

Post-Brexit racism in the UK:

Experiences of Eastern European and Muslim communities

1. Dr. Shobha Das, MBE, is an international human rights expert with extensive experience of anti-hate-crime advocacy, policy and training. She most recently worked with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva.
2. She makes this submission to highlight views of Eastern European and Muslim communities about post-Brexit hate crime in London, Bristol, and Birmingham. She hopes the submission will help the Select Committee to give informed advice to Government on protecting minority rights in the UK.

I. Executive Summary

3. Eastern Europeans and Muslims faced higher levels of hate crime immediately after Brexit. This was not a new phenomenon for Muslims, who have faced increased attacks after other events too.
4. Though the level of incidents has since reduced, both communities have a heightened fear of being targeted for hate crime.
5. Interviewees reported that perpetrators were from various ethnic groups, including white British, dual heritage, and Caribbean.
6. Most incidents of hate crime go unreported. Victims lack confidence in being able to identify a hate crime, lack knowledge of their rights as victims, often do not know how to report incidents, or feel the process is too cumbersome and does not yield results.
7. Some immigrants have decided to return to their countries of origin as a result of the political uncertainty caused by Brexit. Some potential immigrants have decided against coming to the UK as a result of reports of post-Brexit hate crime.
8. Pro-active work by statutory agencies is uneven. In London and Bristol, interviewees felt the police should be doing more to raise awareness of hate crime, and to enable victims to report more easily. In Birmingham, statutory agencies are beginning to provide awareness-raising for the Eastern European community on hate crime and how to report it, but more can be done.
9. The media sometimes contribute to building anti-immigrant feelings and Islamophobia. This makes ethnic minorities more vulnerable to 'revenge' hate crime.

II. Methodology

10. This submission has been researched and written by Dr Shobha Das based on interviews with Eastern European (Polish, Slovak, and Latvian) and Muslim (Asian, North African and Somali) individuals and organisations, as well as victim support agencies and the police. Research was conducted by phone and through meetings in London, Bristol and Birmingham. In all, about 47 people were contacted. Some were spoken to as members of the community, and some due to their affiliation with organisations – 31 organisations were contacted.
11. Calls were also made to hate crime victim helplines identified through a web search. Unfortunately some did not respond to our voicemail/ email messages. It is unclear how victims of hate crime access support from them.
12. The submission does not claim to represent the experience of minority communities in the UK as a whole, but provides insights into the hate crime experiences of some members of this community.

III. The population

13. The Eastern European community in Britain numbers in excess of 1 millionⁱ, of whom 850,000 are from Poland. The largest numbers live in London, with significant populations also in Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester, Leicester, Sheffield and Cardiff.
14. As per 2011 census data, Britain's Muslim community numbers around 2.7 million, which is 4.8% of the total populationⁱⁱ. Over half this number are of Asian ethnicity, with smaller groups of African, white, Arab and mixed ethnicity. There is no disaggregated data of the Somali population or other black Muslim populations as they are counted under the larger category of black African.

IV. Prevalence of hate crime

a. Official data

15. On 29 August 2016, Arkadiusz Jóźwik, a Polish man, was murdered on the streets of Harlow, London. Speaking at the scene of the murder, the victim's brother indicated that Arkadiusz's death was part of 'a surge in hatred towards eastern Europeans after Britain's vote to leave the European Union'.ⁱⁱⁱ An anti-racist 'march of silence' is being organized in Harlow on 3 September 2016.
16. Stop Hate UK have seen a 61% increase in calls to their helpline after the EU referendum. The biggest rise was in hate crime motivated by race.^{iv}
17. Metropolitan police figures show that racist and religious hate crime in London was higher in the 12 months to July 2016 (15,481 hate crimes) than the 12 months to July 2015 (13,041). Islamophobic incidents rose from 816 to 1,313.^v The same period saw a rise in other crime such as homicide, violence against the person, rape, gun crime, motor vehicle crime, and domestic crime. It is unclear whether rising hate crime is part of a general trend of rising crime, or whether there is something else at play here. It is also worth noting that in this period, anti-Semitic crimes have fallen from

- 503 to 468. It would be helpful to understand from the police why one form of hate crime has fallen where others have risen.
18. Police only collect ethnicity data as per census categories. Therefore the extent of hate crime against some communities, for instance Eastern Europeans and Somalis, remains unknown.
 19. Birmingham police received 101 reports of hate crime from 24 June to 30 June, up from 76 in the previous seven days. However, a higher number of hate crimes (111) was reported in the week of 24-30 June in 2015^{vi}, so the significance of the increased numbers this year needs clarification.
 20. Bristol police issued an 'open letter' from the Chief Constable and the Police Commissioner^{vii} about a 'troublesome increase' in hate crime after Brexit.
 21. According to Alex Raikes, Strategic Director of Stand Against Racism and Inequality (SARI) in Bristol, there has been a significant increase in hate crime after the EU referendum with Eastern Europeans and Africans worst affected. She says Eastern Europeans in Avon and Somerset 'have not been targeted (before) like they have since BREXIT and it has been a real shock to their system.'

b. Primary data collected during this research

22. It is impossible to accurately estimate how much hate crime takes place in the UK as most incidents appear to go unreported.
23. Most, though not all, interviewees during this research had seen an increase in hate crime immediately following Brexit, only a very small number of which had been reported. The few who had not themselves suffered any incidents knew someone who had, and all were anxious about further attacks as the Brexit story unfolds.
24. The types of post-Brexit incidents reported to us by interviewees include verbal abuse (eg. 'We've voted out, time to pack your bags,' 'We got our country back, you don't belong here,'), bricks thrown through home windows, assaults, spitting, bottles/ stones/ drinks thrown at victims, discrimination at work, and ostracisation.
25. Hate crime occurs around homes, workplaces, on trains and buses, in parks and shops, on social media, and on streets. Some perpetrators are random strangers, others are neighbours and colleagues.
26. Interviewees reported that perpetrators were from various ethnic groups, including white British, dual heritage, and Caribbean.

Eastern Europeans

27. Eastern Europeans in Bristol and Birmingham have been shocked by the increased hate crime since Brexit; they have not seen anything like it before. In some parts of London, we did not hear of increased racism but there were definite indications of it in other areas.
28. Many Eastern Europeans working in low skilled occupations have faced harassment and intimidation from colleagues. Due to being on uncertain contracts, they are afraid to challenge or report racism for fear of losing work. In Birmingham, we heard reports of Eastern Europeans verbally abused by British colleagues on 24 June. Colleagues said things like, 'We

- didn't think you'd come in today, you should be packing your bags,' or simply, 'You're out!' Some Polish men working in a construction company were told by their boss the day after the referendum, 'We're out of the EU so I don't have to pay you what I pay my English staff.' They did not challenge it as they have no idea if their boss was within his rights.
29. Malgorzata Adamowska of the Polish Expats Association in Birmingham says there are many anecdotal reports of post-Brexit racism against Poles in warehouses, construction companies etc. While incidents are increasing, reporting is not. She feels the xenophobic tone of the referendum campaign created an environment where 'people who had racist opinions but had until then kept it to themselves, felt that they could now legitimately express it.'
 30. This view was widely shared by our interviewees. The UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination has said that the referendum campaign 'was marked by divisive, anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric'.^{viii}
 31. Malgorzata Adamowska feels many lower skilled Poles working in the UK accept racism as a normal part of living here.
 32. Eastern European shops and other commercial premises in Dagenham (which voted Leave) told us they had not been targeted for hate crime.
 33. In Southall many Asian residents saw Eastern Europeans as unwanted immigrants who came to the UK to claim benefits or to take jobs which historically had been taken by Asians. Some perceived Eastern Europeans as engaging in drugs, prostitution and other illegal activity, and disrespecting Asian culture. The result of the EU referendum has made them feel their views are now more mainstream and accepted.

Muslims

34. Hate crime is part of everyday life for the UK's Muslim communities. While they did face increased hate crime since Brexit, they say this was nothing new. They have suffered increased hate crime after 9/11, the Paris attacks, the Brussels bombings, and the Nice attack, *inter alia*.
35. According to Miqdaad Versi, Assistant Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, there has been a significant increase in Islamophobia since the EU referendum. He personally knows of many instances of hate crime, including verbal abuse and death threats, but says almost none were reported to police. He is also aware of significant increase in online hate crime^{ix}.
36. Touria E., a hijab-wearing Muslim woman of Moroccan ethnicity, was shouted at on a street by a South East Asian woman, 'This is a Christian country, not a Muslim country. You should go to a Muslim country.' She says it is not only Muslims who are suffering; many white Spanish friends have been targeted for hate crime and been told to 'go back where they came from.'
37. Touria also noted that she had found racism in Spain much worse. She says she generally feels much safer wearing the hijab here than in Spain.
38. Interviewees say hate crime is now 'back to normal.' They emphasized that this does not mean incidents have stopped, just that they have reduced to earlier levels. Miqdaad Versi of the Muslim Council of Britain warns that

‘although the manifestation of racism after Brexit may have calmed down, the hate itself hasn’t gone away.’

V. Impact of post-Brexit hate crime

39. Many interviewees report being constantly on guard after the recent increase in hate crimes. They say one-off incidents of hate crime make them feel shocked, anxious and upset, but repeated hate crimes make them feel insecure, powerless, angry, unsupported, unconfident, and unwelcome.
40. Interviewees expressed a need for better support for hate crime victims. None knew of any available helplines or support agencies, except for clients of SARI in Bristol. Many generic community organisations who receive disclosures of hate crime are unable to provide effective support, either because their resources are too stretched, or because they themselves are not clear what to do.
41. Dana Klamparova of the Slovak Club in Birmingham says that some Slovak families already living in the UK were destabilised by Brexit and its political implications, and decided to return to Slovakia. Further, she says the increased hate crime has been reported widely in Slovakia, sometimes ‘blown out of proportion’. This has made potential new migrants anxious about coming to the UK.
42. Mags Zielnska of the Polish Catholic Centre in Birmingham said that Poles who were abused by white British colleagues after the referendum thought, ‘You work somewhere for years and years, you make friends with colleagues, then you hear racially abusive things from them, you wonder if they hated you all the time.’ Such incidents, she felt, create a feeling of ‘us and them.’ She thinks the media depiction of Eastern Europeans as either stealing British jobs or stealing benefits is unfair and inaccurate, and creates resentment and conflict.
43. She feels hate crime against immigrants is growing because of economic frustrations. In Poland too, she says, frustrated people are turning towards radical nationalist movements, turning against refugees and migrants. She says, ‘It’s like 1930s Germany – there’s frustration, someone comes along and offers a ‘solution’ and people buy it.’
44. Ayesha A., a hijab-wearing Muslim woman of Bangladeshi ethnicity, has never knowingly experienced a hate crime (apart from hostile looks while using public transport). Despite this, because she hears so much about hate crime in the community, she feels that sooner or later, something will happen to her too. So she is always alert to it.

VI. Reporting

45. From what interviewees tell us, most hate crime is not reported to the authorities. Of the 80-90 hate crimes that were disclosed to us during this research, only 7 or 8 had been reported to police – and some only with support from agencies like SARI. Others had been reported to community and voluntary agencies but not recorded.

46. Stop Hate UK's Rose Simkin estimates that 'about 80-99% of hate crimes go unreported.'^x
47. Almost none of our interviewees were confident they could even define hate crime. This gives us an immediate clue as to why reporting is low.
48. Language is a barrier for many minorities. If the police provided consistent access to telephone interpretation, that could help improve reporting.
49. Malgorzata Adamowska of the Polish Expats Association in Birmingham said victims wanting to report incidents can:
 - a. Call the police – they find this difficult if their English is poor. They find automated phone menus intimidating and impossible to navigate.
 - b. Go into a police station – due to police funding cuts, there is only 1 staffed police station serving a large area and victims could wait hours to be seen. As this would mean taking time off work, they simply can't afford to report.
50. None of the interviewees had used online reporting tools like True Vision or Tell MAMA – only a couple of people had even heard about them.
51. Sagal Bafo, a young Somali woman, says Somalis suffer so many racist incidents that stopping to report each one would be a full-time job. While she acknowledges the importance of challenging and reporting incidents, often her advice to fellow Somalis is, 'let it go, move on.'
52. Valeria F., a Latvian woman, felt that understanding of hate crime is low in the Latvian community. She was personally not sure what a hate crime was, how it could be reported, and what the police could do about it. She feels reporting may increase if knowledge does.
53. Dana Klamparova of the Slovak Club says awareness about hate crime and victims' rights is low in the Slovak community, even amongst the highly educated such as doctors and dentists. And so victims do not report. She welcomed the training offered by statutory authorities in Birmingham in August, but said it might have been more useful before the referendum. The community would then have been better prepared, less taken by surprise, and more able to report incidents.
54. Ayesha A. was not sure she would report incidents. She was not clear exactly what was worthy of reporting, and what the police would do. She was intimidated by the idea of going to court and having to face the perpetrator again but felt that with enough support, she could do it.

VII. Recommendations

55. Police should:
 - a. clarify whether the rise in hate crime is of a piece with the rise in overall crime, or has a separate significance.
 - b. maintain disaggregated data on victims' ethnicity to better understand which communities are being targeted, and design interventions appropriately.
 - c. seek to reduce barriers to reporting, including by improving staff diversity and providing culturally sensitive services (including better interpretation facilities).

- d. improve public awareness of what a hate crime is, and strongly promote zero tolerance for perpetrators.
56. Government should:
- a. support the setting up of third party reporting centres and specialist support agencies for victims of hate crime.
 - b. be more sophisticated when engaging minority communities. Do not assume they are homogeneous monolithic blocks where one part of a perceived community can speak for all parts. Muslim communities made this point emphatically and repeatedly – no one Muslim organization can credibly speak for all Muslim communities in the UK.
 - c. initiate more community cohesion schemes to break down social and cultural barriers, reduce suspicion, and improve understanding.

ⁱ Swinford, Steven (2016) *More than 1million eastern European migrants are now working in Britain, official figures reveal for first time*, The Telegraph 17 August 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/17/more-than-1million-eastern-european-migrants-are-now-working-in/>

ⁱⁱ Muslim Council of Britain (2015), *British Muslims in Numbers*, http://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MCBCensusReport_2015.pdf p24

ⁱⁱⁱ Quinn, Ben, *Six teenage boys arrested over death of Polish man in Essex*, 30 August 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/aug/30/five-teenage-boys-arrested-after-man-dies-following-attack-in-essex>

^{iv} http://www.stophateuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Stop-Hate-UK_EU-Referendum-Report_V2a_Email.pdf (accessed 31 August 2016)

^v <http://www.met.police.uk/crimefigures/datatable.php?borough=lx&period=year> (accessed 24 August 2016)

^{vi} <http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/eu-referendum-unleashes-wave-hate-11532708>

^{vii} Avon and Somerset Constabulary (2016) *An Open letter from Avon and Somerset Chief Constable Andy Marsh and PCC Sue Mounstevens*, 16 July 2016

^{viii} Butler, Patrick, *Politicians fuelled rise in hate crime after Brexit vote, says UN body*, 26 August 2016, The Guardian <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/aug/26/politicians-rise-hate-crimes-brexit-vote-un-committee>

^{ix} <http://www.mcb.org.uk/post-referendum-hate-crimes/>

^x Khaleeli, Homa, *A Frenzy of hatred: How to Understand Post-Brexit Racism* 29 June 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/29/frenzy-hatred-brexit-racism-abuse-referendum-celebratory-lasting-damage>