

Welsh Women's Aid Briefing: *Report on violence against women and girls in the UK by the UN Special Rapporteur*

On the 16th June 2015 the UN Special Rapporteur for violence against women, Rashida Manjoo delivered her latest report on the progress of the UK Government and the devolved administrations in tackling violence against women and girls in the UK, detailing a number of concerns and recommendations.

Welsh Women's Aid has produced a brief the report for your information. A copy of the full report can be accessed here: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/SRWomen/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx>

Summary of findings

The Government of the United Kingdom has declared violence against women and girls to be a national priority. It has developed a number of strategies and action plans to address the issue at the national level, as have the constituent countries. These initiatives have been developed with the participation of civil society stakeholders and are monitored across government departments and by third sector organisations.

In most cases however, these initiatives have resulted in isolated pockets of good practice and often depend on the personal commitment and leadership of individuals and certain authorities. This is largely due to the lack of a consistent and coherent human rights-based approach in the Government's response to violence against women and girls.

The Special Rapporteur is concerned about a number of regressive measures that have been adopted. These include the shift from gender specificity to gender neutrality, including gender-neutral services being increasingly favoured; power being devolved to local authorities on such issues as service provision, including changes to commissioning models which are detrimental to experienced community-based service providers; austerity measures that are having an effect on the provision of services to address violence against women; as well as other cross-cutting issues affecting women, such as poverty and unemployment. Women from black and minority ethnic communities, as well as migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women, women belonging to the LGBTI community, and women with disabilities, have been further affected by these cutbacks, as specialised services catering for their specific needs have been reduced.

The Special Rapporteur would like to address the following recommendations to the Government of the United Kingdom:

Prevention and awareness-raising

- Continue working in close cooperation with specialist third sector organisations to develop strategic, and sustained public campaigns to prevent violence against women and girls and to change sexist attitudes and behaviours;
- Ensure the consistent regulation and restriction of harmful and misogynistic images of women in the media that condone discrimination and abuse against them;
- Ensure a holistic approach to prevention of violence against women and girls by including appropriate and comprehensive sex and relationship education in schools as a compulsory subject; providing adequate training to teachers and other school staff; and developing gender-specific prevention policies.

Service provision

Urgently address the funding crisis faced by the specialist violence against women and girls sector, by:

- Evaluating the funding policy for specialist services to address violence against women and making the necessary changes to ensure long-term and sustainable funding from the central Government and/or the local authorities;
- Ensuring that specialist services are available and accessible for black and minority ethnic women, for refugee and asylum-seeking women, as well as women facing particular barriers, such as women with disabilities and women from the LGBTI community, and dedicating 'ring-fenced' funding for such specialist services;
- Establishing the necessary safeguards to guarantee that local authorities operate within a human rights framework, and in compliance with the international obligations of the United Kingdom, when addressing the issue of violence against women and girls, particularly when making commissioning decisions;
- Creating and maintaining a strong and sustained network of specialist women-centred services that provide prevention, protection and support services.

Law and policy reform

- Address normative gaps in legislation, at the national and constituent country levels;
- Develop, in consultation with women's organisations and experts, implementation plans directed at key governmental departments, in order to strengthen the strategy "A Call to End Violence against Women and Girls" and the related action plans;
- Set up specific taskforces or working groups, with representation of women from black and minority ethnic and refugee communities, to ensure effective policy and programming on violence against them;
- Launch a comprehensive consultation with third sector organisations to evaluate the effects that the changes to legal aid has had on women victims of violence, with a view to addressing the challenges being articulated in access and implementation;
- Establish a specific policy which is responsive to disclosure and which includes an oversight component regarding asylum-seeking women. This is necessary to ensure that women's histories of victimisation and abuse are taken into consideration when examining asylum claims and when considering the detention of asylum seekers;
- Conduct an investigation into allegations of abuse, detention and removal of domestic workers, including those who are negatively impacted by the new visa policy;
- Facilitate an independent examination of allegations of abuse in Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre, and ensure that all complaints are thoroughly investigated and alleged perpetrators held accountable for violations;
- Establish specific safeguards to ensure that women's histories of victimisation and abuse are taken into consideration when making decisions about incarceration, especially for non-violent crimes;
- Implement fully the recommendations made by the Corston Report,¹ including the call to replace the women's prison estate with small women-specific custodial units with appropriate and necessary services;
- Implement the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, such as the adoption of temporary special measures, to accelerate de facto equality between men and women in the country as a whole, as well as the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in Northern Ireland.

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¹ <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/corston-report-march-2007.pdf>