

## **Written evidence from Imkaan [CCI0043]**

### **About Imkaan**

Imkaan is the UK's only umbrella organisation for frontline violence against women and girls (VAWG) organisations led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women. We have 38 members who specialise in supporting Black and minoritised women affected by multiple, intersecting forms of violence, as well as 23 new grassroots organisations supported through our Movement Building work. Through these frontline organisations Imkaan indirectly supports 200,000 Black and minoritised women and girls. We undertake research, advocacy and policy work from a Black and minoritised feminist intersectional perspective.

Imkaan uses a human rights and social justice framework to achieve systemic change through the inclusion of Black and minoritised women and girls in all aspects of society, including by promoting their participation, representation and involvement.

- ***What assessments have been made of community cohesion in the UK in a local and national context?***

During the wave of far-right violence last summer, Imkaan members – frontline, specialist 'by and for' Black and minoritised VAWG organisations – reported serious distress among their staff and the women they support and fear that their services, including specialist refuges, would be attacked. This fear was exacerbated by the targeting of immigration centres which many 'by and for' services partner with.

Despite this, 'by and for' services reported that local authorities and police forces were not sharing local intelligence on far-right threats, instead speaking to male 'community leaders' and male-led community groups who do not have expertise in supporting Black and minoritised women who, particularly visibly Muslim women, are among those most vulnerable to far-right violence. Within this context, 'by and for' Black and minoritised services have experienced chronic and disproportionate under-funding. This has directly led to an incendiary combination of poorly supported Black and minoritised communities having to contend with increased radicalised white extremism.

**Recommendation:** We call for the government to instruct local authorities and Police and Crime Commissioners to actively seek out their local 'by and for' services, find out their needs and ensure that local police forces are cascading local intelligence to them promptly so that services can act accordingly to keep staff and survivors safe. This would be in line with their Public Sector Equality Duty to ensure that the needs of Black and minoritised women and girls are not neglected in safety arrangements as well as the development of community cohesion plans.

- ***What are the primary barriers and threats to community cohesion?***

Several governments have lacked a coherent strategy for addressing systemic and institutional racism and has demonstrated a troubling lack of care and compassion towards Black and minoritised communities. This surge in far-right violence is the direct results of years of hostile environment policies, racist political rhetoric targeting vulnerable communities, and the government's failure to genuinely commit to ending racism. This is a key barrier and threat to 'community cohesion'. There has also been a failure to address material inequalities that have fractured and deprived communities of the assets and resources they so desperately need.

A focus on community cohesion fails to address the decades-long dehumanisation of migrants and refugees through racist, hostile environment policies and segregation of asylum seekers in accommodation marking out their status and exposing them to racist attack. We also know that the asylum process is plagued by disrespectful treatment, arbitrary delays, poor decision-making, and worsened by the collapse of Legal Aid. This is the abhorrent situation of the individuals that were in hotels set alight and Imkaan and its members recognise the significant role that political rhetoric plays in the violence and fear experienced by asylum seekers.

It is painfully clear to us that this racially motivated violence and Islamophobia has not materialised overnight but has been seeded and monetised by social media companies, before being stoked, unchallenged, minimised and finally ignored by politicians across the political spectrum as well as mainstream media over many years.

- ***How can social media impact community cohesion?***

Social media can have positive and negative effects on community cohesion. On one hand, during Covid-19, 'by and for' organisations used social media and technology to connect with women trapped in their homes amidst violence and supported them through tough times as evidenced in Imkaan findings (Banga & Roy, 2020)<sup>1</sup>. This has also been found by Glitch where social media is used to challenge abuse and celebrate Black women depicting the power and joy of Black online communities (Glitch, 2023)<sup>2</sup>.

However, we also know that the far-right used social media to organise last summer's attacks across the country as investigated<sup>3</sup> by Hope Not Hate. We have since continued to see the far-right weaponise the serious issue of VAWG to foment racist hate online with respect to child sexual exploitation and abuse and 'grooming gangs'. This has potentially deeply serious implications for the safety of Black and minoritised women and their communities, particularly visibly Muslim women.

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<sup>1</sup><https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f7d9f4addc689717e6ea200/t/5f9bfa3d5ade2b74d814d2d9/1614903677262/2020+7C+The+Impact+of+the+Dual+Pandemics+-+Violence+Against+Women+and+Girls+and+COVID-19+on+Black+and+Minoritised+Women+and+Girls>

<sup>2</sup> [https://glitchcharity.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Glitch-Misogynoir-Report\\_Final\\_18Jul\\_v5\\_Single-Pages.pdf](https://glitchcharity.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Glitch-Misogynoir-Report_Final_18Jul_v5_Single-Pages.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://hopenothate.org.uk/2025/01/06/twisted-firestarter-southport-wake-up-founder-jailed-thanks-to-hope-not-hate-investigation/>

It is painfully clear to us that this racially motivated violence and Islamophobia has not materialised overnight but has been seeded and monetised by social media companies, before being stoked, unchallenged, minimised and finally ignored by politicians across the political spectrum as well as mainstream media over many years. Moreover, the recent far-right violence has been followed by a wave of disinformation.

Furthermore, we know that for Black and minoritised women, the impact of online hate, is even more pronounced. Findings from EVAW<sup>4</sup> show that:

- Women are 27 times more likely than men to be harassed online.
- 1 in 5 women have experienced online harassment or abuse.
- Black women are 84% more likely to receive abusive or problematic tweets than white women.

Research by Glitch<sup>5</sup> also found that out of almost one million posts about women collected on five major social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Gab and 4chan, 20% were highly toxic. This amounts to over 1000 highly toxic posts per day. They found over 9000 more highly toxic posts about Black women than white women in a data set which highlights the way that Black women are more likely to be racialised, i.e. referred to in reference to their race or ethnicity.

**Recommendation:** This clearly illustrates the need for social media companies to be held accountable and to act on racist and misogynistic hate online.

- ***What can be done at a local and national level to improve community cohesion?***

It is important that a ‘community cohesion’ approach is not uncritical or the singular approach. Such proposals often blame Black and minoritised communities for ‘failing to integrate’, especially Muslim communities, which can exacerbate the very problems they purport to solve. In light of the recent far-right violence last summer, such blame would be absurd and highly inappropriate given the racist targeting minoritised communities. It is important that attacks are not minimised or that Black and minoritised communities continue to be left unprotected when they feel most vulnerable as communities. Furthermore, these attacks placed visibly Muslim women at particular risk, yet there was reluctance to clearly identify them as Islamophobic.

Additionally, it is important for the government to acknowledge and address how immigration status and citizenship have been used to legitimise the dehumanisation and othering of minoritised communities. The government must acknowledge that this far-right threat has not appeared overnight and requires long-term work to defeat it and keep our communities safe. Furthermore, many of our member services, having supported women who

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<sup>4</sup> [End online abuse | End Violence Against Women](#)

<sup>5</sup> <https://glitchcharity.co.uk/research/>

have had partners that are linked to far-right extremist groups, have warned of this threat for years, only to be ignored.

### Costs of the threat of far-right harm

Imkaan has validated our members' experiences and voices, coupled with our strategic insight and written to funders, institutional philanthropists and local commissioners urging them to make short term, unrestricted hardship funding available immediately to help our members recoup unexpected costs associated with their emergency responses to the racial attacks and threats of attacks across the UK.

Black and minoritised women and girls using 'by and for' VAWG services who are already traumatised are now experiencing an additional level of trauma because of the racialised, anti-migrant, and Islamophobic violence, and Imkaan members have directly informed us of the significant practical and psychological impact on service delivery and mental wellbeing. Members cited that:

- They have incurred additional costs, as survivors who would normally use public transport are afraid to do, fearing they will be targeted by right wing extremists; this has led to increased use of taxis paid for by the member organisation.
- Staff are not able to attend appointments alone, therefore requiring a doubling-up of human resources and associated costs.
- Summer activities for survivor families and children have had to be cancelled, resulting in a loss of deposits or entire payments and, more worryingly, reducing opportunities for survivors to socialise and take advantage of respite support over the school holidays.
- There are particularly high levels of concern around refuge provision, particularly where women wearing Hijabs are easily identifiable and targeted by racist perpetrators.
- Staff and survivors are reporting a noticeable increase in verbal racist abuse (often highly vitriolic) when they are in public spaces.
- All these issues (and this is by no means an exhaustive list) have impacted massively on the mental health of the staff of Black and minoritised by and for VAWG organisations, their survivors, and their children. However, there is limited capacity to access mental health support over and above the usual supervisory practice available to staff; and this is in the context of a mental health system that is already failing in the UK, with waiting lists of up to 5 years for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in some counties.

Safety is always a major concern for frontline VAWG services with women living in fear of reprisals from perpetrators, and these current attacks have heightened the risk of compounding racist and Islamophobic violence for 'by and for' VAWG organisations. This has necessitated increased safety planning, risk assessments and to fund the additional security measures. This comes at a time when 'by and for' services have been decimated by over a decade of austerity, having been disproportionately impacted by competitive, one-size-fits all commissioning models.

In response to the hostile and unsafe environment for ‘by and for’ services to continue their vital, lifesaving work during the far-right riots, Imkaan introduced the Contingency Fund, supported by the Oak Foundation’s Issues Affecting Women and Girls Team and their intermediary partners, Global Dialogue and Project Tallawah, to address these barriers so that members could continue providing their services in a safe way.

The formation of this fund followed a callout to Imkaan funders last summer, asking them to recognise the significant needs of the ‘by and for’ sector at a time when support from the government was lacking. Our calls to the philanthropic sector included:

- Cover our members unforeseen costs associated with the racist, Islamophobic and anti-migrant attacks, that some have had to spend from their reserves.
- Ensure our members can sustain their crucial services during this challenging time.
- Enable members to create hardship funds for their survivors impacted by the attacks, threatened attacks and increased racism.
- Enable Imkaan’s member organisations to invest in trauma-informed therapeutic support for their staff and survivors
- Allow our members to invest in safety training to increase their confidence and improve safety mechanisms.

We have worked with some funders, not only through the Contingency Fund, but also have presented on the impact of the riots on frontline ‘by and for’ services at key strategic funder conferences. In this way, the third sector and philanthropic sector have been forced to step in and support local communities, particularly Black and minoritised women, when government support was absent.

The Contingency Fund, although only providing small grants, has so far been used by organisations to provide safe working environment for their staff and women accessing services. These include upgrading security systems and transport and creative resources that help women process the racist trauma of the far-right violence.

*“We cancelled office activities during the racist riots due to feeling unsafe in our area. Our central office location is accessible by the public and the video intercom system will ensure we are able to see visitors before we let them in. This will provide peace of mind to members of staff, especially when lone working.”*

Although this fund was initially set up to meet the immediate needs of our members during the summer’s riots, it is clear from ongoing racist rhetoric online and the far-right’s weaponisation of VAWG, that Black and minoritised women continue to be vulnerable to racist and xenophobic harm. For this reason, we have kept this fund open

**Recommendation:** We therefore recommend that there should be ringfenced, sustainable long-term funding for ‘by and for’ Black and minoritised services that takes account of the additional security costs these services are facing in light of rising far-right violence, so that they can pay for additional protective measures and mental health support without impacting the lifesaving services they provide.

**Recommendation:** We also call on the Minister to work with regional and local government to establish a ringfenced hardship fund for Black and minoritised communities affected by the ongoing threat and impact of far-right violence, so that they can access necessary support to feel safe, rebuild and connect with communities and recover. This should be part of wider investment in a significant community cohesion strategy to redress the damage to community relations created by “the hostile environment” migration policies and the Windrush Scandal; the ongoing over-policing of Black communities; and systemic discrimination in statutory agencies.

- *What examples are there of best practice which has positively impacted community cohesion?*

While most attempts at ‘community cohesion’ typically involve male supposed ‘community leaders’ or are driven by narrow notions of what certain ‘communities’ look like, specialist ‘by and for’ Black and minoritised VAWG organisations, play a vital role in working with communities they are rooted in and ensuring Black and minoritised women and girls are supported in society.

Economic, social, emotional and physical trauma in women experiencing violence create further barriers for their cohesion. For Black and minoritised women “community cohesion” is even more complex due to intersecting layers of race, social, economic, and immigration status, culture, systemic barriers and structural violence. These intersecting factors make them even more vulnerable to alienation. The divides and exclusion are further broadened not only for women but for the collective strength of these communities when the system fails to support women in breaking these cycles. ‘By and for’ organisations play a vital role in bridging this gap by supporting women in the community through various engagement activities. By recognising and supporting these networks, they can become powerful forces for community cohesion, empowerment, and resistance against violence.

Research by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner<sup>6</sup> found that 67% of Black and minoritised survivors stated that they wanted “to receive support delivered ‘by and for’ their own community.” Further to this, 78% of Black and minoritised survivors that 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.” Evidence found that it was often only when minoritised survivors were able to engage with ‘by and for’ organisations were they able to identify and get the support that they needed.

This research in particular highlighted how the “independence of [‘by and for’] services is critical to build trust, and is highly valued by victims and survivors accessing support. Survivors told us about their fears of statutory services – particularly social services and the Family Court – and how important it was that they felt separated and protected from these bodies in their engagement with specialist support.” Further to this, Imkaan’s research into

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<sup>6</sup> [https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/DAC\\_Mapping-Abuse-Survivors\\_Summary-Report\\_Feb-2023\\_Digital.pdf](https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/DAC_Mapping-Abuse-Survivors_Summary-Report_Feb-2023_Digital.pdf)

Black and minoritised women's experiences of sexual violence<sup>7</sup> found that "support and advocacy from BME organisations (and specialist women's services) led to qualitatively different experiences for women and more positive and proactive responses from the police and other agencies, something that contrasted with their past experiences." This demonstrates the beneficial impact that specialist 'by and for' support can have on victim-survivors' engagement with statutory agencies.

This is because have earlier access to specialist 'by and for' workers that understand the nuances of survivors' lives and the totality of their experiences based on the intersecting impacts of racism and sexism, as well ensuring that they felt respected and understood without discrimination. The intersectional discrimination that minoritised women face also often results in greater complexity, requiring more wide-ranging holistic support, including intersectional advocacy for multiple issues and needs.

However, despite how 'by and for' services are clearly valued, DAC research found that just 51% of Black and minoritised survivors who wanted access to specialist by and for support were able to do so. We believe that long-term, sustainable funding can ensure Black and minoritised women can access the protection and support they deserve.

- ***How should community cohesion be best approached in schools?***

The riots that erupted last summer came during the school holidays, a time when many parents would be taking children out to local parks and other amenities, however these no longer felt safe. Furthermore, parents of Black and minoritised children are concerned for their safety for when they go back to school in September, given the likelihood that this threat will not disappear without considered, concerted action.

Furthermore, given the relationship between far-right ideology, misogyny and VAWG, it is also important that schools embed an intersectional 'whole school approach' to addressing VAWG, involving local experts from 'by and for' VAWG organisations. Additionally, as our 2020 report, *Reclaiming Voice: Minoritised Women and Sexual Violence Key Findings* recommended, "Ministers should make a high priority of ensuring schools understand their duties and implement child protection guidance with due regard for minoritised women/girls to ensure that the disclosures of minoritised girls are heard and responded to appropriately." Furthermore, we believe that this rights-based approach to tackling VAWG and misogyny is a much more effective way to address the root causes of harm than a focus on redefining extremism. We reject any such securitisation of VAWG or women's rights that a terrorism/extremism lens would bring.

We believe that the Prevent Agenda is not an effective tool in addressing far-right (or any form of) extremism and is not effective in promoting community cohesion. This is because of evidence that suggests a Prevent approach has encouraged over-surveillance and over-

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

criminalisation of Black and minoritised communities, particularly targeting Muslim communities. The encroachment of surveillance in vital services that should be places of trust has the effect of alienating and driving people away from accessing support. This is the case in schools and has been found to be the case in attempts to drive Prevent through specialist VAWG services as well. We would therefore strongly discourage any attempts to further Prevent or any similar programme.

**Recommendation:** Additional funding must be provided to enhance anti-racist teaching in schools and in non-school settings to address the radicalisation of children and young people as part of a holistic plan to help prevent further violence in the future. This should be reflected in the curriculum review.

*January 2025*