



Call for written submissions -Visit by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from 5 - 16 November 2018

Submission by Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Justice (RESURJ) September 2018

**Please note: this analysis was originally written in 2017, all efforts have been made to revisit and update data and findings to date.*

Inequalities, Austerity, and Economic justice in the UK

Over the past 8 years, austerity measures, the UK government's dominant fiscal policy to reduce the public deficit through public spending cuts, has impacted already vulnerable and marginalized communities, with women and girls bearing the brunt of austerity and welfare reform. Increased sanctions and conditionality^j related to benefits, the deep and swift cuts to social housingⁱⁱ, and growing income inequality, that fails to be accurately captured in the measures used by the UK governmentⁱⁱⁱ, have pushed women and their families deeper into poverty. With £18 billion of public spending cuts to date, and £9 billion more planned, 2010- 2018 has seen the biggest cuts in state spending in the UK since World War II, resulting in the UK being declared as having the third highest level of income inequality in Europe, one of the highest in OECD countries^{iv}. The number of people living in poverty in the UK in 2016 was double that of 1983^v, with an increase in the number of young people in poverty aged 16-24, who in 2016 were the group with the highest proportion of people living in poverty, at 26%.

Budget cuts to social and public spending has seen the largest cuts falling on councils in the most deprived areas, spending falling by £65 per head in such places, and rising in the least deprived communities (mostly Conservative councils), by £28 per head. 97% of council cuts to social care have been shouldered in the poorest areas, by councils in the North and Midlands of England, alongside some London local authorities^{vi}. 10% of adult care spending was cut in England between 2009-10 and 2014-15, and despite increases by 7% in 2017-18, spending was budgeted 3% lower in 2017-18 than 2009-10, resulting in 9% lower spending per person.^{vii} Welfare changes, including transition to the heavily criticised Universal Credit system, are underway, as people face tighter sanctions, caps, and conditionality on a welfare system that already disadvantages, marginalises, and disempowers, and places people in vulnerable conditions. In 2008, 20,000 reportedly people used food banks in the UK, in 2016 that number rose to 1,109,000, with the biggest reason for use reported as benefits sanctions, delays and administrative errors. Austerity related deaths, including suicide, are on the rise, with a study in November 2017, linking 120,000 deaths to health and social care spending cuts^{viii}. Since the introduction of Fit-for-Work assessments for sick and disabled people in 2008 (the publishing of reports for which have been legally challenged by the Department for Work and Pensions^{ix}), suicides among out-of-work disability benefit claimants have more than doubled^x. A drastic

rise in temporary and unstable work has hit women the hardest, with nearly 1 million UK workers now on zero-hour contracts, tripling since 2010^{xi} (accounting for the smokescreen of one quarter of all reported jobs growth), as well as the loss of nearly half a million public sector jobs, an area of high employment of women.

Between 2010 and 2016 local authorities in England lost 27% of their budgets in real terms. The most effected were those social services for families, children, the elderly and marginalized communities. Services with either a preventative or enabling focus, such as sure start centers, children’s center, parks, libraries, that were discretionary, were the first to face major cuts with around 45% of all such services cut across the country. Amongst the myriad of cuts to welfare and public and social services for children, including child benefit and working tax credits, councils have seen funding for children’s services decrease by up to 26% per child. Children in the UK continue to experience rising inequalities in many areas of their lives, with two thirds of children living in poverty being from working families. The UK has in recent years ranked extremely low in many areas of child poverty, compared to other European countries, ranking last of all OECD countries in disparities around children’s healthy eating^{xii}. Cuts to support services have left an estimated 10,000 adult and child survivors of sexual abuse waiting over a year for access to counselling services^{xiii}. Mental health services for children and young people in England have been cut by £35million^{xiv}, whilst demand for mental health services more broadly has risen by a 20% since 2010, with GPs reporting a significant rise in cases of mental health, and a rise in for example, prescriptions for antidepressants of over 725,000^{xv}.

The introduction of the Housing and Planning Bill in 2016 was met with much protest from women’s housing, poverty and disability groups alike, concerned that a number of provisions within the policy would have a negative impact on those in poverty, and the most marginalized communities, already disadvantaged by housing access, affordability crisis and housing policies that violates rights; policies such as the bedroom tax, the ending of lifetime tenancies, cuts to housing benefit, the pay to stay reform, increasing the rent for higher earners in social housing, and the right to rent reform which forces landlords to check the migrant status of their tenants and report those without the right documents. The government sought to fund parts of the housing bill, by forcing local authorities to sell off their most valuable vacant home, which will deepen the crisis of fewer affordable homes for rent where most needed. This further impacts people who already face grave housing injustice, with a recent report showing that four in ten Britons live in homes that do not reach acceptable standards in cleanliness, safety and space.

We have identified below just some of the socio-economic policies and changes, related to austerity measures, as well as other government measures, that have been implemented between 2010-2018 that have had the biggest impact on women^{xvi}, their families and communities:

Welfare changes	Disability	Health and Sexual and Reproductive Justice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Welfare Reform Act of 2012 ○ Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 ○ Universal credit ○ <u>Conditionality on universal credit</u> (UC pilot areas) ○ Benefits freeze for 4 years ○ Benefits sanctions and conditionality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Independent Living Fund abolished ○ Personal Independence Payment replacing disability living allowance ○ Work capability assessment ○ Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) extra payment abolished 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reduction in provision of oral contraceptives ○ Cuts to NHS SRHR services ○ Privatization of SRHR services ○ Closure of abortion services in rural areas (Wales) ○ Cuts to rape crisis services ○ Closure of domestic violence shelters and services

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Benefits cap ○ Crisis loans abolished ○ Community care grants abolished ○ Social fund abolished and introduction of local welfare assistance schemes ○ <u>Decreasing opportunity to appeal benefits sanctions</u> ○ <u>Proof of pregnancy requirements and sanctions</u> ○ Short term benefits advancements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Removal of wellbeing payments ○ <u>Fit for work tests</u> ○ Reduced disabled child element or severely disabled child element for universal credit, for third child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cuts to mental health services (and children’s mental health services) ○ Reduction in LBT specific health services ○ Cuts to alcohol and drugs services ○ Increase in waiting times for gender reassignment services
<p>Families / Children</p>	<p>Employment/ unemployment/ precarious employment</p>	<p>Housing</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Local authority budget cuts ○ Changes to free childcare system ○ Cuts to leaving care services ○ Rising private and public childcare costs ○ Working tax credits changes ○ 2 child tax credits limit ○ Child Benefit Frozen, increases capped 1%, removed for higher earners ○ Child Tax Credit removed for middle-to-higher earners, baby element abolished, ○ Cuts to services for children’s play ○ Children’s mental health services cut and transferred to school counsellors ○ Cuts to children’s social services ○ Overpayments and sanctions ○ Health in Pregnancy Grant Abolished ○ Parenting Order / Education Supervision Order/ School Attendance Orders ○ School attendance fine/ prosecution ○ Child Trust Fund Abolished ○ Planned write off of owed child maintenance ○ Statutory Maternity Pay Increase capped 1% ○ <u>Care home cuts</u> ○ Maternity allowances capped at 1% ○ Sure Start Maternity Grant restricted to first children and amount frozen ○ Closure of sure start centers and services ○ Closure of children’s centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rise in zero hours and temporary contracts ○ No national living wage for under 25s ○ Cuts to employment Support Allowance ○ In-work conditionality ○ Conditionality for job seekers allowance ○ JSA delays, conditionality and penalties ○ Public sector redundancies and job losses ○ Threats of redundancies ○ Low pay on the rise ○ Rises in unpaid/ low paid care work ○ Rises in underemployment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Under occupancy penalty / bedroom tax ○ Right to buy scheme ○ <u>Housing benefit cap extension</u> ○ Housing and Planning Bill ○ Reduction in social housing availability ○ Council tax reduction scheme ○ Intentionality policy ○ Homelessness application process with local authorities ○ Rise in evictions and threat of ○ Private rental advertising (no DSS/ guarantor) ○ Decreasing conditions of properties (social, housing association and private) ○ Rent arrears conditions and sanctions ○ Cuts to homelessness services ○ Temporary social housing tenancies / probationary <u>Fixed term/ renewable tenancies FTTS</u> ○ Phasing out of lifetime tenancies –to five year fixed-term tenancies ○ Cuts to specialist housing (mental health, older people, domestic violence, LGBT) ○ Reduced LGBT outreach and advice services

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Cuts to foster care services including LGBT foster care programs o Family element Child Tax Credits and 1st child premium for UC abolished 		
Migrants rights	Other Cuts	Related
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Employment restrictions o Conditions for residence o Right to remain/ reside process o Implementation of daily allowance (asylum seekers) o Immigration Act 2014 o Restricted access to health services (temporary migrants and undocumented migrants) o Landlord checks non UK nationals o Habitual residency o Evidence of ‘seeking employment’ & ‘genuine chance of being engaged’ & ‘genuine prospect of work’ o Restrictions JSA, housing, child benefit o ‘emergency break’ measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Cuts to legal aid o Cuts to policing budgets o Pension benefit reductions and delays o Cuts to arts and heritage o Street light diming o Closure of libraries o Cuts to public budget for parks & open space o <u>Cuts to charity and advice services</u> o Cuts to government charity funding o Cuts to women and LGBT specific charity services o Public transport privatization o Closure of community centers and youth centers o Cuts to sport and leisure budgets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Rise in state pension age o Brexit o Tuition Fees rise o Fuel poverty -rising costs (food, energy), ‘poverty premiums’ o Rise in doorstep/ loan shark and very high interest loans o Rising xenophobia/ racism o Extension of statutory supervision to short-sentenced prisoners and intensive community punishments/ core punitive elements o Supervision sanctions, fines, unpaid work, curfew and return to custody o The Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 o Proposals to replace Human Rights Act 1998 with a new British bill of rights

Austerity and Sexual and Reproductive Justice

Women and girls have been significantly affected by austerity measures in the UK. A number of reports in recent years have shown how austerity measures, and subsequent changes to welfare, health, housing and disability policy, have impacted women and girls, their communities and their families. A report by UNISON^{xvii} in 2014 shared some key findings related to the impact of cuts and austerity on women. The report, and others^{xviii}, have shown how austerity has meant women are less safe, more vulnerable, more at risk of violence, stigma, discrimination and coercion, are cut off from communities, their families and services, are less healthy and happy, more stressed and anxious, have been driven further into relative poverty and extreme poverty, and that they cannot fully enjoy and exercise their rights and their access to justice. Austerity and related policies that focus on reducing national deficit by cutting public and social services, has severely impacted Sexual and Reproductive Justice in the UK, in particular for young women, migrant women, women of colour, disabled women and LBT women^{xix}. Austerity and related measures outlined above, have impacted women’s;

Health (physical, mental) // Access to SRH services // Wellbeing // Pleasure and happiness // Opportunities // Access to key health, mental health, sexual violence and support services // Freedom to make choices // Autonomy // Meaningful and full participation in decision making // Political power // Freedom from discrimination, stigma and coercion // Sexuality // Gender expression // Planning family/ no family // Access to Information // Freedom from violence // Freedom from hunger // Right to Education

Austerity measures have also, through their impact on women, negatively impacted their children's health, freedom from violence and hunger, access to services, education, opportunities and wellbeing.

Holding the UK to account

Sustainable Development Goals

To date the UK government's approach to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at national level has been very much focused on international development. Throughout the SDG negotiations, the UK government were vocal, both globally and nationally^{xx} on their preference to not retain a goal on reducing inequalities in the SDGs. Even though the government pushed the rhetoric around 'leaving no one behind' throughout the negotiations, they took the position that the SDGs should address the shortcomings of the previous Millennium Development Goals, in particular tackling extreme poverty, citing the need for a more streamlined agenda, as the reason to not include addressing inequalities. The responsibility for overseeing the UK's implementation of the agenda has been put with the Secretary for International Development, and with the Department for International Development, despite calls from government committees, Members of Parliament and civil society, that domestic implementation requires cross cutting responsibility across government departments. A report^{xxi} by the House of Commons International Development Committee, on the UK's implementation of the SDGs referred to the need for the UK government to focus on domestic implementation of the SDGs, as well international development and development assistance:

70. Although Ministers from DFID and the Cabinet Office have recently expressed the opinion that the UK is broadly compliant with the Goals already, evidence suggests that there is a need for the UK to assess its performance. For example, areas of the agenda such as inequality (Goal 10) have been highlighted, as the UK figures on income inequality have remained well above the OECD average over the last thirty years. ODI identified both inequality and energy (Goal 7) as areas the Government may need to address.

In relation to austerity, target 10.4 of the SDGs, *Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality*, provides the opportunity to address economic inequalities that impact Sexual and Reproductive Justice in the UK, and to call on the UK government to voluntarily review in an upcoming High Level Political Forum.

The UK is reporting on their implementation of the SDGs through the Voluntary National Review process in 2019. A report will be produced and submitted to the High Level Political Forum mechanism by July 2019.

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – state recommendations 2016

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights *observations*^{xxii} on the sixth periodic report of the UK, included serious concerns about the *'disproportionate, adverse impact that austerity measures introduced in 2010 are having on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights by disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups'*. The Committee also stated that it was *'concerned that the State party has not undertaken a comprehensive assessment of the cumulative impact of such measures on the realization of economic, social and cultural rights in a way that is recognized by civil society and national independent monitoring mechanisms'*. The Committee also shared their *'deep concern'* with the various changes and cuts to benefits through welfare reform, in particular, the benefits cap, the bedroom tax and reduction in child tax credits. It recommended that the UK *'review the entitlement*

conditions and reverse the cuts in social security benefits introduced by the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016', and to also 'review the use of sanctions in relation to social security benefits and ensure that they are used proportionately and are subject to prompt and independent dispute resolution mechanisms'.

About Us

[RESURJ](#) is a global alliance of feminists under 40 years of age, working for Sexual and Reproductive Justice through national, regional and international advocacy and movement building in countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe and the Middle East.

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Useful Resources

tuc.org.uk

inworkpoverty.wordpress.com/

thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk

wbg.org.uk

katebelgrave.com

welfareconditionality.ac.uk

cpag.org.uk

jrf.org.uk

poverty.ac.uk

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