

Confronting COVID-related hate

Recommendations from the first national conference

On 9th March 2021, [Chinese Welfare Trust](#), [Newham Chinese Association](#), and [Protection Approaches](#), hosted the first national conference on confronting COVID-related hate, bringing together representatives from a UK-wide network of British Chinese, East and Southeast Asian community groups that have received training and support as part of a project funded by the National Lottery and the London Community Response Fund.

The conference provided an opportunity for members of the national network to share with each other and other stakeholders what they are doing to increase understanding of hate crime, to tackle hate crime, and to support victims and witnesses. It was also an opportunity for community representatives to discuss their concerns around hate crime, the impacts the pandemic is having in their local communities, what support they would like to see in the future, and how they would like the national network to develop.

In attendance were representatives from 28 British East and Southeast Asian (BESEA) community organisations from across the UK as well as the project funders and partners.

Rising risk

At times of national crisis, marginalised and minority groups often pay the greatest price. This has been particularly true during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first weeks of the crisis, hate crime reports to police from East and South East Asians [rose dramatically](#): reported hate crime directed at the UK's ESEA communities in the first quarter of 2020 indicated a 300% increase on previous years while research suggests a 900% increase in the global use of hashtags on Twitter encouraging violence against China and Chinese people and a 200% increase in global traffic to hate sites and specific posts against Asians. At the same time, BESEA community organisations know that the number of threats and attacks taking place are much higher than the official numbers. We also know that when discrimination against one group is allowed to flourish, other groups also become more vulnerable and the whole social fabric is threatened.

Outcomes summary

With lockdown restrictions set to be relaxed across the UK over the coming months, there is concern that hate attacks perpetrated against ESEA community members will rise further. A great deal has already been achieved by local community organisations to help support, protect and inform their communities around hate crime and discrimination. National groups such as [End the Virus of Racism](#), the [COVID-19 Anti-Racism Group](#) and [East and Southesast Asian Scotland](#) have led the way in raising awareness and campaigning for change. While there is still a deep lack of understanding around hate crime and hate crime reporting within BESEA communities, there is growing frustration at the lack of support and engagement from Her Majesty's Government, local authorities and the police.

BESEA organisations and their allies are committed to continuing their crucial work building understanding of hate crime among community members but require the funds to do so. We know that campaigns of flyers, posters or infographics are not enough to break down mistrust that persists towards authorities stemming from the intersectional discrimination so many community members have faced over decades. Local and national organisations need urgent and ongoing support to continue to do the complicated work of supporting their communities on these issues.

However, responding to rising anti-ESEA hate requires a comprehensive joined-up strategy that has the communities themselves at its heart. National and local government must prioritise these rising risks, engage with communities and establish the means and be clear in its political commitment. This will require education in our communities and schools, responsible reporting from media organisations, and for Government to prioritise the building of cohesive, resilient communities.

Recommendations

1. Create quick-release, easy-access grants for ESEA organisations:

BESEA community organisations are trusted local experts best placed to reach the most isolated and vulnerable in their communities. However, this largely untapped resource of community resilience faces fundamental barriers to access even the modest resources they need to transform spontaneous responses to COVID-related hate into sustainable and safe solutions. The lack of funding also creates a reliance on overworked and stressed volunteers and goodwill which privileges those more able to give their time and divests local organisations of the modest funds they need – and deserve – to carry out their important activities. A BESEA community fund where small community-led organisations (under £500,000 annual turnover) could access small pots of money in a short period of time through a simple application processes would transform community-led capacity to support victims of hate crime and bridge community divisions.

2. Fund a national organisation to record, measure and support victims of anti-ESEA hate incidents:

There is currently no national organisation or project funded by Government specifically to record and measure anti-ESEA hate incidents, while offering support and advice to victims and BESEA communities. Organisations and projects such as Tell MAMA – a project supporting Muslim communities on issues related to hate crime and recording anti-Muslim hate incidents, and the Community Security Trust (CST) an organisation doing similar work around Antisemitic hate, have shown just how vital such programmes are in tackling hate targeted against specific communities. Led by and for their community these focussed support and reporting services are able to spend the time and resource necessary to build trust among community members for hate crime reporting, offer support and advice online and over the phone in languages appropriate to community members, provide services to those in areas where there are no community organisations or other visible networks, build awareness among community members on hate crime, and act as a mouthpiece for community members on these issues. Both Tell MAMA and CST receive funding for their vital work from Her Majesty's Government. Working with ESEA led organisations, particularly national organisations confronting anti-ESEA hate, funding an independent organisation or project supporting BESEA communities is an urgent and vital step that could be made immediately by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

3. Provide training to local authorities, and police officers, to better support victims of hate crime and their communities:

As lockdowns across the UK are starting to ease, BESEA communities warn against a likely spike in hate crime, and urge authorities to be prepared. Many local authorities do not possess the knowledge to support ESEA victims of hate crimes, their families and communities effectively. This is compounded by the distrust many community members hold towards local authorities, and particularly the police, especially those with uncertain or undocumented status. These factors widen the disconnect between local authorities, the police, and BESEA communities resulting in the underreporting of hate crimes. This means victims of hate crime do not get the support and justice they deserve, and local authorities are misinformed about the scale of identity-based violence in their communities. Improved training of police and other frontline service providers, co-designed and delivered in partnership with BESEA community organisations and other affected communities, will strengthen trust, empower people to report, and foster a better understanding of the breadth, depth and complexity of hate crime. Local authorities will then be better placed to provide the necessary resources and recourse to victims of hate crime, their families and communities.

Organisations

The first national conference on COVID-related hate confirmed the importance of collaboration across communities and the value of sharing best practices from across the country. The recommendations set out in this paper are put forward and agreed by the organisations below, all of who attended and contributed to the conference.

- Bristol and Avon Chinese Women's Group
- Cambridge Chinese Community Centre
- Camden Chinese Community Centre
- Chinese Association of Woking
- Chinese Association of Southampton
- Chinese Community Centre - Birmingham
- Chinese Community Health and Wellbeing Services
- Chinese Information & Advice Centre
- Chinese Welfare Trust
- Chinese Wellbeing
- Chinese Women Connect
- Colchester Chinese Association
- East and Southeast Asian Scotland
- COVID-19 Anti-Racism Group
- End the Virus of Racism
- Hackney Chinese Community Services
- Humberside Chinese Association
- Islington Chinese Association
- London Chinese Community Centre
- Kingston Chinese Association
- Newham Chinese Association
- Nottinghamshire Chinese Welfare Association
- Pagoda Arts
- Peterborough Chinese School
- Protection Approaches
- Sheffield Chinese Community Centre
- Southeast and East Asian Centre
- Vietnamese Mental Health Services
- Wai Yin Society