staffing, management and governance structures of these organisations.

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<sup>1</sup>Specialist services are designed and delivered by and for the users and communities they aim to serve' Voice4Change England and NAVCA Specialist Services: A Guide for Commissioners 2012, accessed online at [http://www.voice4change-england.co.uk/webfm\\_send/158](http://www.voice4change-england.co.uk/webfm_send/158) [Accessed 31 May 2019]

<sup>2</sup> In this report the term 'minoritised' (rather than 'minority' or 'minority ethnic') is used to highlight that "groups and communities do not occupy the position of 'minority' by virtue of some inherent property (of their culture or religion, for example), but rather they come to acquire this position as the outcome of a socio-historical and political process" (Burman, 2005, p.533).

<sup>3</sup> The concept of intersectionality was coined in 1989 by Black feminist activist and academic Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw to contextualise the specific ways African-American women are subjected to both sex and race discrimination, and the barriers they faced when trying to seek redress around this.

'By and for' organisations are engaged in leadership and transformation which is rooted in, but goes beyond, an individual woman's journey; and individual women are able to draw on this as a source of safety, support, space and justice. For minoritised women facing violence being able to access services that understand the complexity of their lived realities and the multiple contexts within which they are marginalised enables them to disclose violence with the knowledge that they will be understood and believed. The 'led by and for' model therefore offers a uniquely empowering experience to minoritised women and girls.

## ***MAPPING THE FUNDING LANDSCAPE***

### ***LIMITED STATE INVESTMENT IN INTERSECTIONAL WORK TO END VAWG***

Currently, across the Western Balkans and Turkey, states are investing only a limited amount of resources into ending VAWG service provision<sup>4</sup>. A recent report on women's rights in the Western Balkans (2019) states that within the region essential specialist services for victims are under-developed and their sustainability is jeopardised as funding by central or local governments is rarely provided<sup>5</sup>. In some parts of the region, specialist women's organisations report that funding for ending VAWG work is in steep decline in correlation with a political climate increasingly characterised by conservative policy agendas. Specialist women's rights organisations have reported instances of withdrawal of state funding when the values of feminist organisations are at odds with State ideology<sup>6</sup>.

Specialist women's organisations also report that where the state does offer funding to ending VAWG services, specialist 'by and for'<sup>7</sup> services in particular face barriers to accessing funding, and are systematically excluded from the economy of provision. This shift includes prioritising smaller 'by and for' organisations who have or are willing and able to 'corporatise' their work approach, which in turn squeezes smaller, more agile and innovative specialist services out of the landscape. This has engendered the effective widespread defunding of provision which is built around the felt needs of minoritised<sup>8</sup> survivors rather than the political interests and specifications of state governments.

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<sup>4</sup> Duhacek, D., Brankovic, B., Mirazic, M. (2019) Women's Rights in Western Balkans. Report prepared for the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (p. 49). January 2019. Available at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608852/IPOL\\_STU\(2019\)608852\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608852/IPOL_STU(2019)608852_EN.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Imkaan (2018). 'A thousand ways to solve our problems': An analysis of existing Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) approaches for minoritized women and girls in the Western Balkans and Turkey.

<sup>7</sup> 'Specialist services are designed and delivered by and for the users and communities they aim to serve' Voice4Change England and NAVCA Specialist Services: A Guide for Commissioners 2012, accessed online at [http://www.voice4change-england.co.uk/webfm\\_send/158](http://www.voice4change-england.co.uk/webfm_send/158) [Accessed 31 May 2019]

<sup>8</sup> In this report the term 'minoritised' (rather than 'minority' or 'minority ethnic') is used to highlight that "groups and communities do not occupy the position of 'minority' by virtue of some inherent property (of their culture or religion, for example), but rather they come to acquire this position as the outcome of a socio-historical and political process" (Burman, 2005, p.533).

The lack of resources committed to ending VAWG support services contradicts states' obligations as outlined in national strategic plans and as per Article 8 of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, referred to as the Istanbul Convention. This convention obliges states to allocate "appropriate financial and human resources for the adequate implementation of integrated policies, measures and programmes to prevent and combat all forms of violence [...] including those carried out by nongovernmental organisations and civil society". Furthermore, the UN Handbook for Legislation on Violence against Women states that legislation which addresses VAWG cannot be implemented effectively without adequate funding, and that budgetary allocation must be based on a full analysis of funding required to ensure comprehensive implementation of all measures contained in the legislation.

## LICENSING OF VAWG SERVICES

States are also attaching funding to licensing requirements. As part of the process of 'social reform' in some states across the region, specialist women's organisations working on VAWG are expected to have their services 'licensed' by the state. For example in Serbia in order to qualify for state funding, 'by and for' organisations supporting disabled women facing violence report that they must obtain a license from the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy in order to provide their services. A 2019 report by the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality<sup>9</sup> raises concerns that the specific conditions and criteria for obtaining a license requires "significant funds" which in particular place an unreasonable financial onus on under-resourced specialist 'by and for' organisations. The report anticipates the negative impact on service provision if specialist women's organisations that have been providing vital services for survivors for many decades are replaced by generic organisations with insufficient experience in the field who do not work from the basis of a woman-centred approach.

In addition concerns have been raised about the threat to the autonomy, sustainability and innovation of 'by and for' organizations if licensing criteria and accreditation fails to incorporate a nuanced intersectional approach to ending VAWG services<sup>10</sup>.

"We had more freedom before when we were not recognised at all, as compared to now when we are becoming part of the state" [VAWG activist, Serbia]

Specialist women's organisations are concerned about the impact of licensing on women's ability to choose whether they want to disclose violence to the State. For instance, under this new model of licensing, when a woman discloses violence to a licensed service provider, the service provider is legally obliged to report the woman. In addition to compounding the risk to a woman's safety,

<sup>9</sup> Duhacek, D., Brankovic, B., Mirazic, M. (2019) Women's Rights in Western Balkans. Report prepared for the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (p. 49). January 2019. Available at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608852/IPOL\\_STU\(2019\)608852\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608852/IPOL_STU(2019)608852_EN.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> GREVIO (2018). GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report on Montenegro. Available at <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-report-montenegro/16808e5614>

licensing also reduces the autonomy of specialist organisations to come up with innovative solutions to violence not necessarily rooted within the criminal justice system. This is especially true of organisations working with minoritised women.

“Women who face violence should have the right to stay anonymous; without reporting to the police or the Centre for social work. However the new licensing laws mean that organisations are obliged to report the woman...This can be dangerous for her because our State systems [police, CSW etc] are not strong enough and often fail women. Also women should have the ultimate choice of whether they want to be part of the state system or not” [VAWG activist, Montenegro].

## ***EXISTING NATURE OF DONOR FUNDING***

### ***DONOR-DRIVEN PRIORITIES***

Given the low levels of State funding for VAWG services, most VAWG organisations within the Western Balkans and Turkey rely heavily on international donors for access to funds. However, in general the funding provided by international donors is project-focused and short term which is a significant deterrent to intersectional praxis. ‘By and for’ organisations in the region have voiced concern over the fact that the aims of their projects are largely being determined by donors<sup>11</sup>.

The Roma and Egyptian Women’s Network [REWN] in Albania have identified an urgent need to provide VAWG services for Roma women in communities around Tirana. However the only funding available to them has been for providing adult education to both men and women in Roma communities. Since the organisation required funds to continue its existence, pay staff salaries and fulfil core expenses they have applied for this funding and received it.

“I want to work on projects that only support women, but I also have to consider my staff...I need the funding to pay salaries. Sometimes I have to take work to sustain us, depending on what is available at the market. This does not always reflect the needs of the community... but I have no choice”  
[Activist, REWN]

Accepting funding that does not necessarily speak to the reality of minoritised women leads to an inevitable overload of work. Says Manjola, the founder of the Roma and Egyptian Women’s Network,

“I cannot turn a Roma woman away just because I don’t have a project on violence”

<sup>11</sup> Imkaan (2018). ‘A thousand ways to solve our problems’: An analysis of existing Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) approaches for minoritized women and girls in the Western Balkans and Turkey.

This issue around 'donor determined priorities' is of critical importance for 'by and for' organisations because the expressed needs of a community might be vastly different from the priorities that donors might suggest. Due to the nature of donor-driven funding, organisational work becomes fragmented, as the mission and aims of the organisation shift to meet the demands and interests of donors. The fragmented nature of funding with its pre-conceived goals thereby prevents 'by and for' organisations from working on issues which they identify as critical.

In addition, since 'by and for' VAWG organisations recognize the structural issues which make minoritised women vulnerable to violence they are not in a position to operate in 'intersectional siloes.' i.e. they cannot solely focus on elements of intersectional VAWG work which are being currently funded such as legal aid or shelter provision without simultaneously addressing minoritised women's access to employment, health care and education.

"Funders don't understand the economic empowerment model and the role of co-operatives. And so we don't receive any funding for it."

Roma women's activist, BiH

The interconnected nature of these issues means that minoritised women's organizations often are dealing with a multiplicity of issues within a single case, something that donor-driven funding does not recognize or acknowledge.

## *CONCRETE AND INFLEXIBLE MEASURES OF 'SUCCESS'*

Donor funding also stresses on achieving 'tangible' goals as measurements of success. This is problematic on two fronts. Firstly, definitions of success are not always measurable and tangible. Improvements in self-confidence, self-worth, understanding oneself as a citizen with rights (and not solely as a 'wife, mother or daughter-in-law') are all critical elements in women's ability to negotiate violence. Furthermore minoritised women have vastly different indicators of what counts as 'success'. Several 'by and for' organisations recognize that for many women leaving an abusive partner is not an option. Therefore they operate from the understanding of how they might make a woman economically and psychologically empowered so that she might be able to negotiate the violence better while living alongside the perpetrator.

"It is important not to insist that the only solution that women have is to leave. We need to help women from within the context of the family."

Roma women's activist, Serbia

It is likely that projects that focus on pre-determined indicators of what counts as 'successful interventions' are unlikely to capture the different 'forms' that success might take.

## LACK OF CORE-FUNDING

Due to the disproportionate focus on funding project-based activities, 'by and for' organisations experience a dearth in funding for core-activities and long term capacity building of staff and minoritised women they work with. Core funding for rent, electricity/gas/water/internet, payment of administrative staff and quality assurance monitoring is hard to come by, forcing smaller 'by and for' organisations to operate in a constant state of uncertainty and precarity.

"Institutional costs need to be covered but donors are more focused on visibility and projects activities. They rarely focus on sustainability of the organisation. We need money for salaries, for rent. We need more lawyers but we cannot afford to employ them and pay pension, health insurance etc....[Currently donors] focus so much on capacity building, but it's all in short-term projects. So we are raising the capacity of those who will leave! And we have to start from the beginning all over again." NGO, Montenegro

## SHORT-TERM NATURE OF FUNDING

Short-term funding translates into organisations not being able to invest in the long term capacity building or professional development of unskilled or semi-skilled job-seekers who often belong to minoritised communities. This is critical in the case of 'by and for' organisations looking to recruit minoritised women in key staff positions. The nature of short term funding also means that organisations can offer minoritised women only limited periods of employment, which given the economic precarity that most minoritised women live with, is unsustainable for them. In mainstream organisations these limitations of short term funding translate into salaried roles in NGOs being occupied by candidates who already possess the knowledge and skills to deliver desired project outcomes within limited time frames (sometimes as short as 6-12 months); often these candidates belong to the 'majority' community.

"This type of funding destroys the possibility of working in an intersectional way. Who can afford to work in precarious conditions? Usually it's 'majority' women".

'By and for' NGO, Albania

Short-term funding also stands in the way of the longer-term transformative change in minoritised women's lives that 'by and for' organisations strive towards. Empowerment of women as a strategy to combat VAWG is a long-term goal, requiring years of continuous, sustainable presence of 'by and for' organisations in women's lives. For minoritised women to be able to stand up to violence, access State support or advocate for services that do not exist requires time, something that is often not taken into consideration by donors.



## *BUREAUCRATIC PROCESS IN DONOR FUNDING*

The bureaucratic processes involved in donor funding are significant deterrents to intersectional praxis, especially for 'by and for' organisations. Small 'by and for' organisations often lack the language skills, networks and financial requirements needed to apply for large amounts of funding. Competing for funding with organisations which are far more established, run by 'majority' women who speak English, are well-networked, and are able to spend significant amounts of time filling in applications for funding can feel overwhelming. In addition the reporting requirements of donors can often be tedious and exhausting especially for smaller 'by and for' organisations who often have only 1 or 2 permanent staff.

"Applications are complex and complicated, reporting is demanding, and smaller organisations are not able to do it right. So funds are mainly accessed by people who work on human rights on a higher level, and who have started their work in a highly professionalised way"

'By and For' NGO, Montenegro

"The donor environment is becoming increasingly corporatized and academic. Donors want to partner with organisations who are 'organised', who can produce reports, feasibility studies and appear quite 'tidy' in the way they work. Donors don't seem to like the 'messiness' of real lives."

'By and For' NGO, Kosovo

## *KEY RECOMMENDATIONS*

**Reconfigure existing funding frameworks which currently impede the possibility of intersectional approaches to combating VAWG.**

Funding provided by international donors should be relevant to minoritised women as articulated by 'by and for' specialist organisations. In particular funding must be flexible, long-term, and sustained in order to bring about transformative change. Minoritised women must be supported to identify their own funding priorities as part of the 'effective strategies for operationalising the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030' and its commitment to leave no one behind. Furthermore donors should be educated on effective intersectional approaches to supporting minoritised women.

**Funding must support economic empowerment of minoritised women, as a crucial strategy for combating VAWG**

In order to produce robust and sustainable responses to VAWG, funding models must recognise the crucial role of economic empowerment in strategies to end VAWG. This is in line with Article 18(3) of the Istanbul Convention which states that parties shall, "aim at the empowerment and

economic independence of women victims of violence<sup>12</sup>” Across the region, specialist ‘by and for’ services deliver programmes which seek to remedy the structural inequalities experienced by minoritized women. Programmes that prioritise women’s economic freedom and autonomy (for example, through providing training, employment support, and equipment and materials for women to earn an independent income) are critical to ending VAWG work, and must be funded urgently.

**Metrics used to measure outcomes and ‘success’ must be guided by the expressed needs and objectives outlined by ‘by and for’ organisations**

‘By and for’ organisations should be allowed to decide for themselves what constitutes a ‘successful outcome’ within a particular context. As part of monitoring and evaluation processes donors must embed space for organisations to reflect on and draw out their particular strengths, achievements and specialism. In addition donors must take into account the value of *process*, and *space* as critical elements to movement-building, solidarity and intersectional praxis. Focusing disproportionately on ‘activity-based-outcomes’ fails to capture the long-term impacts of ‘by and for’ ways of working.

**VAWG service licensing frameworks must be designed and steered by specialist women’s organisations.**

Licensing of VAWG services should not violate the autonomy of organisations. It is necessary to preserve the independent role of women’s ‘by and for’ organisations as providers of specialist services to survivors. Licensing requirements must operate in accordance with the principles defined in the Article 18(3) of the Istanbul convention which states that; *“All protective and supportive measures..... must aim at... avoiding secondary victimisation. In addition, support services must be offered irrespective of the victim’s willingness to press charges or testify against the perpetrator”*

Specialised women’s NGOs should be involved in preparing licensing guidelines and frameworks. Large funding organizations (such as UN Women and UNDP) should ideally support this. Donors must also support the capacity building of ‘by and’ for organisations to develop service standards rooted in their individual contexts of practice.

Furthermore licensing should not determine the funding or functioning of organisations. If the State is funding an organisation then accountability should be limited to fiscal matters and should not include programmatic or ideological aspects of VAWG service provision.

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<sup>12</sup> Istanbul Convention, Article 18 (3)

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