

## **Unequal impact: Covid-19 and the impact on people with protected characteristics**

Written evidence from Protection Approaches

### **Executive Summary**

1. This submission addresses the questions set out in the terms of reference of this inquiry, and specifically discusses the ways people have been affected by Covid-19 or the response to it, and the specific impacts faced by those with protected characteristics.
2. Covid-19 has exacerbated existing challenges faced by the country's marginalised and minority groups, increasing the burden for communities that are already victim to structural inequalities. We suggest recommend active measures that should be integrated into Covid-19 responses to address the disproportionate impact of crises on vulnerable groups; and to promote equal, inclusive, and intersectional community building during this time of crisis.
3. We recommend that this inquiry, local and national government, NGOs and civil society prioritise efforts to consult and include the views and experiences of marginalised communities in designing and implementing intersectional solutions needed to overcome these structural inequalities and bridge divides.

### **About Protection Approaches**

4. Protection Approaches is the UK's leading charity working to better predict and prevent identity-based violence (IBV), from hate crime to violent extremism and mass atrocities. Protection Approaches collaborates with local partners to deliver programmes with some of the UK's most marginalised groups to find community-led solutions to building stronger, intersectional and inclusive societies. Protection Approaches is a registered charity in England and Wales, charity number 1171433. For more information please see [www.protectionapproaches.org](http://www.protectionapproaches.org).
5. This submission has been prepared by Nasyah Bandoh, Programmes Assistant and Dr. Kate Ferguson, Co-Executive Director, both of Protection Approaches. Nasyah Bandoh is a communities and policy analyst with a BA in Modern History and Politics from Royal Holloway, University of London. She is a Discussions Coordinator and the Lead Quality Assessor for BAME-led social organisation #WOKEWeekly, responsible for facilitating debates and discussions centred around and beyond the British black community. Nasyah is also a volunteer at the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton, London. Dr. Ferguson is an experienced analyst in the fields of atrocity prevention, violent extremism, and civilian protection. She is Chair of Policy at the European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, University of Leeds and an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of East Anglia. She is a member of the Centre for Science & Policy's Network for Evidence and Expertise at the University of Cambridge. Dr. Ferguson holds a PhD from UEA and an M.Phil in Russian and East European Studies from the University of Oxford.

### **Our response to Covid-related hate crime**

6. In response to increases in Covid-related hate crime, we have been delivering training sessions through video conference for civil society, faith and voluntary groups across England and Wales on what works in locally-led integration building and prevention of prejudice in communities. Since mid-March, we have trained at least 150 representatives from than 30 civil society organisations as well as Local Authority officers working on community cohesion at 5 different councils, and the Metropolitan

Police. We have been supporting nationwide Chinese community networks and student groups by delivering bespoke online bilingual workshops to over 70 UK-Chinese community leaders, helping them identify the tools they need to respond to the surge of online and real-world attacks targeting both individuals and communities. Those who participated have reported the workshops have developed their understanding of how they can help victims of hate crime in their communities and those concerned about hate crime.

7. For further details or questions relating to this submission please contact Nasyah Bandoh at [Nasyah.Bandoh@protectionapproaches.org](mailto:Nasyah.Bandoh@protectionapproaches.org)

### **Covid-19 and identity-based violence**

8. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges faced by the UK's marginalised and minority groups, increasing the burden on communities that are already victim to structural inequalities. As experts in identity-based violence, we know that in times of social, political or economic crisis the risks of marginalisation and division increase; and we know that the most vulnerable groups – including those with protected characteristics – too often pay the greatest price. In order to proactively mitigate these risks, responses to crisis therefore require an ecosystem of social, political, and institutional actions to prevent the rise of identity-based violence against already marginalised communities.
9. Covid-related hate appears to have surged. So too has the exclusion of - and violence against - groups that were already extremely vulnerable before the pandemic began. An increased burden has been created for those belonging to 'harder to reach' communities that also have – or are perceived to have – protected characteristics.
10. **Pre-Covid vulnerabilities** Protection Approaches has been concerned about the trajectory in the UK of risk factors for social dislocation and marginalisation for a long time. Our 2019 'A Gathering Storm' series analysed social trends in Britain relating to identity, community, perceptions of security, and of belonging. We concluded that prejudice in the UK had become mainstream; exclusionary populist movements, hate crime, violent extremism, and all forms of IBV had grown in strength; and that these trends were threatening our democracy and the long-term security of our minority and vulnerable groups. We judged that the UK's social resilience was low and ill-equipped to meet further stress or overcome moments of rupture.<sup>1</sup> As the pandemic develops, we are monitoring these trends. Despite the overwhelming public response of community and national solidarity in the face of this crisis, the overwhelming Covid-19 crisis risks aggravating our fragile society.
11. **Rising Covid-hate** There has been a rise in Covid-related hate-based incidents in the UK. Our local partners, including Chinese and East Asian civil society organisations, are communicating rising incidence of hate crimes related to the pandemic, particularly against their elderly and disabled. We therefore wish to draw the Committee's attention to the reported increase in number of hate-crime incidents against Chinese and East Asian communities and others, and the scapegoating of certain groups by the right-

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<sup>1</sup> Protection Approaches, [A Gathering Storm?: Assessing the risks of identity-based violence in Britain](#), March 2019

wing media is evidence that the ongoing global crisis has created an environment that cultivates identity-based violence, social isolation, marginalisation and exclusion.<sup>2</sup>

12. **Domestic violence** In communities throughout the world, home confinement has trapped tens of thousands of victims of domestic violence in close quarters with the very people that are doing them harm.<sup>3</sup> Government-imposed lockdowns and quarantine plans implemented to limit the pandemic's spread have given little thought to the risk these measures could pose to existing and potential sufferers. One commentator has compared the global surge in domestic abuse cases as 'an opportunistic infection, flourishing in the conditions created by the pandemic'.<sup>4</sup> Such is the concern for this unprecedented surge, the UN has called for a global ceasefire of domestic abuse.<sup>5</sup>
13. The social consequences of the pandemic reaffirm the fact that the prevention of identity-based violence is not needed in some places some of the time, but everywhere all the time. Moments of political and economic uncertainty and stress can lead to rapid fractures and sharply increase the vulnerabilities of already marginalised groups as well as groups that may previously have considered themselves 'safe'.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Other Impacts of Covid-19 on Communities with Protected Characteristics**

14. The disproportionate rate at which Britain's BAME communities have been affected by the pandemic has been covered widely by racial equality groups and the press.<sup>7</sup> Our local partners have expressed concerns about increased targeting of BAME communities during the lockdown. Leading race equality thinktank the Runnymede Trust links the unequal impact of the virus on these communities to the pre-existing socio-economic disadvantages they face.<sup>8</sup> We support this analysis; as we have underlined in this submission, in times of crisis, our society's most vulnerable face greater risk of identity-based violence, social dislocation and inequality.
15. Protection Approaches welcomes Public Health England's inquiry to investigate why people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds appear to be disproportionately affected by coronavirus. And we hope that the findings of this inquiry are not only able to provide answers to this serious question but are also able to usher in broader and ongoing conversations about the structural bias faced by Britain's minority communities.

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<sup>2</sup> Ipsos MORI, "[COVID-19 – One in seven people would avoid people of Chinese origin or appearance](#)", 14 February 2020; Aina Khan, "[Anger as right-wing UK voices suggest Ramadan virus spread](#)", Aljazeera, 13 April 2020

<sup>3</sup> Scottie Andrew, "[Domestic Violence victims, stuck at home, are at risk during corona virus pandemic](#)", CNN, 27 March 2020

<sup>4</sup> Amanda Taub, "[A New Covid-19 Crisis: Domestic Abuse Rises Worldwide](#)", New York Times, 14 April 2020

<sup>5</sup> UN News, "[UN chief calls for domestic violence 'ceasefire' amid 'horrifying global surge'](#)", 6 April 2020

<sup>6</sup> Protection Approaches, "[Atrocity prevention and Covid-19: opportunities and responsibilities](#)", April 2020

<sup>7</sup> Caelainn Barr, Niko Kommenda, Niamh McIntyre and Antonio Voce, "[Ethnic minorities dying of Covid-19 at higher rate, analysis shows](#)", Guardian, 22 April 2020

<sup>8</sup> Omar Khan, "[Coronavirus exposes how riddled Britain is with racial inequality](#)", Guardian, 20 April 2020

16. But broad-brush public campaigns are unlikely to succeed in reaching our most isolated and vulnerable, or solving the unequal impact the pandemic has had on certain sections of our society.
17. It is important that approaches to tackle the various unequal impacts of the pandemic have the principles of intersectional, inclusive participation at their heart. The views and experiences of marginalised, socially dislocated communities with protected characteristics must be integrated into local and national responses to the health crisis, its consequences, and in efforts to build long-term resilience against all kinds of crises. National and global best practice teaches that community building is the most effective means of strengthening local and national social resilience, empathy, celebration of difference, and stability.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

18. The UK's community building, equality, and violence prevention expertise associated must now be urgently leveraged to ensure that the country's response to Covid-19 has at its heart what decades of practice have taught us: Intersectional, inclusive communities are where resilience of all kinds comes from –whether in the face of a pandemic, economic crisis or identity-based division.
19. No community, society, or country is immune to identity-based violence; rather, constant, and consistent effort is required from local grassroots to political leaderships to ensure that the fundamental rights and freedoms of all are protected and respected. In times of political, economic, or social crisis, all societies become more vulnerable. Active measures must be taken to create an equal, inclusive, and intersectional society preventing the disproportionate impact of crises on vulnerable groups and communities.
20. We recommend Her Majesty's Government:
  - a. **Integrate identity-based violence prevention into local, national and global responses to the worldwide health crisis:** if this is not done, the pandemic risks accelerating trends that undermine social and political resilience to division, propaganda and fear.
  - b. **Actively reach out to and consult with local grassroots community groups:** the smallest local grassroots organisation are unlikely to respond to calls for evidence such as this and are also unlikely to be called on by national or local government for the insights – therefore, the views of larger more established organisation tend to dominate these responses. However, these smaller organisations, that work with and are led by marginalised groups and communities with protected characteristics are those who best understand the unequal impacts of Covid-19. National and local government should work with civil society networks to consult those organisations on how the unequal impact can be mitigated, and eventually shared equally across all sections of society.
  - c. **Establish a Cohesion Commission:** to ensure that as the UK emerges from a period of collective grief, social dislocation, and heightened inequality the Government is prepared to meet what will likely be a sustained economic crisis unlike anything we have seen before. The Government must learn the lessons from 2008 when during austerity community building and social cohesion were

wholly deprioritised, resulting in a dislocated, divided country with low trust in institutions, increasing levels of marginalisation, hate crime, and social exclusion. The Covid-19 crisis has given us all opportunity to remember what is most important; family, community, and the interconnected nature of a society. The government should use this moment to refocus attention and resources on those most vulnerable in our society, recognising that stronger, inclusive, intersectional, equal, and empathetic societies are not just nice to have but benefit us all.