



**Ethnic Minorities  
& Youth Support  
Team Wales**

Tîm Cymorth  
Lleiafrifoedd Ethnig  
& Ieuenctid Cymru

**All Wales BAME Engagement Programme**  
**Impact of COVID 19 Crisis on BAME Communities**  
**Topical Forum – Community Cohesion/Racism/Hate Crime**  
**29<sup>th</sup> April 10:30-11:30 via Zoom link**

**Attendees:**

Rocio Cifuentes (EYST Wales – Chair), Deputy Minister Jane Hutt AM (National Assembly), Ginger Wiegand (EYST - Notes), Rahila Hamid (EYST), Jalal Goni (EYST), Pat Dunmore (Neath Port Talbot CAB), Stuart Summer Smith (Swansea Music Art Digital), Wanjiku Mbugua (BAWSO Wrexham), Ali Ussery, Mohammed Hamayun (Newport), Gareth Hicks (Children in Wales), Joyce Nangwa, Nirushan Sudarsan (Victim Support & Cardiff University student), Ana Miah (Shah Jalal Mosque), Becca Rosenthal (Victim Support), Ingrid Wilson (Newport Community House), Abi Lasebikan (Black History Month Steering Group and National Assembly), Mohammad Azdeh (EYST), Trish Pease (Victim Support), Selina Moyo (South Wales Police), Shahinoor Aloom (Fitzalan High), Abyd Quinn Aziz (Cardiff University), Claire Thomas (Bevan Foundation), Daron Owen (NW Wales Community Cohesion Officer), Fez Miah (Urban Circle Productions), Jess Rees (Victim Support), Laura Jardine (Welsh Government), Lee Tiratira (EYST), Maria Mesa (Women Connect First), Martyn Jones (Gwent Police), Brian Amos (Gwent Police), Paul Davies (Pembrokeshire & Carmarthenshire Community Cohesion), Pavlina Mondol (Newport City Council), Patience Bentu (Race Council Cymru), Rose Lewis (Cardiff & Vale Health Board), Sandra Anderson (AVOW), Sarah Bowen (Ceredigion County Council), Sahar Al Faifi (MEND), Sefa Ozalp (Cardiff University), Thanu Hettiarachchi, Uzo Iwobi (Welsh Government), Bets Ingram (Powys Council), Shaheen Sutton (National Lottery Fund), Heather Powell (Newport City Council), Chris Hunt (Torfaen County Council), Bethan Morris, Aga and Arek, Meena Upadhyaya (Cardiff University and Ethnic Minority Women's Achievement Awards), Rajma Begum (WCVA), Bal Gill (Welsh Government), Jami Abramson (Race Alliance Wales), Kim M, KL Howells (Carmarthenshire Council), Mohammad, Monica Frackowiack (Wrexham Community Cohesion), Noam Devey (Show Racism the Red Card Wales), Reggi Al-Haddi, Sophie De Marco (EYST), Tayera Khan (Gwynedd Council), Jessica Jones (African Community Centre), Chembo Liandisha (BAWSO Wrexham), Fateha Ahmed (EYST), Ross Thomas (Tai Pawb), Agnieszka Tenteroba (VESTA/Wrexham), Sujatha Thuladi (The Mentor Ring), Usha Ladwa Thomas (Welsh Government), Robert Muza (Newport City Council)

## **Aims of this forum**

Today's agenda is about the impact of COVID 19 on community cohesion and hate crime. The aim today is to look for experiences on ground and find out what people think can be done about it. Has community cohesion gotten better or worse in this time? We invite examples that attendees have witnessed directly or have been told about. We want as much evidence as possible from the coal face. All the evidence gathered today will be written up with purpose to inform policy responses.

## **Deputy Minister and AM, Jane Hutt's Introduction/Address**

The Deputy Minister joined in for most of the last half of this forum. She gave a brief address expressing that she was eager to listen to participants. She is grateful to meet this group and noted that 69 attendees is very impressive. She noted that in its response to COVID 19 over the past weeks, Welsh Government wants to ensure that equalities are at the forefront. The Deputy Minister has a wide remit which includes equalities; domestic violence; Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people; crime and justice and the third sector. She has engaged with many groups recently, including Wales Race Forum, BAME Newport HUB, Wales Refugee Coalition and recognises the importance to engage locally and regionally as well as nationally. Shortly, she will be meeting with Faith Communities Forum. It is very important to communicate how Welsh Government can support the disproportionate impact of COVID 19 on BAME people as seen in the workforce and community. This was addressed in a statement by Vaughan Gethin AM, Minister for Health and Social Care, last week and in the establishment of the COVID 19 BAME Advisory Group. Welsh Government is now moving to consider how to get out of lockdown, with the First Minister publishing a proposed framework last Friday. The Deputy Minister has made clear that COVID 19 crisis has potential to deepen inequalities and that it is very important to get exit from lockdown right and protect frontline workers, so we do not go back to outbreak and small outbreaks. Public health must be at the forefront as well as social and economic considerations. One proposal is that any move should be equality impact assessed, so as not to disadvantage people with protected characteristics – but even better may possibly lead to a more inclusive society. The Deputy Minister would like to hear this group's views on how to exit the lockdown in a way that does not exacerbate inequalities but rather provides potential for positive transformations. That is a big discussion, perhaps for another occasion.

*The following is a summary of experiences, concerns, and paths for potential action from forum attendees in regard to the impact of COVID 19 on Community Cohesion, Racism and Hate crime.*

## **Indications that street-based hate crime has declined since lockdown orders may be masking other dynamics**

### Hate crime reporting & street-based hate crime

- Dialogue at weekly police dial ups in Swansea indicate that hate crime has gone down; however there have been reports of abuse directed at members of the Chinese community relating to the pandemic and they have suffered greatly.
- We should not be misled by low hate crime figures. That would be akin to misconception that shoplifting is down now. Coming out of this, things will get worse and we need to prepare. Community cohesion is currently strong because people are helping each other now, but we should not get lulled into sense of false security.
- Hate crime reporting is currently low because people are living in fear of uncertainty and reporting is last thing on their agenda, as they are struggling to survive.
- Gwent police have a weekly phone-in forum on aspect of community cohesion and hate crime. They stress importance of using 101 system. Once its logged, its locked. Please call 101 or contact one of us with concerns. Police are doing all they can to minimise tensions in community.
- One can also phone Victim Support or report at their online reporting portal: <https://www.reportheate.victimsupport.org.uk/hate-crime/>
- Likewise one can report online at TrueVision - <https://www.report-it.org.uk/home>. True Vision will collate national figures and trends and can also make referral to local police if necessary.
- One way to tackle hate crime is skilling up people in reporting. There have been efforts to try to organise conference in Newport around that.
- Currently, EYST is offering online training in challenging hate crime to professionals "Don't Hate, Educate." Contact [nicky@eyst.org.uk](mailto:nicky@eyst.org.uk). When schools reopen, it will be offered to teachers and pupils.
- From Chat: Victim Support will soon release sessions around raising awareness of Hate Crime to key community people, professionals and anyone else interested in Hate Crime. To get on mailing list, contact [Becca.rosenthal@victimsupport.org.uk](mailto:Becca.rosenthal@victimsupport.org.uk)
- There is wide consensus of the importance of encouraging and supporting people to report hate crime.
- From Chat – Welsh Government makes the point that having evidence on hate crime in terms of reporting figures gives them a strong base for our policy response.

### People targeted and abused by neighbours

- “How many people are stuck in unsuitable housing, waiting to be moved on, and are suffering?”
- Example a client in temporary accommodation has been abused by her downstairs neighbour and is afraid to leave the house. The police have been to the property 6-7 times and it’s been reported to housing options, but she is still awaiting a resolution.
- Victim Support notes that clients they are currently supporting are mainly experiencing neighbour related abuse, rendering them, “prisoners in own home,” afraid to go in back gardens or on daily walks because they do not feel safe in their neighbourhood. People experiencing this are reluctant to phone police either thinking the case is trivial or fear of escalating tension and reactions from neighbour. Victim Support is encouraging reports of anything that is neighbour related. They are looking to create online materials which reassure and encourage people to report via 101 or use online reporting.

### Increase in online hate

- There is much evidence that online hate speech has risen in the lockdown period. Social pressure of the lockdown drives people to use online means even more than normal.
- Online, there is much conspiratorial talk and mis/disinformation. Likewise, as online use is going up, people are talking and sharing stories more, thus exacerbating spread of both rumours and of examples of hate speech and stereotyping.
- Question: Are there any attempts to demystify mis/dis-information? We must have a way to separate truth and facts from disinformation, so agencies can distribute truth through their networks.
- A lead researcher at Cardiff University’s “HateLab,” which monitors online hate speech verified that his lab is observing more online hate in recent times. HateLab’s current focus is UK wide. Question: Would Welsh Government be interested in using this opportunity to collaborate and fund Welsh focussed research about online hate? This could be a collaboration between organisations, for example: MEND, the Chinese community, Welsh Government and Hatelab. “Research is costly, but we need all the intelligence we can get, and universities are crucial at looking at online crime.”
- There were a number of chat comments that agreed that Welsh specific research into online hate speech would be a good idea.
- The Deputy Minister noted that we need all the intelligence we can get, and universities are crucial at looking at online crime; we also need to look at what happens next – particularly in terms of challenging hate narratives - how can we keep alive the current recognition of BAME and migrant people’s contributions to NHS and essential sectors?

## **Stereotypes of Muslim communities, some particularly relating to Ramadan**

- Rumours are circulating in multiple platforms/spaces that COVID 19 will peak during Ramadan because Muslim community is gathering and socialising.
- “During Ramadan, we are supposed to pray in the mosque, and this is the first time in history that we can’t ... These rumours are causing panic in the community because we are in fact following the guidelines strictly and we are already in spiritual pain.”
- In some cases, wider community which is becoming aware of disproportionate impact of COVID 19 on BAME people, especially in particular parts of Wales such as Newport, is engaging in victim-blaming. On some occasions, questions are raised as to whether BAME and/or Muslim people are social distancing or aware of public messages. Those may be valid questions to be asked but can quickly become victim blaming. This is a worrying trend to be aware of.
- It is very troubling that Trevor Phillips, who has been suspended from the Labour party for racism, for Islamophobic remarks, has been appointed to lead the inquiry into COVID 19 disproportionate impact on BAME communities. Most people who have died in frontlines NHS are BME and Muslim. No one will have faith that he will be fair to Muslim people in that enquiry. WG should have own independent inquiry apart from Trevor Philips.
- Some concerned about police stopping BAME people who are delivering food to vulnerable people.
- Gwent police have been doing work to ensure that that the message goes out and that mosques are following social distance guidelines.

## **Global dimension**

- International students still living in Wales need attention – Stephen Carr from WGLA had a Zoom meeting with 100 international students yesterday, many of whom were not aware of a lot of COVID issues. The meeting was well received. Universities are doing what they can, but it would be very good for Welsh Government to address this group as well.
- African people are being racially abused in China and that has had backlash across the globe. People in African communities here are sharing video clips about attacks in China against African people and it is very distressing. Race Council Cymru has held meeting with Chinese community in Swansea to see how we can stop escalation of these messages and work together to counteract.
- Across the globe, ethnic minority people are bearing the brunt of COVID 19 both in terms of getting the virus and having negative outcomes such as critical care or death

disproportionately and bearing the brunt of economic fallout due to lockdown. This is well documented in United States and other countries as well as the UK. Causes are years of institutional racism and discrimination: socioeconomic status leading to underlying health conditions, quality of housing, environmental racism – living in polluted areas, occupational segregation into low paying jobs, including many frontline sectors such as transport, delivery, domestic worker, health and care workers, food service, food production.

## “Holding on to the Gains”

*Using this time to amplify positive messages and counter-narratives to prejudice and hate*

- There are some gains in community cohesion now, and in order to keep that going post COVID, there must be strong community engagement.
- Currently there is societal and cultural acknowledgment of contribution of BAME people to NHS. And there are numerous examples of ethnic minority people, communities and establishments supporting the wider communities and the NHS. There are also many examples of diverse communities and neighbours coming together to support each other: creating food parcels, making food deliveries, providing IT equipment and broadband access. “COVID 19, in a funny way, has brought whole community together and we are witnessing acts of kindness, sacrifice and also seeing the impact that the BME community has on the wider community.”
- Amplifying these positive stories and narratives about BAME and migrant contributions to NHS, essential sectors and community volunteering and food provision, etc can indirectly and directly fight racist ideas.
- We organisations in the BAME/racial equality sector must connect with each other and promote these messages ourselves. For instance, the MEND website is providing platform for anyone to blog personal stories. Anyone can write and send stories to Sahar Al-Faifi and she will send to MEND website to be shared with all social media platforms: [sahar.al-faifi@mend.org.uk](mailto:sahar.al-faifi@mend.org.uk). Likewise Newport CAB can promote local positive stories: [pat.dunmore@citizensadvicesnpt.org.uk](mailto:pat.dunmore@citizensadvicesnpt.org.uk)
- Stories are very powerful and its vital to record as much as possible at this time so it's not forgotten post Covid-19. Race Alliance Wales is currently collecting stories (200-300 words) to capture personal experiences of BAME individuals and communities during this period. Please send any experiences to [racealliancewales@gmail.com](mailto:racealliancewales@gmail.com)
- **However**, Welsh Government, local government, mainstream media and non-BAME voluntary organisations must all do more do more to promote these stories. For instance, a lot of the ‘Save the NHS’ imagery in mainstream media appears to be ‘white-washed’ with little representation of people of colour.

- It is important to be sure our communications are spreading helpful and constructive messages, especially considering a lot of young people are seeing these narratives. We need to connect positive and light-hearted stories with impactful and serious stories. That will make our framing more believable and our stories more widely accepted. For example, the Welsh Government statement on Chinese Community.
- From chat: Bevan Foundation has recently published a report titled “Shared Ground: Integration of Migrants in Wales” <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/publications/>

### Continuing the lift on No Recourse to Public Funds

- At the moment, UK Government and Welsh Government have lifted rules relating to No Recourse to Public Funds and for now, many more women surviving domestic violence are able to access refuge. Organisations such as BAWSO are very grateful for that, but what happens after the pandemic? When women need to move on from refuge to their own accommodation, will Government be sure there is a way to do this?
- During the lockdown, BAWSO have seen an increase in referrals both for women surviving domestic violence and trafficking (NB: there is often a correlation between the two). People are coming forward during the lockdown as “they can’t stand it anymore.” The domestic violence cases that BAWSO deals with can involve multiple family perpetrators: brothers, in laws, partners. “These women have escaped for now; What happens after?”
- Wales Refugee Coalition are also organising a campaign to argue for scrapping No Recourse to Public funds and would invite BAWSO to get involved as well.
- Deputy Minister’s comments in relation to this issue: She is glad to hear from BAWSO and Wales Refugee Coalition. Welsh Government have secured some leeway on NRPF for now.

### Keeping the energy of this forum and others like it going and gaining momentum

- There is consensus with Deputy Minister’s proposal to have a subsequent conversation about best and most equitable/transformational way to exit lockdown. This group is up for such continued conversation.
- One suggestion was for a point person to coordinate media efforts and another suggested a funded policy role to coordinate issues and take them forward.
- Perhaps this forum can create a couple of sub-groups – one regarding media and one regarding keeping the gains/exiting lockdown.

## **Institutional Racism**

- It was noted that the 27-year anniversary of Stephen Lawrence’s death was last week Wednesday. The aftermath of that tragedy allowed us to look in depth at institutional racism in our society for the first time. “Never forget that the power we have to challenge started with McPherson report and it’s important that we teach youth the power of engaging and challenging. Without that, I wouldn’t be here today.”
- For years and years, people engaging in work in this sector have reported a combination of disadvantage and inequality for ethnic minority people and it is still happening.
- BAME people are over-represented in essential/frontline sectors, including low paying ones, which have been undervalued until now.
- One attendee has many family members who are nurses or workers in social care, who feel they are unable to say “No” to situations they feel dangerous, such as situations in care home where they have no protective equipment. They are exposed to COVID 19 even though they are more vulnerable to getting virus.
- Likewise, an attendee has noted an increase in BAME people working front of house in supermarkets, which are taking on BAME people in greater numbers only in a time when they need to take on more workers quickly.
- Hate crime (except online) may be low, but we need to prepare for what happens after COVID 19 is over. “The blame game is coming; Society always needs scapegoat. How do we prepare for post-COVID?” Note from chat: Concern that in economy slump post COVID, BAME people and migrants will be blamed for lack of jobs.
- From chat: Big concern that dependent families of migrant workers/work permit holders who have died in the front line are likely to be removed from the UK, depending on their situation. Relating to Home Office hostile environment.
- Question: We know there is English based inquiry on disproportion effect on BAME COVID. Will WG take on study based in Wales? Real fears this pandemic is showing fault lines and inequalities in society and after effects will only make it worse. We would like to be involved in learning good practice, developing community support and working with you on it. Can we do that?
- Deputy Ministers comments in relation to these points:
  - She referenced last week’s statement from Health Minister Vaughan Gethin. In that he said, we are engaging with health professionals, medical associations, Race Council Cymru and other key community figures.



- Now they are moving into advisory, inquiry and evidence gathering stage. There is a meeting of a BAME COVID 19 advisory group today at which Heather Payne from the Chief Medical Officers office will be a key official from medical perspective. This group will look at workforce risk issues including for allied health professionals, but they will also be looking at the impact from a community perspective and engaging many agents.
- She is very interested with the point that many BAME people are going into another frontline space. And she is conscious of the important point that this applies to social care as well as healthcare.
- The Deputy Minister references the need to understand Welsh perspectives, epidemiology and statistics and to link those with ONS, the UK government and the Scottish Government and noted that this is a global phenomenon. It doesn't only apply to Wales.
- She suggested meeting again with this group to talk about how the exit from lockdown avoids exacerbating inequalities and even makes positive transformations.
- Budgets and priorities are always difficult. Welsh Government has had to put a lot of budget over and above the Westminster contribution to address the crisis right now in term of business. But there is also a need to look at what is done coming out of lockdown to ensure inequalities do not deepen.
- She is very interested with the point that many BAME people are going into additional frontline spaces. And she is conscious of the important point about risks applying to social care as well as healthcare.
- She takes the point about how we can build on the gains made during this period. We must recognise the contributions of and impact on BAME people in relation to this virus and must make sure that is handled and respected and at the forefront of policy.

### **Closing to meeting: Next steps and AOB**

- This is the last of this weekly forum series to gather initial evidence of the impact of COVID 19 on Black, Asian and ethnic. We are ensuring that the notes from this forum series are reaching officials in Welsh Government. We will likely schedule additional forums in time.
- If anyone is interested in joining a subgroup either on a) media or b) "keeping the gains"/equitable exit to lockdown, say so in chat.

- It is also announced Institute for Welsh Affairs is looking for a trustee are specifically seeking trustees with lived experience of migration or disability.