

Written evidence submitted by End the Virus of Racism

Summary

End the Virus of Racism has gathered information that shows reported hate crime and racism affecting East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) communities in the UK, has increased since the COVID crisis broke out. This increase has been sustained until now. Publicly released data on this lags behind our findings, thus the last time there are verifiable figures, is from 2020. For instance, in the first quarter of 2020, there appeared to be a 300% increase on previous years (see this October 2020 [report from Protection Approaches](#)).

This is the scale of the problem we are facing, but we are seeing some major gaps in the way the Online Safety Bill is being consulted with ESEA communities and have concerns with the safety implications of the policy developments on our communities.

About End the Virus of Racism

End the Virus of Racism (EVR) are an anti-racist campaign group, working to tackle structural racism and inequalities affecting East & Southeast Asian communities. This is in the context of rising racism and discrimination towards all minoritised groups, with whom we seek to build allyship and solidarity. We are a registered Community Interest Company (13279897). For more information please see <https://www.endthevirusofracism.com>.

This submission was prepared by Hau-Yu Tam, Head of Campaigns at End the Virus of Racism. Hau-Yu is a community worker and campaigner who studied for an MA in International Studies and Diplomacy at SOAS. She is a co-founding member of EVR and formerly its Interim Chair. Previously she has worked as a management trainee within local government, as a Students' Union sabbatical officer, and in various roles in charities and the education sector.

For further details about this submission please contact Hau-Yu Tam at endracementvirus@gmail.com.

Our responses

Question 2. Is it necessary to have an explicit definition and process for determining harm to children and adults in the Online Safety Bill, and what should it be?

- Yes, it is important to explicitly define the term “harmful” in the new bill. Without a clear definition the bill will effectively outsource decision making on what is and isn't permitted to tech companies.
- Intensified Anti-Asian racism, in the context of rising racism towards all minoritised communities, across the UK and globally, is not only a trend reflected in person but also online. Research conducted by [AI startup L1ght](#) in April 2020 yielded the following worrying statistics: that there had been a 900% increase in hate speech on Twitter directed towards China and the Chinese during the breaking of the

coronavirus crisis. Furthermore, there had been a 200% increase in traffic to hate sites and specific posts against Asians, 70% increase in hate between kids and teens during online chats and 40% increase in toxicity on popular gaming platforms, such as Discord.

- We believe that communities and community organisations should be widely engaged in this definition-shaping process and the process for determining harm to children and adults. End the Virus of Racism (EVR) is one of very few organisations serving East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) communities in the UK, we have established ourselves as a recognised advocacy group, and our network is well connected to ESEA communities especially in London and other major cities across England and Scotland. Our primary mission is to tackle structural racism and inequalities affecting our communities. We are therefore well placed to contribute to this process, but would need to be given the platform to do so.
- The threat of large fines will create a commercial incentive to over-censor which will disproportionately impact communities such as ours which have been historically censored, or not even heard.
- The vague definition of harm and the threat of massive financial sanctions provide hate groups with a powerful weapon with which to lobby platforms to censor the speech of those they don't agree with.

Question 3. Does the draft Bill focus enough on the ways tech companies could be encouraged to consider safety and/or the risk of harm in platform design and the systems and processes that they put in place?

- The bill does not focus enough on the risks of the use of algorithmic moderation systems which it necessitates. The Bill encourages social media companies to use AI algorithms that over-censor ESEA voices. The Bill needs to encourage companies to focus on this when designing new processes.
- A 'HateCheck' study tested the efficiency of hate speech detection models using 29 key functionalities. They found that the models tested with HateCheck had fundamental weaknesses including wrongly blocking rebuttals to hate speech and bias when it comes to certain groups. ([Hate Check 2021](#)).
- Discriminatory bias can be found in the unequal way in which content is moderated across different languages. For example, content is twice as likely to be deleted if it is in Arabic or Urdu than if it is in English. ([House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee 2021](#), page 15).
- An online safety bill which does not take ESEA voices and the experiences of our communities into consideration, is not a bill which is prioritising our community safety first. In our jointly written ['Response to the Call for Evidence on Ethnic Disparities and Inequality in the UK' report](#), written in January 2021, we wrote: "The power and reach of social media should be harnessed to highlight effective initiatives directed at improving ESEA representation and to coordinate responses from the ESEA community when direct action needs to be taken. For example, much more needs to be done to protect the ESEA community from online abuse and harms (companies like Instagram and Facebook do not treat racist language towards ESEA people with the same gravity as racism towards people of other ethnic backgrounds). We need zero-tolerance of direct racism and discrimination on social media platforms. Simple action along these lines will go a long way to reduce the level of discrimination and

direct racism experienced by ESEA people and to further the UK's mission to be an "inclusive country of equal opportunity and representation."