Equalities and Human Rights Committee
Draft Budget Scrutiny 2020-21
Submission from SACRO

The following response is based on the professional experience and opinions of the Gender Based Violence Services Manager at Sacro and therefore not representative of the organisation in its entirety.

- What are the key public policy areas where individuals and protected groups are struggling to access their rights?

In spite of very positive recent developments in legislation and public policy in the area of Gender Based Violence (GBV), victims of GBV continue to find it very difficult to access their rights. The reasons behind this are both internal to victims (for example mental, psychological, emotional and capacity-related barriers) while some are external (for example accessibility of services, control by partners, family, extended family and the wider community).

Some of the specific issues addressed by Sacro’s GBV services include:

- **Domestic Abuse support for any victim who does not identify as a natal female-meaning an individual who identifies as female and who was born with biologically female characteristics.** Sacro’s FearLess service has seen a considerable number of male and LGBT+ victims of domestic abuse in its last 4 years of operation. Currently there are no services available for heterosexual or GBT men affected by domestic abuse that offer the same type of intensive support.

- **Honour-Based Violence (HBV), including forced marriage, coercive control and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).** Victims of these types of abuse are largely from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, who have recently migrated in to the country. As such they are unfamiliar with Scottish legislation, their rights and responsibilities and how to access them, while language difficulties pose a further challenge. Victims can also include children and young people from subsequent migrant generations who may be aware of their rights but unwilling or unsupported to access their rights for fear of retribution from their families and/or communities.

- **Education, Employment and Housing:** This is an issue that affects a very high number of Sacro service users, while victims of Gender Based Violence are disproportionately affected. Victims of domestic abuse are prioritised when seeking housing support, however accommodation is often inappropriate (especially for BAME victims or those escaping the abuse and taking their children with them). Further, people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) are further affected by the fact that, although they are able to access housing, no further support is available to them due to their immigration status. Until third sector support becomes available for them to access immigration services, they are at risk (and often become) destitute. For the same reason, individuals are often unaware of their rights (if any) to education and employment-more
specifically, their rights to childcare support which would enable them to access education and employment.

- **Immigration:** Due to current political circumstances, migrant groups including both BAME individuals as well as European Nationals, are not aware of their immigration entitlements, restrictions or changes in legislation. This is particularly true for newly-arrived migrants arriving in Scotland through spouse visas following arranged marriages, and BAME victims of domestic abuse. Many such victims, overwhelmingly female, are often either unaware of the need to access immigration services to renew their immigration status, or are unable to do so as a direct result of abuse. In some cases, victims will stay in an abusive marriage because they are required to stay married to their spouse for a minimum of two years before an extension to their visa will be considered.

- **Which groups of people are most likely to be affected and why?**

From a Gender-Based Violence perspective, women, children and individuals identifying as LGBT are extremely vulnerable and the least likely to be able to access their rights for the reasons outlined above. Survivors of GBV are overwhelmingly female, and with specific regard to LGBT groups, there are very few services available that would be able to appropriately respond to their specific needs. Considering that GBV covers a range of abusive behaviours and criminal conduct (including but not limited to: domestic abuse; commercial sexual exploitation; sexual violence; female genital mutilation; human trafficking; and forced marriage) the odds are overwhelmingly stacked against women, girls and LGBT communities in Scotland.

Of particular concern is the vulnerability of individuals with no recourse to public funds. An extremely concerning trend is that individuals with NRPF unfortunately do not come to the attention of services unless they have survived some of the most horrific forms of abuse and violence, after which point they are not entitled to certain types of statutory support due to their immigration status. This leaves them vulnerable to further victimisation and abuse as a direct result of, or risk of, destitution. The consideration of NRPF boards remains factual and objective, however with little, if any, consideration for the role GBV plays in the lives of victims, or a gendered understanding of the issues victims face.

- **What type of public sector funding (European, national or local) is provided to your organisation to support vulnerable groups and those with protected characteristics to access public services?**

Fearless is funded through the National Lottery Community Fund, with a funding application due to be submitted in order to renew the funding for a further 3 years. Bright choices at Sacro is currently receiving a small amount of funding from Police Scotland to deliver support to individuals, families and communities affected by Honour-Based Violence while the Multicultural Family Base has secured 3 years’ funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to provide 1-1 support to
survivors of forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Sacro has secured funding from the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport through the Tampon Tax Fund until 2021 to deliver a national project in Scotland engaging with women involved in prostitution online. The Another Way service in Edinburgh is funded in part by Scottish Government Equally Safe VAWG Fund and by the Scottish Government’s Sexual Health and Blood Borne Virus Framework-Third Sector Funding Programme.

- Are there public funding challenges for the third sector; if so what would be the implications for delivering equalities and human rights outcomes?

From the perspective of Gender Based Violence, the key challenges are a lack of understanding of the prevalence of Honour-Based Violence which in turn leads to shortages in funding to address the support needs of affected individuals. As a result, work in this area tends to remain insular and in the realm of specific organisations; there is little mainstreaming and awareness raising with the general public and front line professionals, thus perpetuating a ‘revolving door’ problem and contributing to the dependency of survivors of HBV on specific services on an ongoing basis.

The other significant issue is a lack of public funding for male and LGBT victims of domestic abuse and HBV. Although there is data that demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of victims are female, there are considerable numbers of male victims who have very few resources to offer them support and guidance. With ongoing discord around service accessibility for particular subgroups (particularly men and transgender people) the lack of inclusive domestic abuse services remains an immense challenge for service provision while it leaves a significant portion of the population unable to access necessary support.

- What changes could be made to improve accountability for national priorities being delivered by the public sector in partnership with the third sector?

One change that could significantly improve outcomes for victims of domestic abuse would include the promotion of information about support services available to male and LGBT+ victims, as well as the creation and maintenance of services across Scotland to support them. This would not only support and enhance the well-being of victims of abuse who do not identify as women and girls but it would also promote the Equally Safe Agenda in terms of inclusivity and intersectionality. To ensure that the needs of those hard to reach and hard to engage groups are met, more proactive engagement is required by the Scottish Government with organisations and services representing and supporting those groups.

A further change could be the mainstreaming of professionals’ training on HBV and culture-specific forms of Gender Based Violence, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Currently, any training attended by statutory professionals continues to be delivered by specialist third sector organisations, while attendance is voluntary and free of charge, which at times leads to low attendance at training events. For the
successful delivery of the Equally Safe strategy, it is of vital importance that all professionals training in health, education, social work and the police are fully cited on FGM and other forms of honour-based violence and abuse, that they are fully aware of how to identify possible risks and how to respond to them.

To respond to the complex needs of victims of abuse with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) it would be instrumental to both offer local NRPF boards training on gender issues, as well as ongoing communication between NRPF boards and the organisations supporting vulnerable individuals. It is often found in particular local authorities that the criteria based on which assessments for support are made do not take into consideration a gendered understanding of the issues present for individuals and families in dire need of support. This could be improved through the consideration of specific issues relevant to the specific individuals and families with NRPF, as well as consultation and engagement between NRPF boards and third sector organisations.