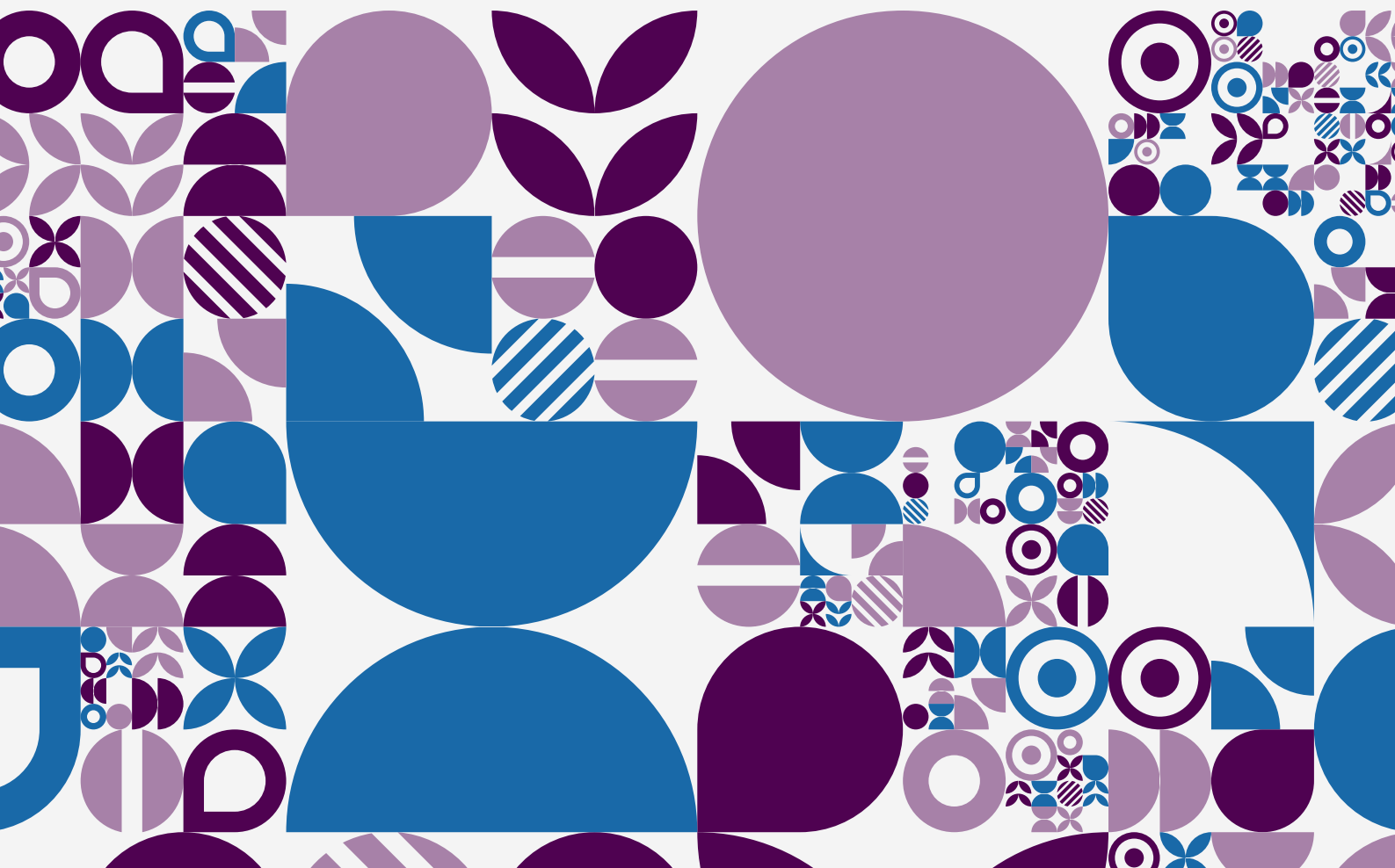


“OUR SECTOR, OUR VOICE, OUR WORK”

A Participatory Evaluation of the
Comic Relief Supporting and
Sustaining Specialism Programme
for the ending-VAWG Black &
Minoritised women-led *by and for*
sector

A REPORT BY
imkaan
March 2023



Department
for Culture,
Media & Sport

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Imkaan has over twenty years' experience of research and evaluation work in the specialist VAWG sector particularly framed at supporting Black and minoritised women and girls subject to VAWG and with an intersectional social justice approach. Imkaan has produced high quality pieces of research that have supported direct, positive changes in the policy, funding and commission landscape.

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Funded Partners



Terminology

The terms 'funded partner' and 'Black and minoritised (B&M) women-led *by and for* organisation' operating in the ending VAWG sector will be used throughout the report to describe the organisations that were funded by Comic Relief through its Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme.

Where verbatim quotes have been used, funded partners' staff may have used different terms to describe the women and girls that accessed their service, such as 'BME', 'BAME' or otherwise.

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Executive Summary

This report discusses the findings from the evaluation of the Comic Relief Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme, distributing the fourth round of the Tampon Tax Fund (TTF) from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The programme was a unique ringfenced fund for specialist ending-Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Black and minoritised (B&M) women-led *by and for* organisations supporting B&M women and girls.

Comic Relief centred its programme design on the expertise of external B&M women-led *by and for* sector leaders and the programme itself was led by a portfolio manager who herself is a B&M woman with a background in *by and for* and VAWG work. These two factors were instrumental to the effective delivery of the programme and valued by the successfully funded *by and for* partners who felt supported and understood.

The programme aimed to address the needs of B&M women and girls at risk of and subjected to VAWG. Ten grants were issued to individual B&M women-led *by and for* organisations and B&M women-led *by and for* partnerships across England, often bringing funding to communities and grassroots organisations otherwise poorly served. The programme also intended to build community and collective voice in a sector subjected to systemic marginalisation and destabilising under-funding. This evaluation explores these issues through discussions at individual organisation-level and through a series of learning and reflection sessions where all organisations were present and active, to give space to shared learning and relationship building between the funded partners.

The Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme ran only for 12-15 months but supported over 3,500 B&M women and girls across England. It funded 1,500 frontline workers engaging with B&M survivors to receive training and support from the B&M women-led *by and for* funded partners.

The programme funded critical, life-saving support through complex case work, institutional advocacy, in-house legal advice, housing, and mental health and wellbeing sessions. As a result,

- 1,812 women accessed community engagement and activities;
- 833 women accessed specialist complex case work;
- 407 women attended one-to-one or group counselling;
- 221 women engaged with statutory services;
- 483 women accessed skills workshops.

While the short-term nature of the funding created pressures on mobilisation and delivery, and concerns about how to sustain the funding for critical provision beyond the lifetime of the project, other aspects of the programme were successful. The centring of B&M women's expertise in the programme's design and management gave nuance, foregrounded quality, and focus, and upheld the decision to ringfence the funding. This gave B&M women-led *by and for* organisations a unique opportunity to bid on their own terms without the inherent structural disadvantages they face when forced to compete with better funded generic VAWG providers and their mainstream offer.

The learning from this evaluation is a call to all funders and commissioners of VAWG provision to create a more equitable anti-racist grant-making approach which sees and values the B&M women-led *by and for* sector as key experts, partners and collaborators in creating social change, justice and advancing the human rights of B&M women and girls.

Recommendations

Listen, learn and act to the needs of the B&M women-led by and for sector

Funders and commissioners

Resulting from this evaluation are the following recommendations for funders seeking to address B&M women and girls at risk of or subject to VAWG:

1. As a first step to designing funding programmes, self-assess your organisation's own dynamics of power and control from an intersectional perspective:

- Use the *Power and funding culture: Addressing Violence against Women and Girls* diagram (see Figure 7) aimed at funders to re-shift the focus on internal self-assessment and reflection to identify the ways in which oppressive practice manifests, if it remains unaddressed. Do this with a knowledge of the dynamics of systemic and institutional racism, and from an intersectional perspective.
- Using this learning and an intersectional perspective, consider how institutional behaviours and attitudes also affect your approach to the B&M women and girls being supported by your intended programme.

2. When designing the funding programme, self-assess your organisation's inclusivity for B&M women-led *by and for* services and B&M women and girls. Ask:

- Do you have sufficient understanding of the role and value of B&M women-led *by and for* organisations and the types of support interventions that are most effective in supporting B&M women and girls in the VAWG sector landscape.
- Who is most likely to benefit from your fund and who are you least likely to reach?
- Does your funding eligibility criteria exclude or disadvantage the *by and for* sector and is there an alternative strategy to address the disadvantage?
- Do your financial models create barriers for some organisations, such as funding in arrears and payment by results?
- Do you fund in ways that support the organisational capacity and sustainability of smaller, specialist providers?

3. Position B&M women with B&M women-led *by and for* expertise, skills and experience as leaders in design and management of the funding programme:

- Through consultancy or employment, give the mandate to shape the programme.
- Put in place the routes for these leaders to be heard and responded to in senior decision-making spaces, so learning is embedded from the top of the organisation, recognising structural change cannot happen without change at all levels.
- Consult and seek engagement with potential B&M women-led *by and for* providers, to test emergent thinking and ensure structural barriers (scale, complexity of bidding process, timeframes) are identified and eliminated.

4. Sustainable multi-year funding is essential. Funders should provide additional funding to extend or compensate for short-term funding programmes:

- Funding for the B&M women-led *by and for* sector should be multi-year.
- Where government funding is being cascaded through the programme and is less than multi-year, funders should provide their own funding to sufficiently extend the programme.
- Where funding fails to meet sustainability, funders should provide additional funds to cover the costs of time B&M women-led *by and for* organisations spent on the bidding, mobilisation, and exiting of short-term services, and in fundraising for continuation funding.

- Pool funding with other funders to create larger and more sustainable B&M women-led *by and for* ringfenced funding programmes.
- 5.** Fund full cost recovery, and in doing so, recognise the historic underfunding of B&M women-led *by and for* services:
- Fund full cost recovery. Base this on a review of B&M women-led *by and for* specific service models and comparable wages and core costs in other sectors (such as housing and generic VAWG organisations) to help address the underfunded and unsustainable current pricing of B&M women-led *by and for* services.
 - Recognise and ringfence 'sustainability' funding to address historic gaps created by underfunding, including (but not limited to): fundraising core costs; wages; training and supervision costs; research core costs; monitoring systems and impact measurement infrastructure.
- 6.** Commissioners, trusts and foundation funders should collaborate on learning about B&M needs and effective B&M women-led *by and for* funding practice.
- Funders should work with and resource *by and for* sector leaders/experts to embed learning focused events and actions about B&M needs and B&M women-led *by and for* sector experience. The learning generated should be used to inform decision making.
 - Funders should be committed to creating a culture of continuous learning with the *by and for* sector to inform effective funding practice.
- 7.** Trusts and foundations should step up into a strategic advocacy role, informing and encouraging improvements in funding practice by commissioners and central government:
- To collect and organise data, research and policy responses to influence government VAWG funding.
 - To play an active role advocating for the outcomes and strategic impact of B&M women-led *by and for* services, including *by and for* anti-racist, rights-based intersectional practice.
 - To use evidence and platforms in collaboration with sector representatives and experts to speak out on structural racism, injustice and institutional harms perpetrated against B&M women and girls and their B&M women-led *by and for* services.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)

Resulting from this evaluation are the following recommendations for DCMS:

- 8.** As funder of the valued and uniquely impactful Tampon Tax funding programmes, DCMS should create a forum to share learning on funding practice, VAWG sector needs, and potential funding, with recipients of Tampon Tax funding.
- 9.** DCMS should promote the learning from and impact of this programme and evaluation with government departments who fund VAWG, including the Home Office, Ministry of Justice, and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Recommendations

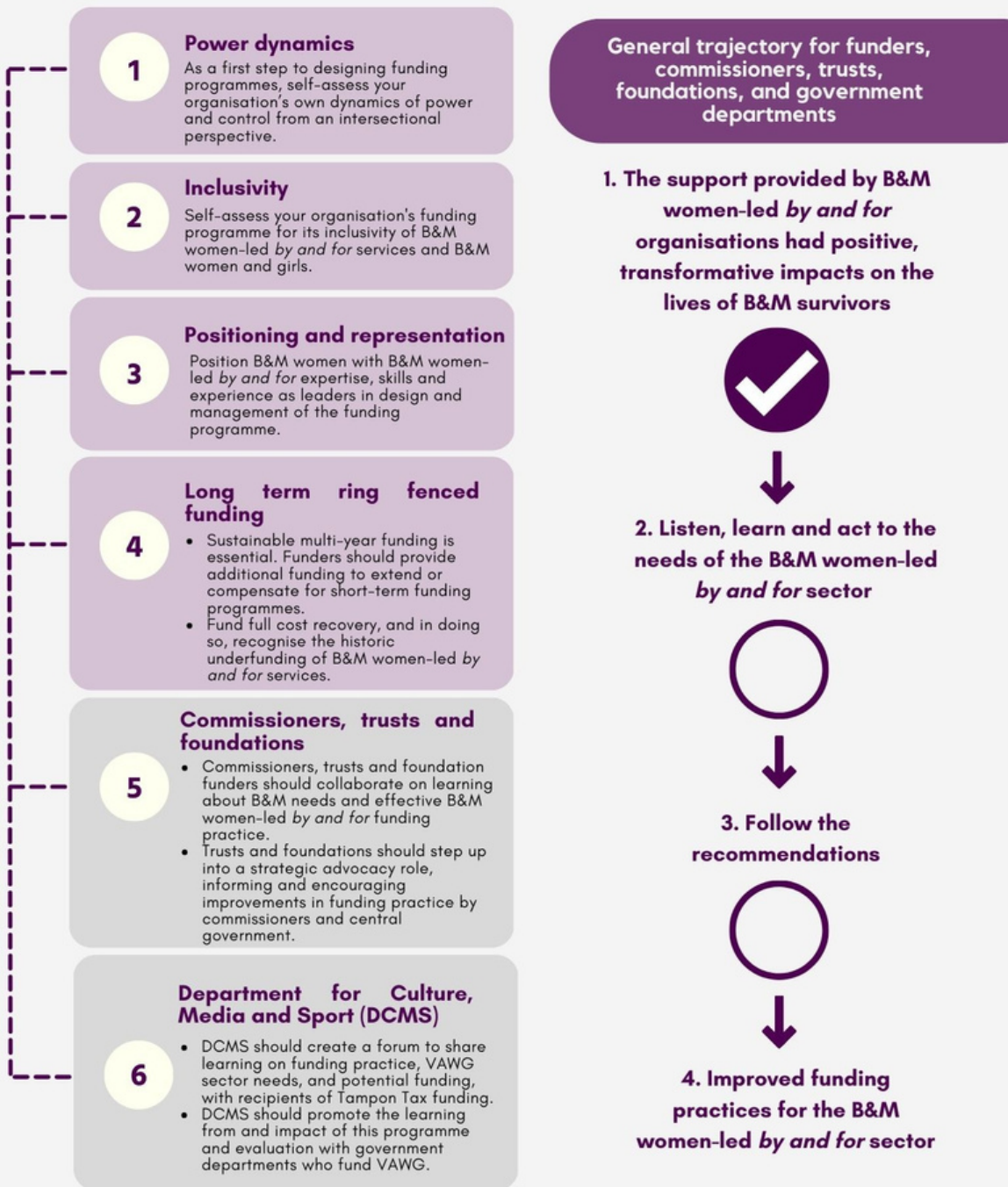


Figure 1. Summary of recommendations

Introduction

1. Background to the Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme

In 2015, the UK's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) established the Tampon Tax Fund (TTF), consisting of income raised through taxation on feminine sanitary products, to be allocated to frontline work that aims to improve the lives of disadvantaged women and girls. Comic Relief successfully secured its fourth round of Tampon Tax funding in 2021 to design and implement the 'Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme' which sat within its Gender Justice programme of work. In the future, work on violence against women and girls (VAWG) will sit within Comic Relief's new funding strand, Gender Justice and Equality, which was launched in 2023. With the DCMS funding, Comic Relief designed, for the first time, a ringfenced, dedicated funding programme to provide critical resources to specialist Black and minoritised (B&M) women-led *by and for* organisations that are working to end violence against B&M women and girls in England.

The aims of the programme were to ^[1]:

- improve access to quality services and support for B&M women and girls who are experiencing, or at risk of, violence and abuse;
- improve understanding of the needs of, and effective responses to, violence and abuse against B&M women and girls;
- share learning with other organisations and stakeholders across the sector.

An open competitive call was launched in February 2021 for applicants from across England. Investment amounts between £30,000 and £250,000 were made available for each organisation over a duration of 12 to 15 months. Specialist ending-VAWG B&M women-led *by and for* organisations were specifically invited to apply, either individually or in a partnership with other B&M women-led *by and for* organisations.

A total of 41 proposals were received. The process involved shortlisting and a detailed assessment process, the latter included an interview. Two *by and for* VAWG experts, Baljit Banga (Executive Director, Imkaan) and Rosie Lewis (Deputy Director, Angelou Centre at the time) were recruited onto the programme's Fund Reference Group (this Reference Group also advised on the development of the programme as a whole). Comic Relief also recruited additional assessors.

10 funds were awarded at the end of June 2021 to 10 expert B&M women-led *by and for* organisations and partnerships following an initial bid in response to Comic Relief's guidance notes, shortlisting and interview process. The 10 funded partners were: [Africa Advocacy Foundation](#), [Anah Project](#), [Apna Ghar Women's Centre](#), [Foundation of Women's Health Research and Development \(FORWARD\)](#), [Imece's Women's Centre](#), [Latin American Women's Aid \(LAWA\)](#), [London Black Women's Project \(LBWP\)](#), [The Phoebe Centre](#), [Saheli](#) and [Southall Black Sisters](#).

According to UK Civil Society Almanac 2021^[2], of the 10 funded partners, 7 organisations fall under the category of 'medium' organisations with an income band between £100,000 to £1 million,

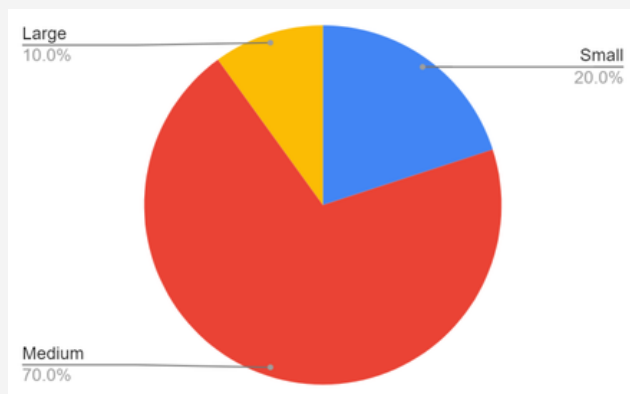


Figure 2. Funded partner profile

Two organisations are under the category of 'small' organisations with an income band ranging between £10,000 to £100,000 and one organisation is under the 'large' organisation category with an income between £1 million to £10 million. The funded partners' staffing levels are on average, 8 paid full-time staff and 11 paid part-time staff.

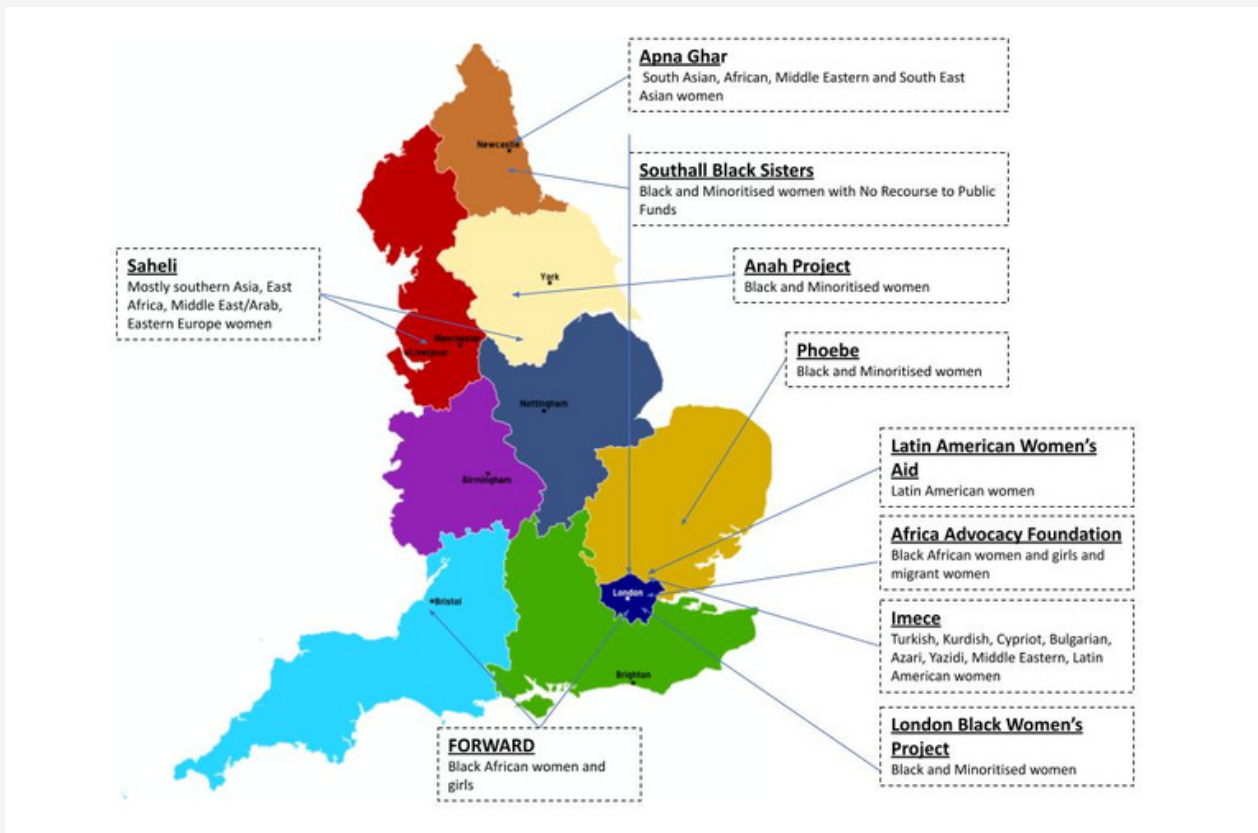


Figure 3. Map of funded partner geographic location

The table below illustrates the types of support provided by the 10 funded partners. They provided a wide variety of services ranging from complex case work and institutional advocacy, move-on accommodation, legal advice, community outreach through dedicated champions, counselling, skills-building and wellbeing workshops. One of the funded partners engaged in wider sector capacity building through the development of a knowledge hub/platform (see section 'Case Studies').

Funding ranged in value from £49,000 to £213,000, with the total value of allocated funding totalling £1,174,976. The funded partners commenced implementation of their respective projects at various times, starting from July 2021. Funded partners also had the opportunity to apply for a top-up fund in 2022, which drew on the £282,000 allocated to the Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme, taken from the £1 million donated to Comic Relief by the Health Foundation. Each funded partner was able to apply for a maximum amount of £28,000, as a top-up, to spend on its existing project. As there was a slight underspend, the remainder was redistributed between the 10 funded partners for expenditure related to the wellbeing and resilience of their staff. Projects had to conclude by September 2022.

Complex case work/institutional advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrap around specialised Independent Sexual Violence Adviser/ Independent Domestic Abuse Adviser /advocacy (e.g. drop in sessions, practical and emotional support) • Transitional move on accommodation • Legal advice/immigration clinics • Level 1 and 2 Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner Advisors • Immigration legal support
Mental health & wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling: one to one, group work, “para counselling”, integrated therapy approaches • Therapeutic arts and/or dance workshops • Confidence building groups/workshops
Skills workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESOL/English classes • Career and/or skills training for women • Volunteering, employment and employability workshops
Grassroots community work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champions Training/Mentoring • Coffee Mornings • Activities (e.g. art sessions, luncheons, fitness classes, yoga, swimming, walking, dance and gardening)
Sector capacity development/education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge hub/platform • Training for external professionals

Table 1. Funded partner support provision

2. Evaluation overview

Comic Relief appointed Imkaan to conduct the independent evaluation of the Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme. Imkaan has over 20 years’ experience of research and evaluation work in the specialist VAWG sector, particularly focused on supporting B&M women and girls subject to VAWG through an intersectional social justice approach. Imkaan has produced key research that has created change in the policy, funding and commissioning landscape. The overarching aim of the evaluation was to highlight funded partners’ achievements, any learning about supporting B&M women and girls, and to offer an assessment of how funder practice could be improved in the future. The evaluation was conducted over the period January 2022 to March 2023.

The aim of the evaluation was to:

- better understand the needs of B&M women and girls experiencing, or at risk of, violence and abuse;
- build evidence around ‘what works’ in this space, what defines specialist B&M women-led *by and for* services and how quality, targeted service delivery can be improved and sustained longer term;
- build a sense of community and collective voice among the organisations and partnerships being funded to influence others and leverage more support into this area of work.

The evaluation was led by Imkaan’s research and evaluation team – Sumanta Roy (Head of Research, Evaluation and Development) and Claire Davis (Research Coordinator) and two external consultants appointed by Imkaan, Professor Ravi Thiara and Fiona Sheil.

3. Evaluation approach

The evaluation was designed to be participatory. In line with this intention, the evaluation team invited funded partners to participate as Experts by Experience to foster collective learning and collaboration, and to co-produce wider lessons and actions for key stakeholders. The overarching research questions were guided by Comic Relief’s specifically released Terms of Reference (ToR) and included:

The context within which funded partners deliver VAWG support:

- Types of VAWG support delivered to B&M women and girls, level/type of need and demand.
- Nature of multi-agency work (police, housing, health, social care).
- Success factors, challenges and gaps for funded partners in relation to service delivery.
- Responses and barriers within a COVID-19 context.
- Barriers to and opportunities for building sector sustainability.

The development and implementation of the Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme:

- The key features of design, decision-making and delivery of the funding programme.
- The experiences of funded partners: application process/fund management and monitoring/fund length.
- The level of accessibility, inclusiveness/participatory approach of the funding programme.
- The wider funding landscape, opportunities and challenges for the *by and for* sector.

Programme achievements:

- How were the interventions designed to effectively reach B&M women and girls and what defines *by and for* specialism?
- What are the achieved outputs and outcomes for B&M women and girls?
- Were there any unintended outcomes?
- What are the key success factors/added value of the funding for *by and for* organisations?
- How *by and for* specialism is defined and challenges and opportunities for measuring impact of the programme.

The wider benefit on funded partners:

- What was the organisational learning/impact through the programme?
- What was the programme's impact on organisational sustainability and what is the impact of not continuing beyond the funded period?
- What are the wider lessons and learning points for the wider funding bodies and policy makers?

As the national umbrella organisation for the B&M women-led *by and for* sector, this evaluation is aligned with Imkaan's ethos and research approach, which is grounded in the lived experiences of B&M women and B&M women-led *by and for* organisations. The evaluation has been conducted using a gendered/intersectional lens. This involves:

- the use of researchers/data analysts who reflect the communities being researched;
- analysis that draws on an intersectional, feminist, and decolonial approach;
- a recognition of the disproportionate impact of violence against women and girls;
- a participatory and strength-based approach which fosters mutual learning and collaboration and benefits those being researched by helping to educate, influence and harness strategic action;
- recognition of the structural conditions and lived experiences of B&M women and the B&M women-led *by and for* organisations who deliver VAWG support;
- research processes which embed a 'do no harm' approach in research design and delivery.

4. Methods and data analysis

The evaluation design centred on learning rather than an accountability exercise. A mixed method approach was adopted which involved the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. This included one-to-one (1-1) and group interviews with all funded partners, Comic Relief staff and one of the appointed *by and for* expert/s, facilitated learning sets, desktop research, and analysis of programme monitoring reports. The majority of activity took place online, due to the ongoing limitations created by COVID-19 at the outset of the evaluation as well as to limit the time commitment required from already stretched funded partners. Data was collected in three separate phases; the key research activities are summarised in the table below.

Phase 1: Introducing the project and setting parameters	Timeline (2022-2023)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation meeting with Comic Relief staff. • Desktop review of programme documents, bid analysis, assessment criteria, analysis of unsuccessful/successful bids. • Introductory meeting with 10 funded partners to discuss the evaluation, gather initial feedback and reflections on the programme and consult on key areas of enquiry and approach. • Themes from desktop research and introductory meeting used to produce research tools (topic guides for 1-1/group interviews) ^[5]. 	<p>February 2022</p> <p>March-April 2022</p> <p>March 2022</p> <p>March-April 2022</p>
Phase 2: Building an understanding of the proposal/application process and the work delivered by funded partners	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-1 interviews with the 10 funded partners (and their onward partners where they were part of a partnership) which included staff responsible for delivery/management/ monitoring of the funded activities (16 Frontline Staff and 16 Chief Executives). • 1-1 interviews with 2 Comic Relief Head of Government' Funded Partnerships and Portfolio Manager. • 1-1 interview with independent <i>by and for</i> experts responsible for the development and implementation of the Comic Relief fund. 	<p>April-June 2022</p>
Phase 3: Identifying learning about 'what works' in the B&M led <i>by and for</i> sector and the barriers and challenges to sustainability	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated Learning and Reflection sessions 1-3 (total 46 individual participants). • Gathered and reviewed monitoring data on outcomes/outputs from partner reports, Imkaan's top-up funding survey and case study development. • Data analysis and report development. 	<p>July, September, December 2022</p> <p>September-November 2022</p> <p>December 2022-mid-February 2023</p>

Table 2. Methods and data analysis process

Primary data

Interviews and group discussions: Group discussions were aimed at gathering in-depth knowledge about: the opportunities created by the programme for each funded partner; nature of the interventions being funded and value added to support already being provided; uniqueness of *by and for* provision; challenges in implementation and learning; views about outcomes achieved and key successes/limitations; any unintended consequences; relationship with funder and learning; and sustainability considerations. Interviews with Comic Relief staff and *by and for* experts were aimed at exploring the aim of the fund, the design and structure of the programme, what was achieved; challenges and considerations during implementation and lessons for future development.

All interviews and group discussions were conducted and recorded on Zoom and were later transcribed.

Learning and reflection sessions: The learning and reflection sessions were designed to create spaces for collective and in-depth exploration about specific themes that were identified through the desktop research and group discussions and interviews with funded partners and Comic Relief staff during Phase 1.

These spaces were participative and aimed to share knowledge, expertise and learning about the projects being delivered within the programme as well as wider discussion on sector need, impact and sustainability. The final learning session was delivered in-person in the final phase of the project (December 2022) and was part of Comic Relief's contractual agreement with DCMS to hold an in-person event with the funded cohort, as detailed in the delivery plan. This created a space for the evaluators to share key findings with funded partners and to co-produce recommendations and actions for funders, and policymakers. This event provided an opportunity for the funders (DCMS and Comic Relief) to hear and learn directly from funded partners about their experiences of the Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme and sector issues more generally.

A thematic analysis, through NVIVO, of each group and individual interview and learning and reflection sessions, was conducted and enabled identification of key themes and sub-themes across the entire data set. GDPR guidelines were followed to ensure confidentiality of all participants. The anonymity of all participants was ensured particularly where sensitive information about survivors was provided. The recordings were stored in a password protected and secure folder which will be destroyed once the report is published.

The commitment from all the funded partners to engage and share rich insights, despite the demands and delivery responsibility, was incredibly valuable. The established relationship between funded partners and Imkaan helped to rapidly build trust and engagement, creating safe spaces for mutual learning and critical thinking during the evaluation. Many funded partners commented positively about the suitability of Imkaan's appointment as the evaluator given the understanding, knowledge and credibility Imkaan brought to this learning piece.

Secondary data: A desktop review of the bid process included an assessment of how the fund was described in its marketing to potential applicants, the process of applying for funding and how bids were assessed, and the role of external *by and for* experts. A review was carried out of all monitoring and evaluation data submitted by funded partners - the original bids, 6 monthly reports, annual reports, and project case studies - to extract outcomes and outputs data. Evaluators were given access to Comic Relief's funded partners' survey (an anonymous survey provided at the bottom of every Comic Relief staff's email signature and which can be completed by funded partners at any time during the funding period). Funded partners were also asked to complete an online survey on how they used the top-up funding donated by the Health Foundation.

The significance of the Supporting and Sustaining Specialism Programme

The Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme represented the first time that Comic Relief has ringfenced a programme specifically dedicated to supporting B&M women and girls through the B&M women-led *by and for* sector.

1. The value of specialist B&M women-led *by and for* services

There is significant evidence about the value of *by and for* organisations to B&M women subjected to violence and abuse and the benefits of dedicated support for their protection, healing and recovery from violence. Multiple sources emphasise the role of the B&M women-led *by and for* sector in:

- reducing levels of domestic homicide and murder of B&M women, which remains disproportionately high, and levels of repeat and secondary victimisation;
- relieving pressure on statutory services and ending the revolving door of crisis interventions;
- reducing the cost to public services through the provision of appropriate community-based interventions;
- increasing B&M women's employment which, in turn, leads to safer communities, creates vibrant local economies and boosts technological innovations.

'For every £1 in grant income received by a specialist organisation, they invest £4 in their local economy' (Imkaan, 2021) ^[4].

Generic and statutory-led models of support provision are found to be less effective for B&M women and girls subjected to complex and intersecting forms of harm and trauma. They value 'seeing themselves' in provision developed and led *by and for* B&M women and girls. This increases access and makes a positive difference to their engagement and sense of belonging, in feeling supported and safe and being validated (beyond the safe physical space) ^[5].

B&M women are more likely to disclose and feel safe with organisations where they feel understood and heard without discrimination and judgement. They are more likely to benefit from organisations that have a specific knowledge, understanding and support response to their lived experiences of VAWG spanning interpersonal, familial, community, socio-structural contexts (VAWG and wider structural harms, such as police racism, hate crime, victim-blaming cultures, inaccessible rights and provision, and health, housing and economic inequalities ^[6]).

The value to women and girls of *by and for* organisations is reinforced by a recent mapping study undertaken by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office (DAC) which found that:

'Of Black and minoritised survivors, 78% of those who had accessed a 'by and for' service felt safer, compared to 48% who had accessed another kind of service, and 30% who had accessed no support whatsoever. This represents a 48-percentage point difference between accessing specialist 'by and for' support and no support' (DAC, 2022) ^[7].

Despite the demonstrable value of *by and for* provision, the DAC research also highlights significant gaps in provision with only half (51%) of B&M women who wanted access to specialist support being able to access it^[8].

2. Dedicated and sustainable anti-racist funding approach

The programme was developed by Comic Relief in recognition of the disproportionate funding and sustainability challenges faced by the B&M women-led *by and for* sector and the learning generated through Comic Relief's substantial experience of delivering programmes funded under Tampon Tax.

The need for a ringfenced and sustainable funding solution is not a new issue for the *by and for* sector, which continues to raise concerns about unequal funding structures and practices with government decision makers. Many factors, historic and current, have contributed to the challenges faced by the sector including cumulative funding cuts in the era of austerity, years of disinvestment, removal of grant-based funding and use of competitive and commercial procurement practices to fund VAWG provision. Furthermore, many of these structural inequalities re-surfaced and deepened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research by Imkaan found that, at the onset of the pandemic, B&M women-led *by and for* organisations in the UK provided VAWG related support to 129,765 women and children a year (2020) whilst operating with a funding shortfall of 39%^[9].

More recently, organisations have expressed concerns about the dilution of the specialist role of the B&M women-led *by and for* sector through the broad interpretation of central government guidance - National Statement of Expectations (NSE)^[10]- which highlights the important role of *by and for* organisations but which large mainstream organisations use to self-identify as *by and for* organisations even if they only recruit a single B&M worker or deliver a one-off short term service for B&M women.

These issues and concerns underline the calls for change in funding systems from the Anti-Racist Working Group (ARWG)^[11], a coalition of ending-VAWG organisations, which seeks to address racism within the VAWG sector. Within the charter, there are strong calls for funders and the government to value the role, contribution and expertise of B&M women-led *by and for* organisations through a commitment to ending funding and commissioning processes that perpetuate inequality and damage the sector.

Evaluation Findings

This section presents the evaluation findings about what the Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme achieved and explores the positive lessons, outputs, outcomes as well as the challenges, of this type of funding for B&M women-led *by and for* organisations.

1. Selection of partners

B&M women and girls received support from organisations across England, as shown in the map (see Figure 3), each of which have individual and collective strengths and expertise in responding to B&M women subjected to VAWG, and provide a holistic range of interventions reaching diverse communities. Some funded partners are based in parts of the country where there are few specialist B&M women-led *by and for* organisations.

The funded partners are all established B&M women-led *by and for* organisations with an impressive, combined track record of over 500+ years of knowledge, expertise and experience of delivering specialist and holistic support to B&M women and children. They have also played an instrumental and nationally recognised role in rights-based social justice advocacy, which has led to improvements in national and local policy and practice on VAWG, human rights and equality.

There was a focus on community reach and impact. Successful applicants reflected a geographical spread with a good balance of in and out of London groups (about 50% were London based)^[13]. There was also a deliberate strategy to include organisations which cover large regions of the country as the sole B&M women-led *by and for* providers in the area and who provide support to under-represented B&M communities. Partnerships made up around 50% of the portfolio which enabled smaller organisations, who would normally find it difficult to meet funding eligibility criteria because of their size and scale, to benefit from the programme funding.

Given the short 15 month duration of the fund, more established partners were more likely to bid. However, there were some established organisations who were not successful. In future, funds seeing smaller (not 'less experienced' necessarily) organisations be funded would be important to the overall health of the *by and for* sector but that wasn't ultimately the key aim of this grant.

2. Added value of the programme

The programme was used to sustain and expand the work already being delivered by funded partners. For instance, this included being able to meet the increasing demand for holistic support, prevent the closure of both a female genital mutilation centre and an outreach service which had become challenging to sustain without additional resources.

The programme also helped partners to extend the support already offered, such as to migrant women who remain unprotected because of a lack of equal rights. For instance, one funded partner was able to develop an in-house VAWG sensitive immigration legal advice service which could also offer the technical expertise required to support women with more complex immigration challenges post-Brexit. Another funded partner used its experience of developing community champions provision as a blueprint for developing a bespoke service for migrant women, which has helped to identify and engage vulnerable women normally excluded from any form of support.

'The funding helped us to hire expertise but also expand on the remit of the work that we are doing and ensure that we're providing holistic services to the people that we are working with, not leaving people hanging [...] It became so difficult to refer people to services because some of the services were non-existent. And also, the services that we provide, such as FGM Resources Specialist Service, became so difficult for us to continue without any resources, so the funding was an opportunity for us to sustain that work, but also to expand on it' (Funded partner).

'The Comic Relief project is helping us to develop a new service within our violence against women and girls advice centre. We are trying to create a small legal team that includes specific support in immigration. We have always had additional challenges and barriers to access services because of migrant status. 99 percent of the time we need to go to external solicitors firms [...] But we wanted to really develop that knowledge within our community. We wanted to have a Latin American woman specialised in immigration law' (Funded partner).

'We did not specifically have champions for the undocumented women or women on spousal visas. So this program helped us to have those champions. And so those champions are the ones that are also leading support groups and recruit other women to join our support groups. And then from there, we can identify all the women in need. It's an approach that is quite effective if you're doing grassroots community work' (Funded partner).

Another funded partner found that it was essential during the project to recruit specialist staff because of the complex needs of their service users. This funded partner emphasised the importance of recruiting skilled trauma-informed therapists to help women with their recovery and healing from sexual violence and abuse. This organisation welcomed the opportunity to adapt their application to Comic Relief to be able to carry out the necessary recruitment:

'When we were starting the work, we did not understand the depth of the pain that we were going to find with the women [...] We did not expect the repercussions or the experience of people who have gone through sexual violence. We thought it was going to be the normal way of discussing and then it ended there, but we did not really anticipate how serious an impact such an act could have on the victim. And so through this, we had to apply again to Comic Relief and say we need somebody that can help provide trauma-informed therapy to the women who have suffered sexual violence' (Funded partner).

3. What works in a B&M women-led *by and for* space for B&M women and girls subjected to VAWG

The programme shows the value of funding which is not restricted to mainstream models and ways of working. Instead, organisations were able to focus on delivering services that reflect their expertise, fill gaps in mainstream VAWG responses, and make a positive and meaningful difference to B&M women's lives. This was evident from the way in which funded partners used the funds to maximise their achievements within a short-term funding programme. The funding was used to deliver support in ways that have been developed and tested by the B&M women-led *by and for* sector but are not sufficiently recognised by mainstream policy makers and funders. Below are some examples of the ways in which funded partners spent the project funds (see section 'Case Studies'):

Examples of innovative ways funded partners spent their funds

- **A pan-London *by and for* advocacy worker** which operates differently to a generic Independent Domestic Violence Advocate or Independent Sexual Violence Advocate service and has been reframed to address women's intersectional contexts. The advocate was not restricted to work on standard-medium risk but could work fluidly across all levels of risk and respond to complex casework needs. This positively reduces the number of agencies that women need to engage with and the potential for poor responses from mainstream agencies. It also helps the organisation to more effectively identify and respond to any safety issues that increase women's vulnerability. The role was not confined by borough boundaries or duration of support which can create a fragmented and disempowering experience of support for survivors. The advocacy worker could work across multiple boroughs and therefore widen their reach, particularly in areas where there are smaller B&M populations and which lack B&M women-led *by and for* provision.
- **An in-house VAWG sensitive immigration advice service** was established using legal advocates who reflect the communities they serve, who are gender sensitive and trained in VAWG. Having skilled in-house advisors that reflect the backgrounds of women and who have a deep understanding of VAWG and women's intersectional contexts creates higher levels of trust and provides a much more empowering experience for women. It reduces the time taken by B&M women-led *by and for* organisations to identify and rely on external legal support. It also decreases the length of time women spend when engaging with different agencies for support. This decreases the possibility of support refusals, judgement, racism and discrimination which is a common experience for migrant women. The knowledge and experience developed through the frontline provision also helps to inform the organisation's wider rights-based social justice work to support migrant women to access equal protection and rights.
- **Trained community champions** women who have previously accessed the service, engage with women to raise awareness of VAWG and provide information about available support through trusted local grassroots community networks. Community champions play an important support and wellbeing role, pre- and post- disclosure, by creating safe and discrete spaces for women to begin to identify and talk about their experiences, and to inform women of their rights, opportunities and options for accessing specialist support. They offer relatability and play an important befriending role, which reduces women's social isolation and improves their mental health/wellbeing. Where resources are available, champions can also provide an important entry into employment, thus adding important socio-economic value and improving access to equal opportunities. Importantly, champions provide a consistent and trusted contact which helps reduce violence by maintaining women's engagement with support. They play an important role in the women's healing process.
- **An intersectional model of therapeutic counselling** placing B&M women at the centre of the therapeutic process. The model recognises the gap in mainstream therapeutic approaches by addressing trauma from a 'whole-person' perspective. The therapeutic approach recognises the impacts of domestic, sexual and other forms of VAWG and the interconnected impacts of structural violence i.e. systemic racism and discrimination, homophobia, ableism, classism, socio-economic disparities, and inter-generational trauma. Women benefit from accessing counsellors from their own communities and therefore preventing the additional stress and disconnect that can exist by having an interpreter in a therapeutic space. The funding also helped manage the increased demand for mental health support that arose during the pandemic.

4. Funding impact

Numbers of women and outcomes achieved from receiving support

The programme has provided **over 3,500 B&M women and girls across England** with critical, life-saving support through complex case work, involving institutional advocacy, in-house legal advice, housing support, and mental health and wellbeing sessions. This has also included group work and one-to-one sessions with specialist counsellors, skills workshops to access further education or employment and grassroots community outreach. In addition, over 1,500 frontline workers received training and support from funded partners on how to respond to VAWG. This training bodes well for the sustainability of the programme, in that the knowledge acquired from the programme encourages the continuation of high quality service provision after the programme ends.

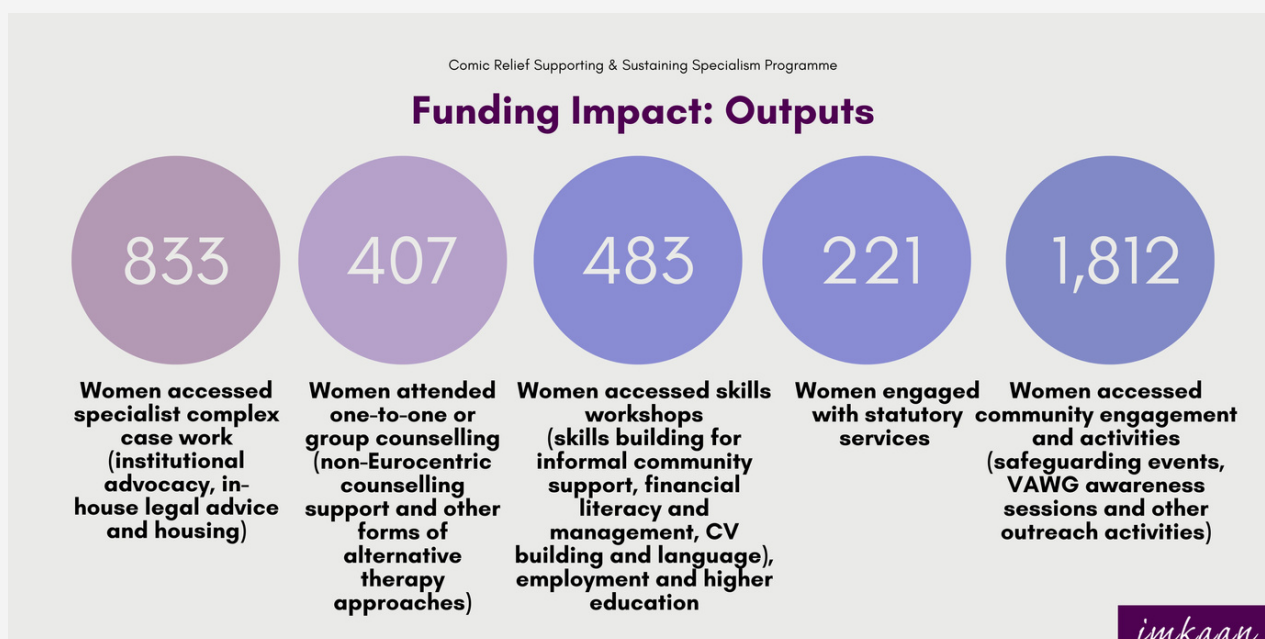


Figure 4. Funding impact: outputs

It is clear from the interviews and discussions with funded partners and the monitoring and evaluation data submitted by funded partners that the wide ranging and specialist support provided has had significant transformative impacts on B&M women's lives, including a significant reduction in risk and vulnerability, greater awareness among survivors about their rights and available services, improved physical and/or mental health and wellbeing, reduction in levels of isolation, and increased confidence/resilience.

Collecting numbers of women and outcomes from receiving support



Figure 5. Funding impact: outcomes

In addition to these direct positive outcomes for women, support has had a wider community impact by raising community awareness about VAWG. Women's families and networks have become more aware of VAWG support, and external professionals have improved knowledge about B&M women's needs and effective responses. However, the wider social and community benefits of funding B&M women-led *by and for* organisations is an area of impact measurement that requires further funding and development.

5. Positive lessons from the funding process

Embedding independent expertise on VAWG and the by and for sector created a more effective programme

Building in B&M women-led *by and for* sector knowledge and VAWG expertise from the outset was essential to the success of the development, implementation and assessment of the Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme. Comic Relief appointed two external *by and for* experts to sit on the Fund Reference Group and they also took part in the assessment of the bid process. The experts played an important role in shaping the funding approach and in defining the criteria for the assessment of bids. Specifically, the experts helped to shift the power dynamic to a more community-led and driven approach and they brought an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the *by and for* sector which helped make the bid process more rigorous. As one of the external experts remarked, discussions about power were front and centre within the Reference Group and 'not many mainstream funders do that'. However, it was also observed that these conversations about power were not necessarily reflected at board level and that funders like Comic Relief should ensure that the learning from this programme is used to create internal transformation beyond the limits of specific programmes.

'Funders should be accountable to communities rather than their funders. Sometimes they can fall in line with the government. They need to think about their responsibility to communities in a meaningful way' (Funded partner).

The *by and for* experts also brought their strategic and operational knowledge of the B&M women-led *by and for* sector, which helped to ensure that the programme was designed more effectively and that it was as inclusive as possible. The assessment criteria was designed to consider an organisation's wider characteristics and not just the quality of their bid. For example, the unique strengths of partners in relation to their VAWG expertise, their geographical location and their reach across diverse 'under-represented' communities were all factors that were taken into consideration.

In addition to the experts, the recruitment of a programme Manager (PM) with extensive experience and understanding of both VAWG and the *by and for* sector was a deliberate and effective strategy for the successful implementation of this programme. Funded partners spoke extremely positively about this, considering it to be of great value and the staff member to be an asset for Comic Relief. They also noted that having specialist PMs is not necessarily the norm in the sector. The PM's personal approach was thought to be a key determinant of the programme's success by funded partners and external experts. Without the PM, a colleague noted, 'the portfolio would have been much weaker [...] it could have gone horribly wrong'. Words like 'supportive' and 'responsive' frequently came up in interviews with funded partners, with many saying they felt like 'she understood' and they 'didn't need to explain'. The PM attributed the 'boldness' with which she shaped the programme to her formative experience of having previously worked within the *by and for* sector. She could draw on her own experience to forge positive working relationships with the funded partners in ways that place them at the centre of the programme. More strategically, this shows the importance of investing in a sustainable *by and for* workforce whose skills and attitudes have value for the wider social economy, including funders.

'[The PM] has been brilliant [... It's a] 'breath of fresh air' to work with someone who totally understands violence against women, the services and the *by and for* element. It makes all the difference to work with a funder who understands this' (Funded partner).

Funded partners benefited from a relational funder approach

A key aspiration for Comic Relief was to create a funding programme that is designed to recognise the specialist role of the B&M women-led *by and for* sector. A more relational approach to the fund design and implementation was possible to achieve because of the technical expertise and experience of the PM, as highlighted, but also other key factors. For instance, the PM could spend 90% of her time on this Programme, in contrast to other programmes where the PM may be managing 40+ partnerships. '*Knowing your fundees well*' was described as a key attribute to effective fund management which Comic Relief and others in the funding space should seek to improve on. Since funded partners felt that Comic Relief was committed and sensitive to understanding the external context within which they operate, something demonstrated in practice by the PM, they experienced the funding partnership as much more relational than their partnerships with other funders, which they perceive to be far more transactional.

Funded partners accessed additional support from Comic Relief throughout the programme period. This included a webinar on the monitoring and evaluation process, alongside information about training opportunities and resources about wider funding opportunities beyond Comic Relief, particularly as the Programme was coming to an end. This support was welcomed by funded partners.

'The funding manager is still in touch with us. So lots of linkages with other grantees and also opportunities for attending training meetings that she identifies [... She is] very, sort of, open and supportive' (Funded partner).

However, Comic Relief staff noted that this relational approach can often be severely undermined by the organisation's internal resourcing constraints and the short and pressurised time frames imposed by the short-term nature of co-funded programmes such as the Tampon Tax Fund. The need for funders like Comic Relief to harness its position to strategically advocate with government and other funders for longer term funding models for the *by and for sector* was repeatedly emphasised.

Partnership working is more effective when there is a shared by and for ethos

Partnerships can strengthen the quality of a programme and the partnering organisations themselves, especially when there is a shared ethos, respect and mutual understanding of each other's work. This was evident within this programme. Working together gave organisations located in more isolated areas a stronger voice and increased organisational confidence through collaboration. It led to teamwork, peer support, and the sharing of information, resources and project delivery strategies between organisations. Staff spoke about being able to formalise collaborative working relationships beyond this programme.

'We would definitely want to continue the partnership in the North because it's giving us a voice, it's giving us some unity and we are really collaborating in a very different kind of way' (Funded partner).

Top-up funding supported funded partners to strengthen and expand support and invest in staff development/wellbeing ^[15]

The added value of the top-up funding was to increase the funded partners' capacity to take on more complex casework and to increase their outreach and counselling provision. The funding was also used to provide women with cost-of-living support through food and emergency provisions. Some groups used the additional funding to strengthen their organisational capacity through the recruitment of additional staff, investment in clinical supervision, and training and wellbeing support for staff. Many also noted that the funding was helpful in covering areas of their work that 'funders do not fund' and which are challenging to access resources for, such as clinical supervision for staff, volunteer expenses, immigration advice fees, staff wellbeing, and staff training and development.

Overall, partners welcomed the top-up funding from the Health Foundation, and they were able to absorb it effectively to make the appropriate operational and administrative adjustments. However, they stressed that staff would have benefited from more time for planning and implementation of the top-up funding.

Examples of ways in which the funded partners used the top-up funding:

- Immigration advice fees
- Translation fees
- Emergency food for women and girls, fuel, and supermarket top-ups
- Training for women and girls
- Volunteer allowances
- Disclosure and Barring Service costs
- Respite break for staff with children
- Advocacy and counselling
- New positions (e.g. volunteer coordinator, VAWG women's worker)
- E-library
- Clinical supervision
- Management and MEL costs
- Bespoke training sessions /pilot sessions

Overall, the high level of detail, rigour and intentionality built into the development and implementation of the Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme gave the programme credibility and integrity, and reinforced the importance of an intersectional and social justice lens. Without this intentionality, it was emphasised that there was a high risk of performative rather than transformative intersectionality and that ‘the money wouldn't have gone to the *by and for* sector’.

6. Challenges of the funding process

Funded partners welcomed the *by and for* focus of the programme, however some areas for learning and improvement also emerged from the research, and these are highlighted in this section.

More transparency was required during the assessment process

The bidding process included a review and shortlisting of the application, thereafter those that progressed were assessed in detail via deep-dive interviews, financial and governance reviews and an in-depth application assessment. The latter had greater weight for assessors, but this was not communicated in the marketing to funded partners. Based on their past experience, many partners assumed that the weighting of decisions rested more on their written application and they concentrated more on this element. A funded partner estimated that their organisation spent 80 hours on average on the application form. The time taken to write the funding application had negative implications for many of the partners, both in terms of consuming a lot of organisational capacity and creating anxiety for those lacking confidence in bid-writing.

Some factors increased the likelihood of being awarded funding. For example, partnership bids involving smaller organisations that are usually disadvantaged during bidding processes had a greater chance of success. It would have been helpful for organisations to be provided with this information in the guidance notes, as it could have shaped decisions on forming partnerships or bidding as single organisations. More generally, funders should be as transparent as possible in their decision-making factors at the application stage, to enable potential partners to weigh up the cost/benefit for their organisation about whether to apply.

Whilst the programme fund was described as supporting sustainability in its marketing, this was not reflected in the description within the guidance notes, in the decision that the fund would run for only 15 months. On average, funded partners allocated 6.2% of their budgets to sustainability.

The process of applying for funding was disproportionate to the length of the programme and the capacity of the sector

The length of the guidance notes and the length of the application form for applying to the Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme were disproportionately extensive (disproportionate to factors including risk posed by grant delivery, financial value of grant, duration, and sector capacity).

The guidance notes ran to 30 pages, and the estimated word count for the narrative questions on the application form was 6,838 ^[14].

The Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme's bid process required narrative answers over double the length of those required from four of the five other funders which commonly support *by and for* work.

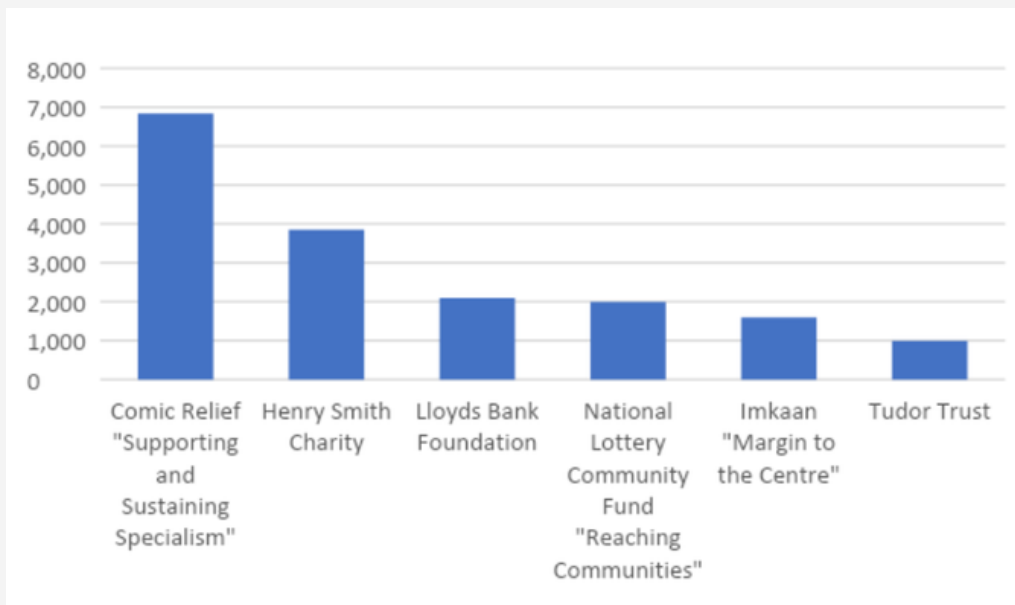


Figure 6. Total word count required for all narrative bid answers

This was compounded by the extensive guidance notes and lack of explanation about the assessment weightings, which placed extra pressure on the funded partners. It also reduced the amount of time that could have been spent developing the partnerships to which assessors gave preference. The table above provides a comparative analysis of word count used by other key VAWG funders.

There was a 3.5 week turnaround period from the time the bidding process was open for submissions until the deadline. The short timeframe of the fund meant that funded partners had to submit bids over a short period of time.

Proportionality is also critical given the limited bid development capacity and infrastructure within some B&M women-led *by and for* organisations resulting from historic disinvestment, low wages, and sector insecurity. Reasonable adjustments could have been made to the bidding process to make it proportionate and accessible.

Some staff reported that they found the IT system difficult to use when submitting their bids and when submitting project reports because of a lack of prior experience with the system. This highlights the importance of giving greater consideration to staff training needs, time and capacity when they are expected to use new and complex IT systems/portals for submitting bids and performance monitoring.

'There should be reasonable adjustments in terms of [the] funding process according to different groups, capacity and size. Commissioner attitudes feel 'exclusive and excluding', there's no encouragement for BME organisations to be who they are, to have their own identity (small organisations are unique and valued), it feels like a 'tick box exercise', there's an automatic exclusion around the systems used. There's a lot of assumptions around skills and capacity to be on the same level but we're not (Funded partner).

Partnership working needs time to develop where pre-existing working relationships do not already exist

Established partnerships were more agile compared to those who developed partnerships from scratch for the purpose of the programme. Initiating partnerships was harder if agencies had not worked together before. Before delivery of services, new partnerships required more time for developing a theory of change, defining shared expectations, and setting up logistics and administration. The wider sector challenges in recruiting staff meant that for some this process took longer than anticipated and added more pressure. Funded partners repeatedly emphasised the importance of a mobilisation period to recruit, establish partnership working and logistics before they are expected to deliver services.

Partnering under this programme contrasted with their general experiences of partnerships which often felt forced, unequal and exploitative to *by and for* organisations, particularly where they are required, as part of grant conditions, to partner with a larger generic organisation which lacks the expertise and track record of delivering specialist support.

'[It felt] so different working with generic organisations in comparison to working with *by and for* led organisations. It's an amazing experience, you know, there is not much competition. We collaborate, we share resources, we work how the sector should really be working. And it's fantastic' (Funded partner).

'Organisations who are sort of mainstream and already known and obviously not Black and minoritised, they say 'we're really keen to work with Black and minoritised people, we've recognised their needs' [but then] they get the recognition, and all of our work is not being recognised and funded. That to us is a continued threat' (Funded partner).

Models of funding perpetuate and maintain inequality

Very few funders commit to long term funding. Short-term, fragmented and tokenistic funding approaches keep the B&M women-led *by and for* sector in 'survival mode' and maintain sector instability. Whilst this programme was viewed positively by the funded partners, a 15-month funding programme defined as 'supporting sustainability' was considered to be contradictory to what could realistically be achieved in that time period.

Short term funds require organisations to invest a disproportionate amount of time and expertise in management and implementation activities, including building strategic alliances and service promotion, compared to the length of the fund. Under this programme, organisations also had the ongoing burden of identifying funding opportunities that could replace Comic Relief funding within a short period of time to sustain services in the longer term.

'It was such a short-term project, there was a lot of time dedicated to mobilisation, [and] getting boroughs to know that the service existed' (Funded partner).

Short termism forces organisations to operate in crisis mode by having to continuously identify and bid for small pots of money which require constant adaptation in a constantly changing landscape of funding focus and criteria. Within an insecure external environment, B&M women-led *by and for* providers demonstrate high levels of agility and skill in delivering and maintaining high quality lifesaving provision for B&M women and girls. However, this places a considerable burden on organisations and leaves them with significantly less time to focus on longer term strategies. In addition, smaller organisations working in this sector are less likely to attract public donations compared to larger generic organisations, which further leaves them in a far more precarious position.

'We've always been in survival mode since 2012, when the austerity measures kicked in and our local authorities stopped funding us [...] The current situation is] literally getting us from one year to the next year to the next year' (Funded partner).

'So if you are a big organisation [...] they will generate quite a bit of money, they will have regular donations, they will have one-off donations which generate unrestricted funds to do the background work. With the other smaller BME women's organisations you are lucky if you get two or three hundred a month through your public donations and with that you are already disadvantaged. If the funds you have are restricted you will not be able to source any other funding [...] it's like public recognition as well' (Funded partner).

In addition to short termism, funded partners spoke of exclusionary VAWG funding criteria, models that drive an unhealthy competitive culture and favour large generic organisations, and the lack of full cost recovery. Many emphasised the benefits of grant funding compared to the competitive tendering of VAWG provision. Public procurement structures continue to exclude smaller charities and benefit larger, generic organisations because of large contract sizes; their enhanced capacity to bid frequently for contracts and the focus on cost efficiencies rather than quality continues to be incredibly damaging to the B&M women-led *by and for* VAWG sector.

Funded partners shared concerns about staff recruitment and retention stating that the skills drain and loss in the sector was frequently driven by funding instability. Organisations are not able to offer staff competitive salaries or support staff retention through training and development. Equally, even where there has been investment in staff development, these efforts are compromised by the job insecurity created by short-term funding. Some funded partners are attempting to address staffing gaps through paid internships and volunteering opportunities; however, this does not replace the need for a stable, skilled workforce.

'If [staff member] leaves [...] we would have to start from scratch again, we need to have a staff member that has the certification. So what we are trying to do is to secure more funding in the longer term and to be able to pay a competitive salary to the immigration adviser' (Funded partner).

'The lack of long-term funding is really damaging for the workers, for the staff, and it creates insecurities that are not healthy' (Funded partner).

'We would like to be able to provide more training, paid training, to offer a career progression [... But] we really don't have the means to do that. So we lose. Quite often we lose the experience' (Funded partner).

There is a narrow framing on the part of funders about what working with B&M women should entail/ encompass

The Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme demonstrates the positive possibilities and benefits that are created through a dedicated funding programme designed to support B&M women-led *by and for* organisations.

However, funded partners stated they were still spending significant time and energy in making the case for their services to funders, with valuable time lost which could be spent on operational and strategic work. Organisations operate under considerable pressure to sustain services, having to approach several different funders, all of whom have different funding criteria and expectations, making it difficult for B&M women-led *by and for* organisations to maintain holistic provision. Funding is often too narrowly framed and fails to address the full range of holistic and complex support B&M women and girls require at each point of the support journey.

The B&M women-led *by and for* sector supports women's pathways to healing from VAWG through a wide range of provision from housing support, intersectional advocacy, welfare, social and rights based advice to therapeutic work, building independence, and social justice work.

The complexity of support exists because of the intersecting impacts of VAWG and structural discrimination and racism towards B&M women. Funding structures are too rigid to recognise the non-linear, complex and fluctuating nature of intersectional trauma work. Support needs to operate fluidly so that it is available at the point of need, but funding structures work in opposition to this. Support needs are also shaped by shifts in the external legal and policy environment. Funded partners provided many examples of this, including the impact of Brexit, immigration laws and human rights legislation, all of which have a direct impact on their casework and advocacy with women. Media exposure of certain types of VAWG cases or institutional failures can also lead to more immediate shifts in national priorities and funding practice. However, policy responses following high profile institutional failure do not necessarily benefit organisations carrying out intersectional work in the longer-term.

Funded partners shared numerous examples of the negative impacts of short-term non-holistic funding on meeting women's needs, mainly because it limits their ability to provide support:

- They are often unable to provide the necessary level of ongoing outreach and advocacy, and the increased complex emotional/practical support for women in the community when they move on from crisis accommodation.
- Organisations are often only funded to deliver short-term counselling interventions over a period of 12 weeks, which does not allow them to provide the depth of counselling needed to unpick the layers of VAWG-related trauma. They also struggle to meet the level of demand for counselling and wellbeing support (e.g. one funded partner noted an increased number of women on its waiting list extended the waiting period to between 2-4 months).
- Because of limited funds, an organisation had to remove the language-specific counselling provision which was integral to the advocacy role, reducing their ability to offer holistic support.
- The limited capacity of immigration advisors to address rising demand coupled with the level of coercive control from the perpetrator hindering a woman's ability to work or study can mean that a woman's immigration status becomes more compromised, complex and serious.

Funded partners strongly emphasised the importance of funders showing more commitment to understanding why these spaces are important to B&M women and in taking actions that protect important life-saving provisions.

'Some of the funders don't understand the *by and for* sector, they don't know the importance of it. They don't get the racism a woman faces in her journey to access safety and then end up funding work that is being done with Black and minoritised women by generic organisations and then come back and say to a Black and minoritised organisation that they funded that organisation to do this work but they really just don't get it' (Funded partner).

'The holistic provision, the wraparound support, the long-term support, the community-based approaches and also the ethos of the sector is different from other generic organisations. It comes from a different history of feminism and anti-racism and most of them are secular. Most of them use human rights frameworks and have a track record. It's the women's organisations within those communities which are based on these feminist principles and will likely offer alternatives to women who feel that they've got someone to go to in the community without having to leave the community entirely, which then helps them to reinterpret what is religion, what is culture?' (Funded partner).

'We are not only challenging the police, the social workers, we have to challenge everybody. We know the Domestic Abuse Bill hasn't acknowledged or is not accepting yet the Istanbul Convention, without migrant women being included in it. So the whole burden of all that falls on *by and for* led organisations, we are expected to cater to the woman's needs' (Funded partner) ^[15].

The continued emphasis on funding immediate short-term 'high risk' crisis intervention and advocacy for women – at the point they leave, when they are deemed to be 'in crisis', through their engagement with the police or courts – was identified as a key barrier to providing effective and sustainable provision. The focus on specific time periods of a woman's journey prevents organisations from providing the full range of holistic support women and their families need to safely rebuild and recover from the trauma of violence. Access to peer, group-based support, therapeutic interventions, support with move-on and re-housing, advocacy to address ongoing issues related to moving from a refuge, child contact and legal issues are all vital to women's safety and critical to reducing social isolation and improving their mental health/wellbeing.

The national roll out of generic and short-term VAWG advocacy models, such as Independent Domestic Abuse Advocates and Independent Sexual Violence Advocates, provide important support mechanisms. However, for B&M women-led *by and for* organisations, they have contributed to sector harm by eroding and rendering invisible the established and evidenced ways of effective working that have historically evolved to support B&M women and girls. For instance, as highlighted earlier, community-led champion models are part of the fabric of *by and for* work and central to building trust, raising awareness and supporting women to engage with wider support, such as health, social care services, and the police. Yet, despite their effectiveness, they are not recognised as an essential part of the VAWG support landscape and remain under-funded.

'Most of the funds are, not speaking particularly about Comic Relief, if you read the criteria, it is more about the moment they need to leave. And what about afterwards? What about counselling? What about rebuilding their lives, what about support for children? They don't focus on that. And I think that is a big gap' (Funded partner).

'Usually, the funders will fund the crisis intervention, the high-risk cases, even like the recent funding with [the Ministry of Justice]. I mean, all the funding that they've been giving in the past for IDVAs, and things have been like for high risk and criminal justice interventions. But what about all the welfare interventions? You also need to enable women to escape effectively and to recover. The recovery side is usually not understood or it's like, get them out and get them to a safe place and report to the police, usually that's what's expected' (Funded partner).

'Contracts don't take account of the community elements. What they fail to take into account is people's lives and isolation that most women are going to face. There's been so many cuts [... but] you are not going to say to a woman, 'Oh, you can't come through the door today because your 26 weeks are actually expired now'. That sort of lack of holistic view, even to have those networks as something to give a sense of wellbeing that aren't included in the funding' (Funded partner).

Measuring impact

An associated challenge for the funded partners is the lack of measurement tools that truly reflect the work of the B&M women-led *by and for* sector, with funded partners emphasising their 'Eurocentric' nature. The sector's limited capacity to conduct research and impact assessments that meaningfully generate organisational learning and practice to inform wider policy, curtails the sector's ability to showcase the full extent of their work.

The lack of resources to develop and update databases and recruit dedicated monitoring and evaluation staff was also identified as a key barrier. The need for funders to look at ways to help organisations in the sector harness learning and knowledge was emphasised; without this, important expertise and understanding is being eroded.

'You need to have someone doing that job, I think it is such a huge amount of work that when it falls into the hands of someone else, it can be very overwhelming' (Funded partner).

'The measures seem to be very Eurocentric, and we really have been talking about how we develop measures that are very much linked to the needs of our community women because of the scales that they use. Some of them really don't have much meaning in terms of our context. And we've been really talking about how we develop different models for measuring change for women who come in for counselling services?' (Funded partner).

Existing monitoring and evaluation systems also have a limited ability to capture the wider social, economic and community benefits of the work.

'When we headcount, then that's it, but why don't we consider then that it's like a ripple effect? There's children there. There's the whole community there whose awareness of VAWG services is being raised. So we just kept counting. But we are not taking into account the wider impact that's having, not only amongst the community that we work with, but with the children, with the sisters, with the mothers, everybody who's not coming, who's not attending the art group or the VAWG awareness sessions' (Funded partner).

Nature of funding, ethics and accountability

During this evaluation, the ethics of funding and accountability to B&M women and B&M women-led *by and for* organisations continually re-surfaced as a focus of concern and an issue that the funding community should seek to address.

Not knowing how long services will remain available to B&M women and girls and the abrupt end to women's support, as well as having to redefine services based on continually shifting funding priorities, damages the trusting relationships that organisations have worked hard to build with women. It also causes reputational harm to organisations trying their best to deliver effective support within the many external constraints they face.

In many ways, this dynamic creates a form of racialised organisational harm and impacts on staff wellbeing which is not dissimilar, to some extent, to the power and control dynamics women are subjected to from perpetrators of violence. Organisations spoke of the vicarious trauma that they experience from doing frontline VAWG work but also the added stress caused by those that hold decision-making power in funding or policy.

Funded partners gave examples of some of the issues that they and their staff commonly encounter, including:

- Having to constantly produce the same type of evidence that is continuously ignored.
- Feeling insecure, disempowered, not heard, validated or trusted.
- Having limits imposed on organisational/staff potential.
- Feeling discriminated against and marginalised.
- Fear of repercussions if they challenge/disagree with a funder.

'We have to prove ourselves even if we are doing the work in a quality way. The questioning makes us very stressed and we have to put a lot of administrative work in to make sure that they understand and believe us to keep the relationship going with them' (Funded partner).

'The cost or the loss of the short term funding [... is] not only to the organisation, because of course the organisation loses its reputation and the trust of the service users, but it can be very traumatising to the people that we support, because it takes a long time to create trusted relationships especially if the person has been affected by domestic violence or any other form of abuse, and then quickly we are telling them that the resources are over. So it's very difficult for them' (Funded partner).

'We forget that this also involves children because as a community organisation we operate holistically regardless of the terms of the grant. So we've got young people that come into the services, young people of those women that we're supporting, families come in and then quickly we can't just say 'OK, we cannot continue doing that'. I think there is a lot of harm that is caused by abruptly ending services and also attracting skilled workers because a person cannot apply for a job knowing that it is only for one year. And also, just as the one year ends they are busy looking to get another job so this also affects how services are delivered at the same time. The effect of short-term funding is real to community organisations and small ones like ourselves' (Funded partner).

'We support women going through a lot of trauma, we ourselves are being traumatised as we know, and we never address that. So there is no way you can really address your own needs if you are continually running for money and looking at how to sustain the charity because you only have a year-long fund each time. We have set up new projects but we are winding them down now' (Funded partner).

This evaluation shows that it is critical to the effectiveness of the VAWG work that funders create ethical approaches to funding the B&M women-led *by and for* sector. The following diagram shows the different ways in which power manifests between funders and funded partners and we urge and invite funders and commissioners to use this diagram as a learning tool within their own organisations to stimulate self-assessment, critical discussion and learning and, importantly, positive change (see Figure 7).

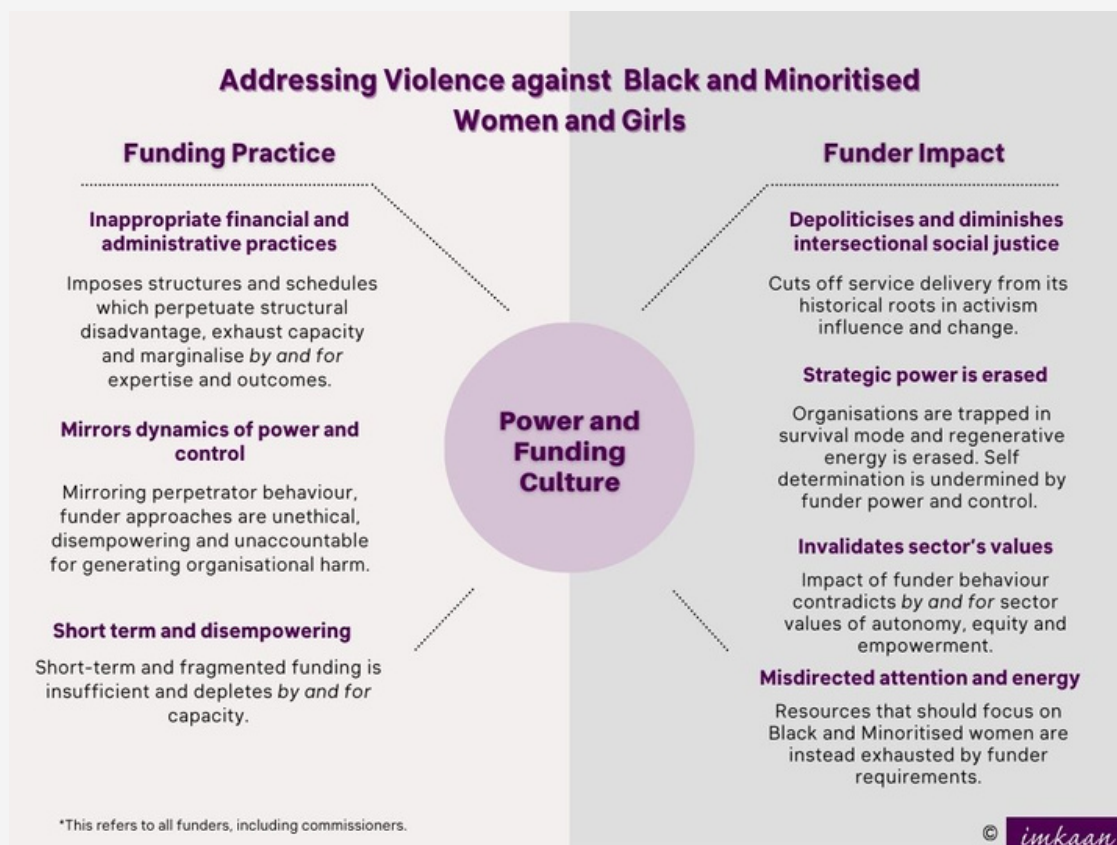


Figure 7. Power and funding culture: Addressing Violence against Women and Girls

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Conclusions

This evaluation of the Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme provides important evidence of the crucial role played by B&M women-led *by and for* organisations in supporting B&M women and girls subject to VAWG at an interpersonal, community and systemic level. The development of a designated fund has been experienced positively by funded partners, helping them to meet demand, sustain existing provision threatened by closure, develop new services and specific roles, and carry out collaborative work with other *by and for* sector partners.

The *by and for* specificity of the funding programme has enabled funded partners to focus their energy and resources to deliver interventions that centre B&M women through specialist and complex pathways of intersectional support which are distinct to and fill gaps in mainstream approaches to VAWG.

Collectively, the support funded by this programme has reached over 3,500 B&M women and girls, helping them to access safety, manage engagement with different external agencies and access the type of support that leads to positive transformation in their lives. However, the evaluation also highlights key issues and risks that continue to destabilise the sustainability of this vital sector.

This is the final round of Tampon Tax funding as the requirement to pay tax on sanitary products was removed in 2021. Short-term funding and funding approaches that are not intersectional or trauma-informed in their approach severely limit the potential of *by and for* organisations to sustain effective pathways of support to B&M women^[16].

The learning from this evaluation is a call to all funders and commissioners of VAWG provision to create a more equitable anti-racist grant-making approach which sees and values the B&M women-led *by and for sector* as key experts, partners and collaborators in creating social change, justice and advancing the human rights of B&M women and girls affected by VAWG.

Positive lessons, outputs and outcomes from the Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme

'They have genuinely engaged with us. We are educating them, but they are guiding us, it really feels special' (Funded partner).

The support provided by B&M women-led *by and for* organisations had positive, transformative impacts on the lives of B&M women:

- 3,517 women and girls benefited from life-saving support including complex case work, institutional advocacy, move-on accommodation, legal advice, peer support, community outreach, counselling, skills-building and wellbeing workshops.
- Support reached B&M women who face institutional barriers to mainstream provision, and marginalisation and barriers to their rights (e.g. migrant women, young women).
- Women described positive changes in their lives including increased awareness of their rights, improved mental health and wellbeing, and increased confidence and resilience as a result of the support. This included:
 - 1,304 women had increased awareness about services and their rights.
 - 684 women had improved physical and/or mental wellbeing.
 - 624 women had increased confidence and resilience.
 - 518 women had reduced levels of risk/vulnerability.
 - 279 women had reduced levels of isolation.

- The programme provided services across the regions in England to 10 B&M women-led *by and for* organisations located in areas where there is limited *by and for* specialist provision, and who brought to these localities expertise, knowledge, diverse community reach, and impact.

The funded B&M women-led *by and for* organisations were positively impacted by:

- A dedicated *by and for* programme that, through ringfencing and focus, protected *by and for* organisations from the systemic disadvantages of the open competitive market, through which they are unable to compete on a fair and equal footing with the larger, better resourced, mainstream generic VAWG providers.
- The recruitment of independent *by and for* VAWG sector experts to assist with fund development, assessment, and the award process. This brought credibility, rigour, and shifted the power dynamic to a community led and driven approach.
- The programme's quality which was strengthened by the fund's portfolio manager being a B&M woman with professional experience, commitment and knowledge of the *by and for* and VAWG sector and its funding and operating realities.
- The funding which helped to develop new roles, meet demand, expand provision and deliver support to fill gaps in mainstream responses to VAWG.
- The top-up funding which helped to resource activities that *by and for* organisations usually find difficult to secure financial support for (see Section 6).

Challenges and barriers that impact sustainability in the B&M women-led *by and for* sector

- Short-term and fragmented nature of funding keeps the B&M women-led *by and for* sector in survival mode and unable to meet demand. This is structural inequality, creating a coercive and debilitating dependency and power dynamic between B&M women-led *by and for* organisations and those controlling funding decisions.
- Funding approaches are too static. They deny, and act in opposition to, the realities of delivering non-linear, holistic, trauma-informed intersectional support that should be available flexibly, over time at the point of need, and at a pace in which survivors build trust in the service.
- Funding is focussed too narrowly on short-term crisis-based interventions, with an overemphasis on advocacy with the criminal justice system. In an underfunded VAWG system, this leaves less investment to support women with essential steps in achieving their safety, including access to housing and move-on support/ accommodation, advice, complex casework and institutional advocacy, and therapeutic and prevention work.
- The use of competitive procurement processes to fund VAWG provision continues to disproportionately disadvantage and exclude *by and for* organisations from accessing funding. This contributes to the systematic and cumulative erosion of B&M women-led *by and for* provision and B&M women's voices and place at the table, in favour of large, mainstream providers.
- Existing funding models are destabilising the B&M women-led *by and for* sector and making it unsustainable. Organisations are forced to deliver support without adequate resources for organisational governance and infrastructure. This has negative consequences on the sector's ability to meet high demand, measure its impact, retain staffing levels and expertise, and manage and expand provision.

Acknowledgements

Imkaan wishes to thank all the funded partners (Africa Advocacy Foundation, Anah Project, Apna Ghar Women's Centre, Foundation of Women's Health Research and Development (FORWARD), Imece's Women's Centre, Latin American Women's Aid (LAWA), London Black Women's Project (LBWP), The Phoebe Centre, Saheli and Southall Black Sisters) for so generously giving their time and commitment to this evaluation. In addition to this, Imkaan is grateful for their energy, dedication and contribution to transforming the lives of so many B&M women and girls and for leading the fight for more effective national policy and practice on VAWG.

We would like to thank Emma Frobisher (Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Manager, Comic Relief) and Rina Mehta (Portfolio Manager, Comic Relief) for their insight and guidance throughout the evaluation process.

Endnotes

[1] Text taken from Comic Relief funding programme description document.

[2] UK Civil Society Almanac 2021. Available at: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/uk-civil-society-almanac-2021/profile/how-many-voluntary-organisations-are-there/#/>

[3] The topic guides were framed around the questions that had been provided by Comic Relief in the original ITT document (see section 3 on 'Evaluation approach').

[4] This quote is from Imkaan's Executive Director, Baljit Banga, when she was employed by LBWP. The calculation is as follows: total grants received including donations divided by total grants from local authority which gives you the SRI figure.

[5] Thiara, R. and Roy, S. (2020) Reclaiming Voice: Minoritised Women and Sexual Violence Key Findings. Imkaan. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f7d9f4addc689717e6ea200/t/621d2268b8dfac09dc68894b/1646076524316/2020+%7C+Reclaiming+Voice+-+Minoritised+Women+and+Sexual+Violence+%5BKey+Findings%5D.pdf>

[6] Information taken from the sources below:

Thiara, R.K. and Harrison, C. (2021) Reframing the Links: Black and minoritised women, domestic violence and abuse, and mental health - A Review of the Literature. Bristol: Women's Aid.

Thiara, R. and Roy, S. (2020) Reclaiming Voice: Minoritised Women and Sexual Violence Key Findings. Imkaan. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f7d9f4addc689717e6ea200/t/621d2268b8dfac09dc68894b/1646076524316/2020+%7C+Reclaiming+Voice+-+Minoritised+Women+and+Sexual+Violence+%5BKey+Findings%5D.pdf>

Imkaan.(2018) Summary of the Alternative Bill: From the Margin to the Centre Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls. Imkaan.

Larasi, M. and Jones, D. (2017) Tallawah: A briefing paper on black and 'minority ethnic' women and girls organising to end violence against us. London: Imkaan.

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[7] Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2022) A Patchwork of Provision How to meet the needs of victims and survivors across England and Wales Summary Report, p6. Available at: https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/DAC_Mapping-Abuse-Suvivors_Summary-Report_Nov-2022_FA.pdf

[8] Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2022) A Patchwork of Provision How to meet the needs of victims and survivors across England and Wales, p41. Available at: https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/DAC_Mapping-Abuse-Suvivors_Long-Policy-Report_Nov2022_FA.pdf

[19] Information taken from the sources below:

Imkaan (2015) *The State of the Sector*. London: Imkaan.

Imkaan (2008) *A Right to Exist: A Paper Looking at the Eradication of Specialist Services to BAMER Women and Children Fleeing Violence*. London: Imkaan.

From Survival to Sustainability. London (2018) Imkaan. Available at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/2f475d_9cab044d7d25404d85da289b70978237.pdf

Imkaan (2018) *Summary of the Alternative Bill: From the Margin to the Centre Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls*.

[10] *Violence against women and girls National Statement of Expectations (2022)*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/violence-against-women-and-girls-national-statement-of-expectations-and-commissioning-toolkit/violence-against-women-and-girls-national-statement-of-expectations-accessible>.

[11] Anti-Racism Working Group. Available at: <https://www.endingracisminvawg.org/>

[12] Over half of Imkaan's members are located in London.

[13] The Supporting and Sustaining Specialism Top-up (unrestricted) Funding granted by the Health Foundation for a total available amount of £282,000 for 9 partners and research investment.

[14] 'Estimated' word count because Comic Relief uses a character count. This was translated into an estimated word count required of narrative answers in the Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme was disproportionate when compared to other funders who commonly support *by and for* work. The Supporting and Sustaining Specialism programme required narrative answers over double the length of four of the five comparable funders, and was nearly twice as long as the next longest bid (Henry Smith). This compounded with extensive guidance notes and lack of explanation of the assessment weightings to put pressure on bidder's applications. Funded partners noted this cut into time which could have been spent developing the partnerships to which assessors gave preference. The word count was based on assuming 1000 characters were equal to 200 words.

[15] The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) still does not include migrant women.

[16] Tampon Tax abolished from today (2021). Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tampon-tax-abolished-from-today>.

Case Studies

AFRICA ADVOCACY FOUNDATION (AAF)***Hidden Voices Project (12 months)***

Over the last 25 years, AAF has supported mainly, but not exclusively, African women and girls of refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds living in London, in the UK and overseas including, undocumented migrants, those living with HIV and survivors of violence against women and girls (VAWG). AAF provides support, advocacy, one-to-one counselling, and group-based peer support and delivers training and campaigns work on female genital mutilation (FGM) and interconnected form of VAWG.

Funded project:

The Hidden Voices Project created a uniquely accessible trauma-informed, VAWG service for Black and minoritised (B&M) undocumented migrant women affected by all forms of domestic and sexual abuse. Migrant women are often forced to remain with abusers or become destitute and/or homeless and are at risk of further exploitation due to a lack of access to public funds, which leads to multiple exclusions from generic services. A lack of rights to safety means that women will be hesitant to approach mainstream services due to a fear of immigration enforcement. This significantly undermines their independence, confidence and dignity to seek support to challenge the physical, emotional, and economic violence they are subjected to by perpetrators.

Project highlights:

The project supported 67 undocumented women on spousal visas with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) subject to domestic and sexual abuse. This includes a significant number of young women, including unaccompanied minors and young carers of parents with mental health needs.

Women and girls accessed wrap around support consisting of tailored immigration advice, advocacy, housing and therapeutic support. With specialist support from AAF they were able to reduce their social isolation and build an awareness of the dynamics of domestic abuse/ VAWG which increased their confidence to report abuse and strengthen self-advocacy. Through the project, migrant women were able to access intersectional institutional advocacy to challenge the high levels of racism, and discriminatory practice from external agencies that leads to a neglect and minimisation of their reports of violence and abuse. In the following example, intersectional advocacy and holistic support from AAF led to a more proactive and positive response from the Police and a better understanding amongst statutory providers of the impact of VAWG on Black and minoritised women and girls.

'There's better understanding of domestic and historical sexual abuse and community support for women and girls mainly from African backgrounds and we also advocated to ensure victims reports that had been overlooked by the police were looked into again thus leading to at least 3 perpetrators charged with physical and sexual assault' (Funded partner).

Key achievements:

- **Over 100 B&M women and girls accessed support through *Hidden Voices* project.**
- 21 women accessed community champions training and have the skills to provide support to women with signposting and referral through informal community networks, creating a longer-term positive impact beyond the funded period.
- 11 women were rehoused and have been successful with their claims for indefinite leave to remain.
- Young survivors of FGM in foster care have been placed with new parents that understand their culture, faith and lived experience.
- Some children have been supported with being reunited with their parents after being trafficked to the UK.
- 140% improvement in women's physical and mental wellbeing through their determination to leave abusive relationships, to improve school grades for their children, and their confidence to follow through reported cases without being intimidated by perpetrators, their families and friends.
- 93% progress in women's engagement with statutory services (e.g. police, legal advice, immigration clinics).



Comic Relief Supporting & Sustaining Specialism Programme

ANAH PROJECT

Removing barriers - Building resilience (15 months)

As an established service and a voice for disadvantaged and marginalised groups in West Yorkshire, Anah Project has 30 years of expertise in supporting women facing violence against women and girls (VAWG). Anah Project provides holistic pathways of support including safe refuge accommodation, one-to-one support, and in-house education and training to Black and minoritised (B&M) women who face multiple disadvantages and barriers when accessing mainstream services.

Funded project:

The Removing Barriers - Building Resilience project enabled the Anah Project to expand housing provision to women needing access to safety during the pandemic.

Anah Project also delivered in-house training sessions and supported women to access education and training opportunities. Survivor engagement opportunities included International Women's Day involvement, sharing lived experiences with Comic Relief as well as co-creating a play on violence against B&M women with a local theatre group.

Project highlights:

Anah Project was able to provide 4 additional bed spaces, complementing the 12 existing bed spaces and employ a support worker who provided women with 78 in-depth key sessions and 11 weeks of on-call and out of hours support. Through the programme, women received essential casework and housing-related support through access to intermediary accommodation post-refuge. This funding helped to address the limited move-on accommodation which creates delays in women moving out of the refuge, resulting in 'bed blocking'.

The funding enabled Anah Project to build staff capacity and decrease the likelihood of women's exposure to repeated victimisation by providing a longer-term post-crisis intervention response. Of all the women accommodated, none have returned needing crisis support and the project has successfully secured new accommodation to continue this important work.

'We are proud to be able to demonstrate the need for transitional move on accommodation for Black and Minoritised women and that as a result we have secured a property to buy, to continue this work. We have successfully supported 21 women to be free from abuse, helping them to increase their personal and financial autonomy. This funding has helped us to retain an experienced domestic abuse support worker' (Funded partner).

Key achievements:

- **Anah Project supported 21 B&M women and girls.**
- 27 in-house training sessions were delivered covering domestic violence and abuse, adult grooming and sexual exploitation, building self-esteem and confidence and stress management.
- 21 women accessed education and training opportunities.
- 12 women actively took part in volunteering for the local food bank to support families during the pandemic.
- A 5 bedroom property has been secured and Anah Project is in the final stages of purchasing this property.
- An 80% improvement in women's physical and mental wellbeing after accessing the service and an 84% increase in women's awareness about services and rights.



Comic Relief Supporting & Sustaining Specialism Programme

APNA GHAR WOMEN'S CENTRE

Women Together Partnership: Black-led Peer Support Networks in the North East (13 months)

Apna Ghar (35 years' experience) and Sangini, in partnership with Hindu Nari Sangh, Network Aspire and Diverse Women's Network uniquely support women from a range of South Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian backgrounds facing structural inequalities and poor mental health in Sunderland, South Tyneside and County Durham.

Funded project:

Women Together Partnership: Black-led Peer Support Networks in the Northeast is a three-strand programme focused on women's wellbeing, awareness raising and community outreach and organisational development.

Project highlights:

COVID-19 highlighted a need for an extended period of support for more intense emotional needs. The partnership provided peer support spaces for women who have concerns about accessing counselling due to the stigma and victim-blaming culture that exists around mental health and to address gaps in available support which is multi-lingual and appropriate for Black and minoritised lived experiences. Apna Ghar was able to reach isolated women, who face poor responses and discrimination from mainstream services because of a lack of understanding of their specific contexts of violence and abuse. The medium of artwork was used to share information on violence against women and girls (VAWG), women's rights and entitlements and this helped women to build trust, begin to identify their own needs, share experiences with each other at their own pace.

'We are proud of all the artwork that has been produced. It has brought colour and beauty to such a topic as VAWG. It is meaningful and depicts the emotions and feelings of women. As the evaluation highlights, women's confidence and self-esteem has grown' (Funded partner).

Key achievements:

- **Project partners supported over 200 B&M women and girls.**
- Provided 30 therapeutic art sessions for women to build confidence, skills, improve health and wellbeing and raise awareness around VAWG issues.
- Hosted 3 campaign events to promote VAWG awareness and services.
- Provided community outreach activities such as Domestic Abuse Support Group, luncheon club, ESOL, Conversation, Sewing & fitness classes.
- Training and capacity building for staff and volunteers.
- There was a 232% improvement in women's physical and/or mental wellbeing after accessing the service and a 156% increase in women's awareness about existing services and their rights.

FOUNDATION OF WOMEN'S HEALTH RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT(FORWARD)***Tackling multiple forms of violence among African Communities in the UK (15 months)***

FORWARD is an African-led, women's rights organisation with over 35 years of experience working in the violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector. FORWARD operates in the UK, Europe and selected African countries, partnering with women-led and youth focused community organisations to co-deliver effective programmes that transform lives. Over the last 15 months, FORWARD, in partnership with Refuge Women of Bristol, successfully enhanced the wellbeing, resilience and confidence of women and girls, built partnerships, and strengthened leadership development of Community Champions.

Funded project:

Tackling multiple forms of violence among African Communities in the UK aimed to provide 1) holistic integrated specialist support and wellbeing services to Black and minoritised women affected by VAWG, 2) prevention and community outreach activities 3) build bridges with statutory professionals and 4) develop organisational capacity.

Project highlights:

Black and Minoritised women and girls were able to access practical and multilingual emotional support, attend and host safeguarding, wellbeing and VAWG events, and attend community engagement activities facilitated by Community Champions and staff (coffee mornings, parent sessions, workshops). Champions also provided training to statutory and VAWG sector professionals. Most importantly, the Champions helped to build trust by providing signposting, befriending and accompaniment support to improve access to specialist services for isolated and vulnerable B&M women.

'We know that we've got the IDVAs but when you look at the role of the community advocate, they play a totally amazing role and it's undervalued' (Funded partner).

Key achievements:

- **Project partners supported nearly 2,000 B&M women and girls.**
- 328 women accessed specialist support services.
- 279 community women received one-to-one and group counselling, peer-to-peer emotional support and advice delivered by a professional therapist.
- 477 statutory professionals including teachers, local authorities, and B&M led *by and for* organisations were trained across London on VAWG and FGM.
- Community Champions Training: 49 B&M community women trained in the project year.
- 37 young women took part in the young women's leadership programme across the UK.
- There was a 500% progress in B&M women's awareness about their services, rights and entitlements.

IMECE WOMEN'S CENTRE

Pathway to Recovery Project (PRP) (13 months)

Imece Women's Centre, established in 1982 (London), stands against all forms of violence affecting women and girls. The Comic Relief Fund has strengthened the partnership between Imece, Latin American Women's Rights Service and Kurdish and Middle Eastern Women's Organisation to provide support to Black and minoritised (B&M) women affected by VAWG. It primarily targets Turkish, Kurdish, Turkish Cypriot, Bulgarian, Azari, Yazidi, Middle Eastern and Latin American women aged over 16 and living in London. It also supports migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking women, women with No Recourse to Public Funds, disabled and LBTO+ women.

Funded project:

Pathway to Recovery Project allowed IMECE's current Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) service in Haringey and Islington to develop to a Pan London IDVA service. The mainstream IDVA model was adapted to embed a VAWG sensitive and intersectional response to better fit the needs of B&M women and respond to complex casework and advocacy needs. The partnership established violence against women and girls (VAWG) specialist counselling and group work activities aimed at addressing survivor's journeys to empowerment and reducing re-victimisation.

Project highlights:

Project partners have been able to carry out outreach and provide women with timely and accessible crisis intervention support. Imece was able to provide a Pan London IDVA who worked fluidly across all levels of risk and was not restricted by borough boundaries, reaching into boroughs with no local specialist B&M provision.

B&M women and girls accessed practical support, counselling and Walk and Talk therapy groups, confidence building workshops, time management and CV building workshops, and domestic violence awareness raising activities. Women reported increased levels of self-confidence and greater understanding of VAWG and information about their rights that would support them to build positive relationships in the future.

'I think safety is one of them [outcome] obviously because we do immediate crisis intervention. After safety, it's more confidence building, resilience building. They were more resilient and they've got their confidence back, they feel safe [...] what we're trying to do with this project essentially is to prevent re-victimisation' (Funded partner).

Key achievements:

- **Project partners supported over 270 B&M women and girls.**
- The PRP was able to successfully support 20% over the target for Pan London IDVA services.
- There was a 172% progress in improved women's physical and/or mental wellbeing after accessing the service and a 155% progress in increased women's awareness on services and rights.



Comic Relief Supporting & Sustaining Specialism Programme

LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN'S AID (LAWA)

Access to VAWG support for Latin American & other BME women who are NRPF (15 months)

LAWA has been providing supporting specialist services for nearly 35 years across London to Latin American and other Black and minoritised (B&M) women affected by violence against women and girls (VAWG) and whose cases are assessed as more complex due to the intersection of their experiences and identity. LAWA's holistic approach includes emotional support and specialist immigration advice/support.

Funded project:

Access to VAWG support for Latin American & other BME women who have no recourse to public funds allowed LAWA to hire a legal immigration adviser to join their VAWG Advice Centre and provide specialist legal immigration advice to women accessing support. The service was offered as one-to-one sessions, provided either at the office or remotely in Spanish, Portuguese and/or English. The new legal adviser was also tasked to liaise with external agencies and stakeholders and accompany women to face-to-face appointments.

Project highlights:

Over the last 15 months, LAWA has been in a stronger position to build an empowering 'rights based' approach to its work and develop its organisational competency and resilience. It successfully obtained the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) level 2 accreditation to provide independent immigration advice to women, as well as accept referrals from external organisations. LAWA is the only Latin American charity with an OISC level 2 immigration adviser.

'To be able to provide the support in-house changes how women access the service because it is by the community for the community, and it is a woman as well. She speaks the language, so that shifts the way women access the support and how they feel supported. She also has fewer organisations she needs to liaise with' (Funded partner).

LAWA's ability to provide in-house accredited immigration advice reduced women's reliance on finding good quality legal advice and helped them to access support more rapidly. Having a Latin American advice worker who used a VAWG and gender sensitive approach enhanced women's engagement and experience. This has allowed LAWA to offer a broad range of immigration advice and take on complex cases (e.g. Retained Right of Residence, Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) cases, Indefinite Leave to Remain, Naturalisation, Child Registrations, Fee Waiver applications).

Key achievements:

- **LAWA supported over 430 B&M women and girls** (includes VAWG support and social media campaign).
- The immigration adviser has been able to secure an OISC level 2 accreditation, allowing LAWA to offer a broad range of immigration advice.
- LAWA is a member of the Step up for Migrant Women campaign and the experiences of women inform this wider social justice work, which seeks to increase rights of migrant women.
- LAWA submitted a significant number of visa applications and has encountered 0 refusals to date.
 - 126% progress in the number of women accessing community engagement and activities.
 - 105% progress in women's engagement with statutory services.
- As a result of LAWA's work, 98% of women stated that support offered by women from their community and in their own language made a positive difference/had a positive impact.



Comic Relief Supporting & Sustaining Specialism Programme

LONDON BLACK WOMEN'S PROJECT (LBWP)

Therapeutic Counselling Service for BME Service Users (15 months)

For over 33 years, LBWP has been meeting the needs of Black and minoritised (B&M) women and their children, including migrant and asylum-seeking women affected by domestic violence, through direct holistic service provision. This has been crucial because of correlating factors of racism and gaslighting whereby B&M women have not been seen as 'victims' of this crime, against a backdrop of media stories that highlight white victims. B&M women within therapy are supported using an intersectional lens, where the approach to therapeutic counselling is one that celebrates their individual identity, upbringing, and social context.

Funded project:

LBWP's quality B&M therapeutic service expands counselling provision and complements the existing talking therapies and provision provided by Mind in East London. Demand for LBWP's counselling services has increased considerably and its specialist, B&M-focused approach provides a critical point of access and a safe space for B&M women affected by violence. The funded therapeutic counselling service enables women to heal, find their voice and access services such as health, social services and the criminal justice system.

Project highlights:

The Comic Relief Programme has allowed LBWP to fill a gap in counselling provision. Counselling services in Newham are over-subscribed, with a three-month waiting list for women referred to LBWP by East London Foundation Trust's Talking Therapies service. LBWP provided specialist transcultural and intersectional counselling to over 160 B&M women. It applied a deeper meaning of 'positive self-regard', as an example of the person-centred approach, through delivering counselling using an empowering linguistic approach that enables women to come 'into' a position of strength. The significance of the power of language in healing is emphasised - being seen and accepted in a hostile environment where language is used as an exclusionary weapon against B&M women. LBWP's approach used a mixed model of humanistic, psychodynamic, cognitive behavioural therapy, gestalt and person-centred therapy, enabling counsellors to use a mixture of different techniques and associated tools to respond to different traumatic experiences.

'The women feeling accepted, generally feeling that they are being believed [...] increase of confidence, people being able to maybe go back and have conversations, certainly within their female networks about what is right and what is wrong with their cultures [...] by being given a different perspective and then being able to reflect on that perspective, being able to go back and challenge in a way that is not going to increase their risk' (Funded partner).

Key achievements:

- **LBWP supported 166 B&M women and girls.**
- Recruited 2 Bengali counsellors.
- There was a 244% progress in women attending one-to-one or group counselling sessions, 297% progress in increased women's confidence and resilience and 297% progress in reduced women's levels of isolation.



Comic Relief Supporting & Sustaining Specialism Programme

THE PHOEBE CENTRE

BME Domestic Violence Support (12 months)

PHOEBE has a long-established reputation in Suffolk (nearly 15 years) due to its understanding of different forms of discrimination and its intersectional practice, which enhances women's trust and engagement in the support it provides. The majority of women accessing PHOEBE's services consistently struggle with feeling excluded from mainstream society, and PHOEBE invests much of its efforts in addressing social isolation, violence and abuse, destitution, and poor mental health. The funding enabled PHOEBE to strengthen its practical and emotional support, community activities and skills development.

Funded project:

BME Domestic Violence Support aimed to support women in leaving abusive relationships (mainly from Suffolk) by establishing a relationship of trust, encouraging them to disclose abuse, creating support plans, offering them access out of services depending on their needs and signposting them to other relevant support.

Project highlights:

Over the course of the funding period, PHOEBE helped women with safety plans, Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) referrals, refuge applications, Home Office applications and visa applications. Women were also helped to access hardship funds through the partnership with local trusts and Suffolk County Council welfare assistance scheme. PHOEBE also delivered practical support, offered food vouchers, and assisted with accessing financial help. Women who faced anxiety, depression and other mental health issues were able to receive counselling flexibly offered either on site or over the phone, based on their needs. Women joined community outreach activities and support groups for B&M and migrant women to expand their social networks.

PHOEBE aims to make Suffolk a safer place for B&M women:

'Women's safety will not come from changing women's behaviour it will come from changing the culture that fails to tackle toxic masculinity' (Funded partner).

Key achievements:

- **PHOEBE supported over 230 B&M women and girls.**
- Funded women's access to immigration legal services.
- Implemented its end-VAWG policy which addresses the particular issues for B&M women.
- Shared knowledge and learning at the Ipswich Domestic Abuse Forum.
- Established partnerships with local trusts and other key stakeholders.

PHOEBE reported a huge difference in women's access to specialist advocacy and reduced levels of risk and vulnerability, with 100% of the survivors who accessed legal services reporting that they felt empowered to leave their abuser after they accessed this support.



Comic Relief Supporting & Sustaining Specialism Programme

SAHELI

Champa Champions - Co-creating: Hope, Advocacy, Meaning, Power and Ambition (12 months)

Saheli has over 20 years of experience delivering specialist support to Black and minoritised (B&M) women in Manchester. Its primary mission is to promote the rights of B&M women and girls through legal support, advocacy, and practical and emotional support. Women and girls benefiting are mainly from the Northwest of England and South Yorkshire, with a small percentage of women from elsewhere in the UK.

Funded project:

Saheli partnered with Apna Haq (Rotherham), Humraaz (Lancashire) and Rochdale Women's Welfare Association to deliver the *Champa Champions* Programme, a women's led survivor volunteer programme of peer support. This was developed after identifying gaps in service provision resulting from discrimination and intolerance, among the factors leading to deterioration in living conditions, poverty, violence, multiple exclusions, and the limitation or denial of human rights.

Project highlights:

The *Champa Champions* programme delivered a helpline service, peer group support, drop-in sessions, awareness workshops, and activity sessions such as yoga and employability drop-in sessions. Saheli successfully trained over 40 volunteers and supported them to facilitate groups and become *Champa Champions*. After the funding ends, the Champions will support not only the partnership but the wider community and will provide women with one-to-one support and run group work sessions with the support of the outreach team.

'It's that peer support development that's going to help develop the champions, which will encourage and support other women going through the same or encourage them through the cycle of change into becoming more independent [...] more integrated into society'
(Funded partner).

Key achievements:

- **Project partners supported over 430 B&M women and girls.**
- Trained and empowered over 40 women to become *Champa Champions*.
- Specialist training packages for internal and external professionals and volunteers.
- Strengthened partnership working across Greater Manchester, Rotherham and Blackburn; sharing skills and knowledge and empowering women as volunteers.
- Trained over 100 external professionals health, domestic abuse workers and other community-based staff to better understand the issues that impact on B&M women.
- Submitted key research recommendations to inform strategic housing policy.
- One woman's story was included in the National Domestic Abuse Commissioner research reports.

On average, the confidence of women in making positive choices increased from 4.67 before involvement with the *Champa Champions* programme to 8.26. The average rating of mood/ mental health increased from 3.44 before involvement with the *Champa Champions* programme to 8.41, with 87.2% giving a score of 8 or 10 post support (data based on Saheli's lamplight monitoring system).

- The partnership saw a huge difference in workshop attendance and improved mental health with:
 - 200% progress in number of women accessing skills workshops.
 - 150% improvement in women's physical and/or mental wellbeing.
 - 150% progress in increased women's confidence/resilience.



Comic Relief Supporting & Sustaining Specialism Programme

SOUTHALL BLACK SISTERS (SBS)

Migrant Women Unbound: Resilience Inclusion Supported Equal Access to Safety (12 months)

SBS is a leading Black and minoritised (B&M) women-led organisation founded in 1979. It aims to assist women and children – overwhelmingly VAWG victim-survivors – to obtain effective protection and assert their fundamental human rights. SBS runs a specialist, survivor-centred, holistic resource centre with national reach, providing a specialist multi-lingual national helpline, information and advice, and advocacy. It also undertakes educational, policy development, evaluation and action research work. SBS is renowned for its expertise in domestic and sexual violence, harmful practices, immigration, and B&M women with No Recourse to Public Funds.

Funded project:

The Resilience Inclusion Supported Equal Access to Safety (RISE) partnership, led by SBS (Middlesex), Angelou Centre (Newcastle upon Tyne) and Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS, London), is a partnership skilled in delivering bespoke holistic and intersectional support to B&M women. The partnership aims to increase and strengthen access to support provision through sharing and optimising existing resources and learning.

Project highlights:

The project partners have supported women and children to engage in holistic services, including group work and the Women's Voices Steering Group. Community outreach delivered by SBS has been successful in reaching isolated older women in the community through regular coffee mornings and support provided with food, toiletries, and essential support for those struggling to leave their homes to access the shops or buy core essentials. The cost-of-living crisis has exacerbated the risk of destitution therefore the help provided under this project has been a lifeline to many women and girls.

'This project has been able to assist a number of destitute survivors to access vital accommodation and subsistence costs which has been a lifeline to many, enabling them to leave abusive/ dangerous perpetrators' (Funded partner).

Key achievements:

- **Project partners supported over 1,200 B&M women and girls** and enabled access to legal advice, holistic advocacy and therapeutic interventions for women to fund vital accommodation and subsistence costs.
- The Women's Voices Steering Groups were successful in supporting and mobilising women in various strategic meetings and roundtables, such as the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's survivors' roundtable, the Migration All Party Parliamentary Group on no recourse to public funds, roundtables with Jess Phillips MP, and the Women and Equalities Committee attended by the Safeguarding Minister.
- Women participated in research led by Northumbria University on the impact of financial exploitation and how this is heightened by insecure immigration status.
- Project partners received training, including accredited training, leading to an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) qualification through Women's Aid's Domestic Abuse Prevention Advocate (DAPA) certification course and some staff accessing the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) training.
- Developed an e-library template (a platform for shared resources dedicated to specialist B&M women-led *by and for* sector).
- Reached 5,000 people informing national media about VAWG survivor issues, amplifying their voices and informing them of their rights/ options.
- There was a 400% progress in women's awareness about services and rights, 111% progress in women's attendance to one-to-one or group counselling sessions and 100% progress in women's reduced risk and vulnerability.

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