

COVID-related hate

East and South East Asian communities' experiences of racism during the COVID-19 pandemic

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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 British East and South East Asians rose dramatically. At the same time, British East and South East Asian (BESEA) organisations were telling Protection Approaches that the number of threats and attacks taking place were much higher than the official numbers. This briefing sets out why we're so concerned by this rise, what the Government can do to confront COVID-related hate, and how the tide of prejudice can be reversed.

Since COVID-19 reached the UK:

- Reported hate crime directed at the UK's BESEA communities in the first quarter of 2020 indicates a 300 % increase on previous years
- Research suggests a 900% increase in the global use of hashtags on Twitter encouraging violence against China and Chinese people
- Research suggests a 200% increase in global traffic to hate sites and specific posts against Asians

While Chinese and Asian communities in the UK are facing increasing levels of hate so too are other BAME communities. We know that when the discrimination against one group is allowed to flourish, other groups also become more vulnerable and the whole social fabric is threatened.

Social resilience was low in the UK before COVID hit

Cohesive and connected communities require an ecosystem of social, political, and institutional actions. Protection Approaches has been concerned about the trajectory in the UK of risk factors for social dislocation and marginalisation for a long time. In 2019 we found that prejudice in the UK had become mainstream and warned that if left unchecked, current and emerging social trends including marginalisation, exclusion, social isolation, and hate speech and hate crime would continue to gather momentum and lead to further, long-term rises of identity-based violence in Britain. In the last five years, hate crime, hate speech, and other forms of verbal and physical attack motivated by how perpetrators conceptualise their victims' identity have continued to become more common. A 2019 briefing paper released by the Commons Library about police recorded hate crime offences has seen a steady increase since 2012/13. At the same time, long-term de-prioritisation of community building investment has perpetuated the exclusion of minority, marginalised, and difficult to reach groups from policy-making and conversations about how to make our society resilient to hate and division.

Before COVID hit, the UK's social resilience was low and ill-equipped to meet further stress or overcome moments of rupture. The pandemic is an overwhelming crisis, following on the heels of a challenging, divisive, and dislocating decade; it will continue to disproportionately affect the most vulnerable because of nature of the pandemic, who the virus affects most seriously, the structural inequality of British society, and the underlying condition of the UK's social resilience.

It is crucial that community building is at the heart of the UK's COVID recovery.

Supporting Britain's Chinese and East Asian communities

Responses to the high levels of hate crime against BESEA communities must be recognise that local grassroots organisations are those with the greatest reach to isolated individuals and communities. Those grassroots organisations are also the experts in and of their communities

Actively reach out to and consult with local grassroots community groups: The smallest local grassroots organisations are too often ignored by national or local government. However these small organisations, those working on the ground with and among BESEA communities are those who best understand the needs of those communities and what works in supporting them. National and local government should work with BESEA civil society networks to consult those organisations on how they

can be better supported in their work and ensure their expertise informs responses to COVID-19, increases in hate crime, and long-term challenges to social cohesion.

Provide psychosocial and trauma support services to meet the needs of communities unused to responding to extraordinarily high-levels of discrimination, online and offline abuse, and hate crime. This might take the form of granting local providers already trusted and well-connected by affected communities, or prioritising inclusion of social services provision in different languages.

Create quick-release, easy-access grants for small grassroots organisations: Many government grant schemes are overburdensome on small, grassroots, and community-led organisations. As a result local experts who are best placed to reach the most isolated and vulnerable in their communities are unable to access support, while larger nationally operating organisations continue to set agendas for locally felt and experienced challenges. As the social response to COVID-19 has shown, there are thousands of people across the country keen to support and participate in local communities; the majority of these structures are themselves supported by networks of local, small, faith-based, community, and youth organisations who understand local dynamics – and may often already know some of the individuals at risk. However, this largely untapped resource of community resilience do not have access to the modest resources they need to transform spontaneous responses to the pandemic into sustainable and safe solutions. A BESEA community fund where small community-led organisations (under £500,000) 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.

Community building in a time of crisis

The responsibility to help protect the most vulnerable is part of the modern social contract. Resilient societies rely upon the actions of citizens, the strength of communities, and the support of the State. In the midst of this worsening social disintegration and rising prejudice, there are realistic and responsible actions that can impede these negative trends and begin to bridge the social divides.

Establish a Cohesion Commission to ensure that as the UK emerges from this period of collective grief, social dislocation, and isolation able to meet what will likely be a sustained economic crisis unlike anything we have seen before. The UK must learn the lessons from 2008 when, during austerity, community building and social cohesion were deprioritised; without this investment in a time of economic hardship the UK became a dislocated, divided country with low trust in institutions, increasing levels of loneliness, and rising hate crime. COVID-19 and its consequences will be a long-lasting crisis; it is already exacerbating social tensions, leading to increases of hate crime. The Government must use this moment to refocus resources on what makes society cohesive because stronger, integrated, and empathetic societies are not just nice to have but benefit us all—and help protect the most vulnerable.

Our work to confront rising hate crime against East and South East Asian communities in the UK: Since March, Protection Approaches has worked with and to support BESEA communities in the UK in confronting the rise of COVID-related hate. In the first few weeks of the national lockdown we organised free online, bilingual workshops on understanding hate crime for more than forty BESEA groups from across England. Since then, PA has worked with BESEA organisations to build their capacity to identify, report, and prevent hate crime. We developed a small grants program that is working with more than 20 BESEA groups to support victims, increase awareness, and promote community cohesion; We have recently been granted funds to provide bilingual trauma and psychosocial support. The APPG for Social Integration, in their report *Social Connection in the COVID-19 Crisis*, highlighted PA's work with the Metropolitan Police as an example of best practice to “be replicated in other police force areas with large Chinese populations, including university towns.”

This briefing has been compiled by Protection Approaches with the support of:

