



RIGHT TO HEAL

Rebuilding Community Trust & Support
After The 2024 Race Riots

July 2025

A report on research conducted by
Sisters Not Strangers coalition - UK

#SistersNotStrangers



Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements

This report is a collective achievement made possible by the strength, wisdom, and dedication of so many remarkable women.

My deepest gratitude goes to the members of the Sisters Not Strangers coalition, who not only shaped this work but led it as the research team. Under the thoughtful leadership of Dr Jeni Williams, the research was carried out with care, integrity, and deep respect for lived experience.

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We are also grateful to our funders for their continued support, which enables us to document, organise, and advocate for the rights of asylum-seeking and refugee women.

This report is more than words on paper, it is a testament to our shared struggles, collective strength, and unwavering hope.

With deep appreciation,
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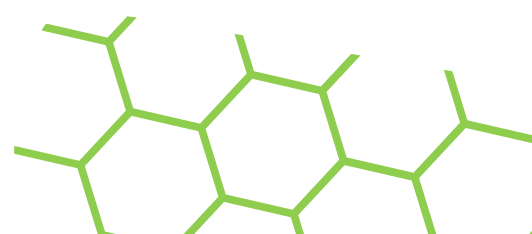
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INTRODUCTION: RATIONALE FOR RESEARCH

Last year's race riots inflicted serious mental harm on those at the receiving end of the violence. Most significantly the sense of a supportive community in which people trust each other was severely damaged. The violence drew on wider racism and islamophobia and impacted ethnic minorities and Muslims beyond the hotels housing asylum seekers but the focus on 'illegal immigration' provided the flashpoints of these attacks and the hotels bore the brunt of the violence. The worst race riots since 2011 have, unsurprisingly, led to numerous investigations, reports, academic papers, blogs, news articles, and more. So far, however, no report has focused solely on the experience of - and longer-term impact on - women seeking asylum, many of whom were trapped in those hotels. We believe that how the trauma of these women and their children is addressed, should serve as a benchmark for the success of any attempt to rebuild the communities in which they live.

This is why, a year from the riots, Sisters not Strangers is compiling a report to explore this issue, using witness statements and comments from those individuals most affected by the violence. We are particularly concerned to track the extent to which community trust and support has been refashioned in this time and to develop proposals that will support recovery.

In preparation we held a major online event for International Women's Day focusing on the mental health issues experienced by women caught within the UK asylum system. We have mapped mental health support in cities across England and some in Wales. In so doing we have built substantial networks of support through which we can disseminate our research. The issues that emerged through our IWD event helped frame the research interviews we conducted in the training retreat hosted by our Manchester coalition partner at the beginning of June. This case study is included here; its findings will inform the broader online survey we will be circulating through the six other population centres our coalition partners represent: Birmingham, Coventry, Liverpool, London, Sheffield, and Swansea.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH

We held face to face interviews with a cross section of asylum seeking and refugee women from a specific geographic space: that of the city of Manchester. The interviewers included five trained mental health first aiders. The topics were circulated and discussed in advance of the research session and the interviewers were provided with guidelines. The interviewees chose whether they wished :

- ▶ to speak one to one,
- ▶ to engage in a group discussion, or
- ▶ to express their experience through the medium of drawing and discussion.

Those conducting one to one interviews had prior experience of conducting research. Only one of our interviewers did not have direct experience of the asylum system, but she had twenty years' experience of working closely with women asylum seekers.

These testimonies of the riots are contextualised by a face to face interview with a woman still in the asylum system who established a local initiative to counter their impact. She has long experience of supporting women with mental health problems and has recently completed her masters in psychotherapy. During the race riots she was instrumental in working with different organisations, such as MIND, in setting up regular zoom meetings several times a week which carried on over a month. She was able to recruit two others to support her and they engaged with over 200 women during this period.

She was also able to point out that the support she offered was useful also to female members of her university as the hostility supposedly aimed at violent asylum-seeking men also impacted members of faculty and both postgraduate and undergraduate students.

Taken together these interviews provide an enormously rich source of data concerning not only the distressing effects on individual mental health, the impact on children, and the capacity to trust others, but also on wider aspects of community engagement such as the uptake of cancer treatment, the growth of bullying within schools, the loss of independence for victims of domestic violence as perpetrators seized back control of their movements and choices under the guise of 'protection'.

They also provide an inspiring vision of the resilience of many of these women, and the development of supportive bonds between them, and with supporters which must serve as a model for addressing ongoing xenophobic violence such that seen recently in Northern Ireland

The interviewers included five trained mental health first aiders.



SUMMARY

Stage 1

A case study of Manchester - a geographical area badly affected by the riots comprising :

- semi-structured interviews with 9 women, conducted as one-to-one, two-to-two, or using the mediation of drawing to speak to one or two people
- an extended face-to face interview with an asylum-seeking psychotherapist who established online meetings with 200 odd women both during and after the riots

All interviews were recorded, anonymised, and transcribed.

All one-to-one interviewers had prior experience of conducting research.

Stage 2

An online survey based on these findings to be conducted with women from all 7 coalition partners (Birmingham, Coventry, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Sheffield, and Swansea), examining similarities and differences across a broader geographical base.

Stage 3

Collate findings, write-up and publicise.

Research Aims

- Document the immediate impact on the mental health of women asylum seekers and refugees;
- Understand how the riots have affected their current sense of security;
- Examine the impact on children;
- Interrogate the value of media and social media;
- Consider ways of nurturing trust among asylum-seeking, refugee, and migrant women;
- Recognise the factors that supported them during the riots, including support and faith groups and/ or local organisations;
- Identify ways to rebuild trust and community.

Methodology

- Group decision on format of interviews: semi-structured face-to-face interviews either individual, or group; use of drawing as an aid for expression;
- Facilitator guidelines for those conducting the interviews debated and drawn up;
- Draft list of prompts discussed and finalised by coalition members to ensure both safety and a common ground;

Safety Considerations

The prompts followed a positive trajectory moving from groups focused on

- i) personal response at the time to
- ii) situation now to
- iii) sources of support to
- iv) suggestions for development.

Should any mental health issue have been triggered, 5 qualified Mental Health First aiders and one qualified psychotherapist were there to provide support.

SECTION 1: RECOGNISING THE VOICES OF WOMEN VICTIMS

Since the roots of the riots lie within a hostile environment deliberately fostered by the government and supported both by mainstream and social media, it is essential that any attempt to rebuild a community must include care for the members who were their targets. As in the criminal justice system the impact on the victim should be recognised when assessing the violence that occurred.

The interviews make it clear that the immediate impact of the riots on the mental health of women asylum seekers and refugees was devastating for all participants, affecting their trust in the wider community, their sense of security in public spaces (whether on the street or inside a local bus). Statement after statement reveals an experience of overwhelming fear within the hotels, and even, for those living in the community, when sheltering in their homes.

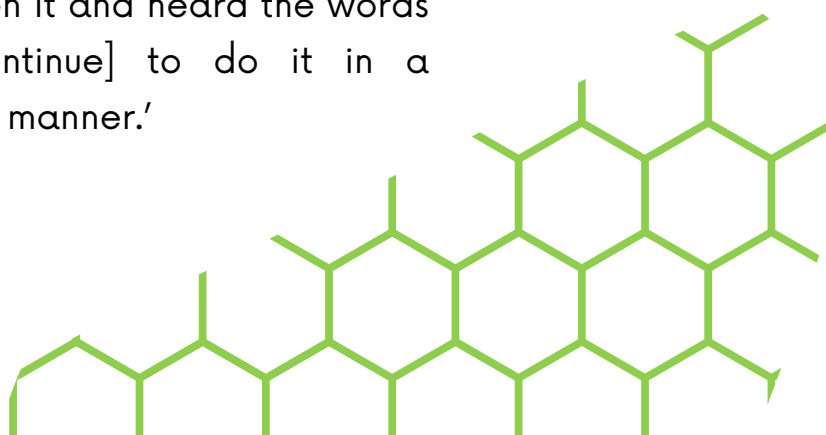
Many of the women talk of feeling terrified, one speaks of shaking as she stands by the bus stop on her way to work, another speaks of her bus being pelted by stones by black-masked youths on motorbikes. Most also speak of a sense of panic and entrapment.


Those who talked of their children reveal the enormous strain and panic felt by young children. A five year old boy questioning his teacher as to whether she hates him and is a danger to him, a 15 year old girl subjected to racist insults and missiles in class and sobbing in the corridor, a teenage girl unable to eat, partly through her anxiety but, also, in part due to a system that cannot make exceptions to the rules and accommodate the debilitating fear that keeps her in her room and unable to access the only food they allow her to have. These are children in distress, not criminals. Their mothers express fear and anxiety in their inability

to ensure their children's security, pretending to feel safe while fearing for their lives, aware of the problems their children face in school, but unable to solve them. They speak of the confused sense of injustice and fear felt by their children, and recognise that unless they receive recognition and support within their schools and colleges, this may fester.

Policymakers would do well to remember that there are always multiple actors in any relationship and damage to one set of children cannot but affect the other: It is bad for any child to see other children being punished for something not their fault, or, even worse, subjected to violence. Positive affirmation is necessary, not only punishment. Although **B** commends her daughter's school for expelling the two boys harassing her, she also speaks of copycat actions: 'it does not stop there, others have seen it and heard the words and [continue] to do it in a different manner.'


Despite the opprobrium poured onto social media for its role in fomenting the riots, for these women, social media was seen as enormously supportive, enabling reassurance and contact with family and friends and giving them information about what was happening. Online resources included WAST's zoom sessions which enabled women suffering isolation to feel they had a family, and they continue to provide the friendship and affirmation necessary for healing. The wellbeing zoom sessions provided by HerStory were important supports, drawing women together for meditation and sharing. Even the coverage of the riots in mainstream media is seen as positive in that it allowed women to understand the situation while revealing the existence of large numbers of people opposing the far right.





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However, the sense of community seems to have been overwhelmingly supplied by these support organisations or by religious groups (church or mosque), not by local residents. Obviously since the participants were members of WAST that was great praise for the work of that organisation - rightly so since they did, and continue to do, a lot of outreach.

The ongoing impacts of the riots on communities and community cohesion, are extremely worrying. For the women, they include withdrawal from community engagement, setting back language acquisition, further study, and health concerns, while the fear of going out empowered and enabled domestic abusers.

As the bulk of hate messages reveal, aggressive far right and predominantly male groups justified their violence by claiming to protect women and children, repeating the false claim that perpetrator of the Southport murders was a Muslim asylum seeker.

In reality, they threatened women in the street and attacked hotels filled with women and children. The hollowness of their claims is clearest in their attempt to burn down a hotel with 300 occupants, more than half of whom were children.

Some of the women were still deeply traumatised and found it difficult to manage the discussion.

As noted earlier, three women dropped out of the sessions because of anxiety. (See e.g. H on the hostility they experienced in their street, and how this increased the sense of insecurity). Extracts from the first few testimonies reveal the impact of trauma on expression via the repetition, almost stuttering, of phrases that cannot fully express feelings -



A

*“I was scared, ... got scared...
what scared me.”*

B

*“ It was terrifying... so terrifying
... I was terrified... it was such a
terrifying situation.”*

D

*“It was very terrible. ... It was
very, very, very, very bad. ... a
terrible atmosphere ... It wasn't
good at all... It was so terrifying...
It wasn't good.... It's not good...
It's not good. ...It was very
terrifying...”*

A comparison with the coherence and confidence of speaking without fear is heartbreaking. Here is A again:

“The WAST women stood with me. We created friendship, big friendship there, serious ones where we poured out our hearts, we poured out ourselves into each other and they really, really supported me, and the organization itself, even later on, organized mental well-being courses for us.”

The stories of mutual support and the generosity of the respondents' desire to engage and work with others, demonstrate the resilience and value of these members of the community. Despite her trauma E's eagerness to learn, her recognition of the way that hate poisons a life and her discussion of the value of kindness as a response, is inspiring:

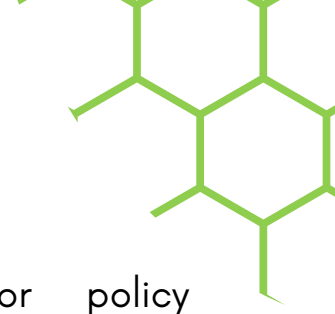
“We are all in the community, we are all community members, which I'm meaning every day that we don't have to have that hate in your heart. If you have hate in your heart, it's like poison. Poison fills you. You poison yourself. Poison yourself, nothing will go right in your life. You just will be stuck there.”

Similarly, A speaks to the importance of acceptance and forgiveness, quietly asserting that she is not dangerous:

“I'm not here for evil, whatever you think, I'm not here to steal anything, I'm here to live peacefully with you.”

And she concludes that building trust is ‘something in progress. ... So yeah, I'm building trust... day to day, every day’.





The far right degrades and homogenises difference so it is right for us to be wary of repeating their mistake. The recommendations of the Race Equality Foundation report rest on an assumption, critiqued by Dury et al, that 'everyone in the riot was equally committed to anti-immigrant, Islamophobic, and other racist beliefs.' He considers that this view risks legitimating the view that 'this represents a growing part of public opinion.'

He refutes this contention by referring to the changing views registered in the British Social Attitudes survey which found that

'views about belonging in Britain are becoming less ethnocentric over time: whereas in 1995, nearly half (48%) of those surveyed said that it was very important that someone had been born in Britain to be considered British, in 2013 40% held that view, but by 2022 it was just 17%.'

The implications for policy revealed in the 6 proposals of the Race Equality Foundation focus on containment, instruction, and punitive correction. These are necessary elements to challenge racism. but we believe that they are not enough. In view of the material that our research reveals, which mirrors that presented by contributors to their webinars, it is a shame that they do not include the legitimating effect that demonising immigration has on overt expression of racism. The REF powerfully reveal the racism experienced within the NHS but unfortunately omit that of women seeking asylum, and the value of additionally promoting positive narratives.

Alex Ardalan-Raikes and Nasrul Ismail's paper on 'Social Media, Hate and Resistance: What We Learned from England's 2024 Riots' (18/03/2025), points out the core significance of misinformation:

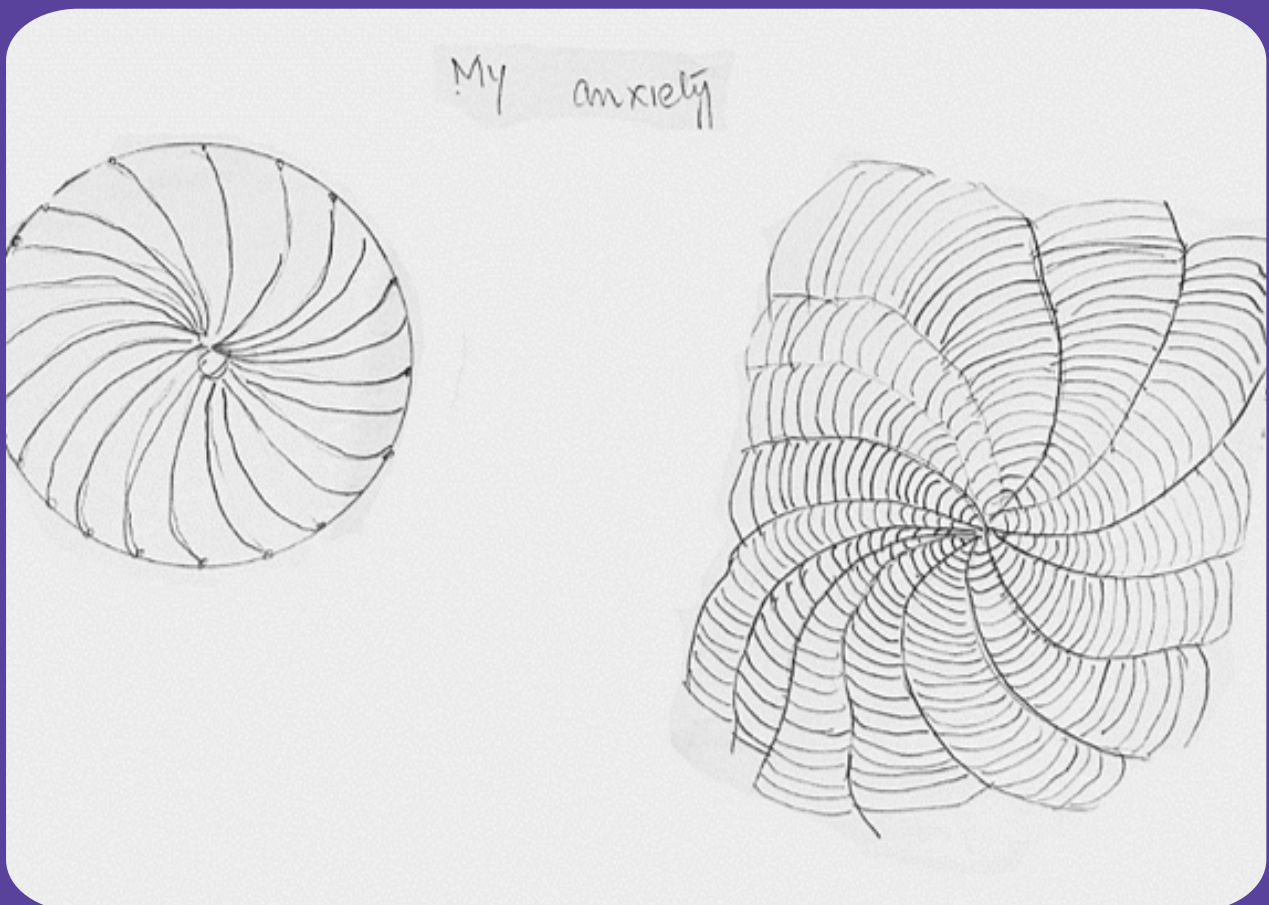
‘While racial tensions have long existed, the 2024 riots marked a turning point. What made them unique was their scale, coordination and the way misinformation played a direct role in inciting violence. In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, false narratives spread quickly, shaping public sentiment and fuelling hate-driven action.’

The values of ‘this rapidly evolving digital landscape’ are rooted in the wider context of a hostile environment deliberately manufactured by the government and reinforced by the mainstream media, dislocating term of asylum from any sense of compassion and eventually dissolving it into the descriptive term, ‘migrant’, then shifting ‘migrant’ from description to a space of suspicion to suggest invasion and abuse. Monitoring social media alone will not counteract this vicious hinterland.

The purpose of this report is to voice the human impact of the riots on the people who were its initial targets. The far right uses a toxic mix of paranoia and ingrained misogyny first, to weaponise false narratives of who and what an immigrant is, and, then, to normalise overt racism. These stories of women and children are the most effective means of neutralising that bile. It is on their inclusion that both communities and policy can be remade.

SECTION 2: THE INTERVIEWS

Initially we had hoped for 12 participants but three withdrew due to anxiety. Nevertheless, we believe what we have is both powerful and comprehensive. This part of the report groups and summarises responses from across the 9 women. Each woman is identified solely by a letter A-J. ('I' being omitted because of possible confusion).



*My drawing of a spiders web: where I started from and where I am now.
(contributor J)*

1. The immediate impact of the riots on the mental health of women asylum seekers and refugees;

A

First of all it was shocking when you watch on TV what was happening, and then that made me scared because I felt that, okay, I couldn't see it happening where I live exactly, but watching it on TV, is like I was expecting it to come to my area. So I got scared and I started being very conscious, I mean when I'm walking out, looking over my shoulder who's coming behind – because, it's like they were fighting the people not of their colour, so anybody would just attack you. So I was very conscious and aware of my surrounding, and the thing that really scared me most was I could not walk at night.

And also considering the way speculation is going around that... Oh, the person is an asylum seeker. And me supporting asylum seeker women. I was like, oh my God. How are my women doing? How are they coping? Are they able to go out? Is there any support in place for them? So... But luckily, my colleague was able to take over and support them in ways that they could. So nobody was being physically affected. Mentally, they were very, very distressed. They couldn't go out to do shopping. They couldn't... They felt that they are not welcome. They felt that.

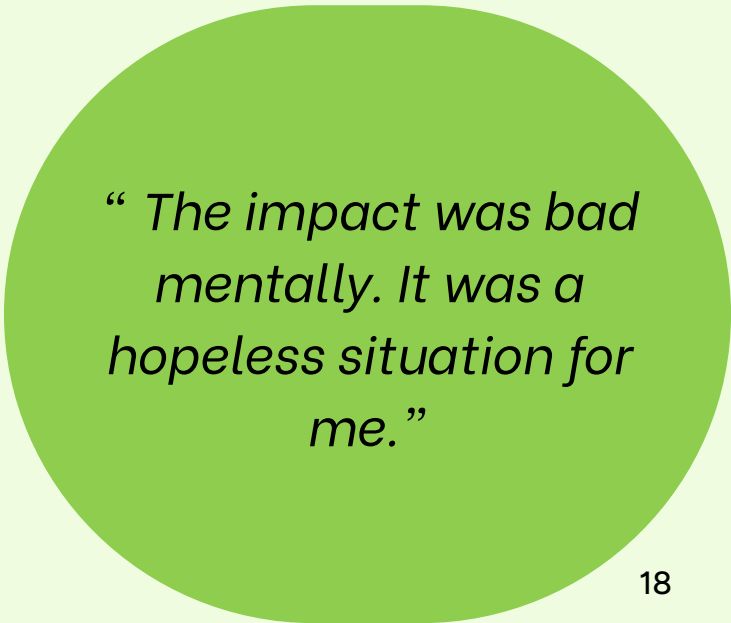
“ They couldn’t go out to do shopping. They couldn’t... They felt that they are not welcome. They felt that...”

B

For me, it was terrifying. It was so terrifying because I was in a facility. I was in a facility called Hotel, I was staying in a hotel at that time, and it's so enclosed and a lot of us asylum seekers were in that area and the riots, according to what we're learning, was against asylum seekers, refugees and all the migrants. I was terrified. I didn't know where out. I was closed in. I was in the camp which they were looking for. The impact was bad mentally. It was a hopeless situation for me.

So I was part of what the riots was all about. Unfortunately, I was in a place I cannot run away, and we were, as it escalated, we were told not to move out, we were closed in, as in, waiting for our fate. We didn't know what was to come because we're hearing that they've attacked such a hotel because they know that is the holding area. A lot of us, more than 300 families with children in one place, for them to come and hit that ... Yes, they attempted to come.

On that day I was just coming from church, it was a Sunday, with the children, and I saw lots of police in front of our hotel. And when I looked, I saw people in front of us just before entering the hotel, holding placards and everything, but the police were just closer to us, so we went to the police officers with the children, my fifteen-year-old and five-year-old, and I asked, please, are we safe? What's going on? I could not run back to church because I thought I might meet others behind me, so it was such a terrifying situation which made me feel helpless, you know, it made me feel unprotected and felt like, how was the way out going to come if the whole country is against us?.



“ The impact was bad mentally. It was a hopeless situation for me.”

C

It was scary. So, the fear that was put on us. I wasn't here when it happened, but when I came back, even when I was outside, I heard everything that was going on even though I was not in Manchester, but I felt it. Imagine that day. How would I feel? How would I act? Would I be able to go out? I have children.

Would they be able to move around? And one of my children said, I feel sorry for those who are there. How are they feeling now? Are they able to go out? Are they able to get something out of the supermarket? How are people perceiving them? How are the people seeing them? So, imagine being there at that moment. That would have been a very terrible situation. And the experience too. So, it's the fear that's the most painful. Being very fearful.

I *"I am here alone and don't have any friends or family. Every situation feels hard for me because I am alone."*

D

It was very terrible for me. Especially, I work night shifts. And imagine going out with that atmosphere. It was very, very, very, very bad. I've never experienced such a terrible atmosphere like that during that time. When I'm going out, even my child was scared for me. Myself, I was like, no way. It wasn't good at all. When you stand at the bus stop, waiting for a bus, and you can see the atmosphere, it's like, wow.

It was so terrifying for me. It wasn't good. You're going to help people and you're having panic. In yourself, you were already panicked. Getting to work, helping the old people. It's not good.

What can you do? You have to go to work. It's not good.

I was using public transport. That's why I said that you have to wait for the bus. While you're standing there, waiting, you're already shaking. Because you think anything can happen. It was very terrifying.

E

At that time I was staying in a hotel. We were told not to go outside because it was dangerous outside. It wasn't a good time, especially for me, because I've been in a hotel for a very long time. The only time I can go out is when I go to school, and then go for training because I was playing volleyball by that time. But my routine was stopped because of the riot. It really put the strain on my mental health because I was just there in a hotel doing nothing. it wasn't easy because it was scary.

Even just to go to the shops, it wasn't easy. It broke down my ability Mhmm. It broke down my ability to get to school. My routine of doing my things, because I can't be in a hotel for, like, the whole day. So if you're in a hotel the whole day, for me, personally, it affected me, like, when it come to school, when all these things are going through your mind, even you can't concentrate at school, you can't perform well. So, yes, somehow, it did affect my performance at school. And as for the friendship, it did affect me, actually, because people will share what is going on.

F

This other hotel which is in Stockport, it called Grandberry. That one, they were there, but they did not attack it. But they were outside, and the police were there. I have this other sister of mine who goes to WAST as well. So she was there. She was like, oh, people are, they are outside and the police cars are here.

It was so scary for somebody, you know, going through that and with the kids. At one time, the lights were off at the hotel, the whole hotel. And it was so scary when she called me. It's like, oh, the lights are off. I don't know what's going to happen. My little girl is panicky and everything, so you just have just put yourself in her shoes, in kids shoes that they don't know what's what is happening. But as the mom, you have to be there and try to explain that it's going to be okay, so you have not to be scared.

“It was so scary for somebody, you know, going through that and with the kids.”

G

Firstly there was a big amount of disbelief. I couldn't believe it was actually happening so disbelief leading to shock, anger, frustration because it unravelled all the good work we had done in Salford. I run a small group that supports migrant women's integration and health. We have a really really delicate mesh of 80 communities living here and a little bit of distrust can absolutely destroy all the work that small groups like mine do, bigger charities work on the macro level, but community-based groups like mine that are community and volunteer-led have a specific local focus. I was sad at the end of it, really sad, to see all our hard work being totally destroyed by stupidity like this.

H

it did have a negative impact on me, because, first of all, I was afraid even to get out of the house or to go anywhere. So that was a very hard moment, I will not lie. So, yeah, I think it did really have a big impact on myself. my friends as well.

Family, I don't have. I think I felt because when you were watching on the news and you know when you're reading about it the way the people were even beating up the police it's like if I was beaten up here and if I go report to the police if the police have been beaten by these people how they're going to help me so I think in a certain way I felt like not even the police can help me in this like i'm like I felt like i'm on my own

I did not even go out, so I would not say I would do anything. I didn't want to go out, so there was no chance of me wearing something. Because in my, like in the back of my mind, it was like, if I go out, I will go experience what I did experience. So, for me, I was like, I'd rather be in the home. But even while I was in the house as well. Because I thought that people will know that, you know, this is an asylum seeker's house. So, they might even come get me, like while I'm inside as well. So, it was just constant fear.

I was very afraid to go out alone. I was very afraid to go out alone. my friends also, sometimes they were afraid to go out.

2. The impact on children

A

I just feel sorry for the mothers, for the children who go to school because their children would face more racism from other children whose parents were protesting out there, which means they are teaching their children that you are not the same like them. So the children knew that they've got a common enemy. So when they go to school, they show the racism. So to me, I really felt sad for the mothers and I was worried for them.

B

It was scaring the children. Everybody's children were starting to ask questions so mommy because people don't want us here you said... we had to teach them at the same time fearing for our own lives and their lives but we had to be strong for them. There was no time to know this one is lying, ...no, no, no, no, it was time to be very positive. It was tough, it's still a struggle we're going through, but my little boy five years old changed to be a very angry little man after that.

He was just traumatized and he started to feel like he's unwanted, feel like why don't we go back mommy? Because he's small he doesn't understand so he felt like but why would we come to people who don't even want us? They're fighting and burning things - because the television was on, everybody had to see it. I could not hide it we're staying in one room in a hotel somewhere so he saw everything and felt like oh okay does it mean my teacher doesn't like me? does it mean? he's taking it as a five-year-old yeah everybody's trauma comes at their age and is appropriate, are you also fighting he asked her [teacher] my son is very straightforward and he talks like a responsible young man and he asked the teacher are you also one of them who don't want us teacher because if it's so I have to get out of this class I'm not safe here if so. They had to do an assembly and tell them they are in a school [where] they don't do it, those are not good words, they do not hate, they love all, that's why the school is inclusion, everything, everything.

It was tough for the 15-year-old, it was tougher than for the younger one because she understood the dynamics, she knew what was going on and I had to look for counselling for her. For her it was deeper than the little one because she had her own, you know, at the lesson stage and the hormones. and everything. She could not, she could not move out of the room, she was always sleeping, she stopped bathing. She just didn't want to eat, she couldn't, she even felt sick, because I think the acids or everything, she stopped eating, she could not go downstairs to the hotel to just have a meal.* Physically she was not okay after that.

But the struggle we're going through, because they go to school and meet a lot of children, some of them took interest in that, some were encouraged by that [they say], okay, we also have these people in our school. And sometimes she'll be sitting and some boys will throw papers, they'll put you some papers like this and throw at her from the back. It was just a struggle for the girl, it was, I even thought maybe

we would have to change her schools after that. But by the grace of God it ended up, we are here now, she's writing her GCSC, and about to finish, we are here.

If I have to tell you, the truth is they don't trust [local people] but they are trying, because they are small, they're trying to, you know, understand what's going on. It's a big change for the children because they have just left where they were comfortable [where] they saw everybody who's like them, they've come here thinking oh these are the nice people because where we come from, we really treat them very well, and they are always nice when they are in Africa where I come from. But now coming here and seeing that no, some of them, or most of them, don't want us, is difficult. It's happening even in schools you know. In school where my son is, sometimes he feels like maybe the other children who are of different colour are treated better than him.

He will sometimes say to me uh you know mommy uh. I'll give you an incidence where they were playing outside in the garden and

then um a little girl, I don't know whether innocently or what, but this girl she's been doing it, hitting my son and I've reported I think once or twice [saying] please just watch them there, they don't play safe but on this day this girl pours soil on my son's head, it's a dreadlock, so she pours soil so and checks it out and pulls it.

And then when the boy says, stop, I don't want, she takes off his glasses, throws them down and stamps on them. Two black kids saw this. And then my boy runs to the teacher because there's soil everywhere. Now he needs to wash his face. And the teacher said to the girl, why are you doing it? he was looking at me, or he was doing something. And the glasses, they could not be used again. So when I came to pick him, he burst down and cried and said mommy I think something's wrong in the school. I said what's wrong ? He said look at my hair so you know when you oil your son's hair and is so shiny when he goes there so I said how come you do this to your hair? he said, no, it's not me, look at my glasses. I said, where is your teacher? He said she's gone.

Okay, the following morning, I come back. I said, o ma'am there was something that happened yesterday with the children. She said, oh, no, I didn't see any glasses. Did something happen to the glasses? I didn't see that. I said, no, I'm not saying you saw it. Actually, this is what happened here, here are the glasses. You can see them yourself.

It was an issue. She didn't see that and even the hair, yeah, because, yeah, but she knows about it. She just told the girl not to do it, but the girl cannot do something to hurt others because ... , and my son was there. He cried. I said, you see. They said, no, he's not telling the truth. I don't think that's how it happened.

And if I could add the last one? In my daughters school it was worse. There are a lot of white students, there are two boys like I told you, they used to throw things at her. They threw things and spoke with [bad words] and this time my daughter left the class and there are some teachers who are always [looking out] ...it's a good school, so when ...they saw my daughter had left the class and

she's not coming back they went to follow her. She was there crying and everything so the teacher went back to the class to ask what happened, and the other students said these two boys hit her, everybody said they spoke bad words to her about her race, her colour, and everything, said she should go back. For that school I commend it because they did not take it lying down. The boys were expelled from school. They are no longer in that school. I saw support from there.

I said you know it's everywhere. It's a matter of learning how to live with it, when and how, but it's difficult because it does not stop there, others have seen it and heard the words and also continuing to do it in a different manner.

So it's a difficult thing because this thing has been there anyway before the riots. The riots was just a show of how people are feeling. it's an ongoing thing. It's an ongoing thing that we need to teach our children how to live with it, how to avoid, you know, confrontations when it happens, how to, you know, just move

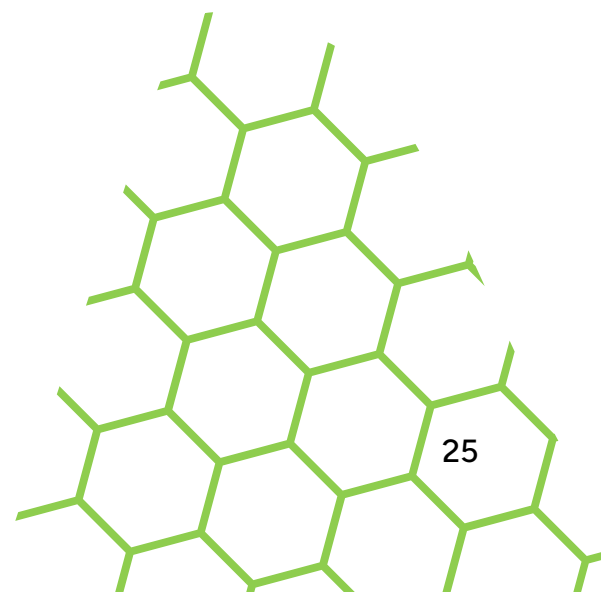
around because we are here to stay. We're not going anywhere.

**Asylum seekers are not allowed to make or even keep food in their rooms, they have to eat the food that is made for them in the place it is served.*

D

I have a child. One daughter. She's school-going. She said, oh, this thing is not good. Especially when you are black. They are pointing at you.

She felt isolated. She said, oh, I have to go to the classroom. The children are outside, in the compound. She doesn't want to join them. She wants to come to the classroom and sit down quietly. She also was having fear. She was isolated. It was a very bad experience. I had a very bad experience.



G

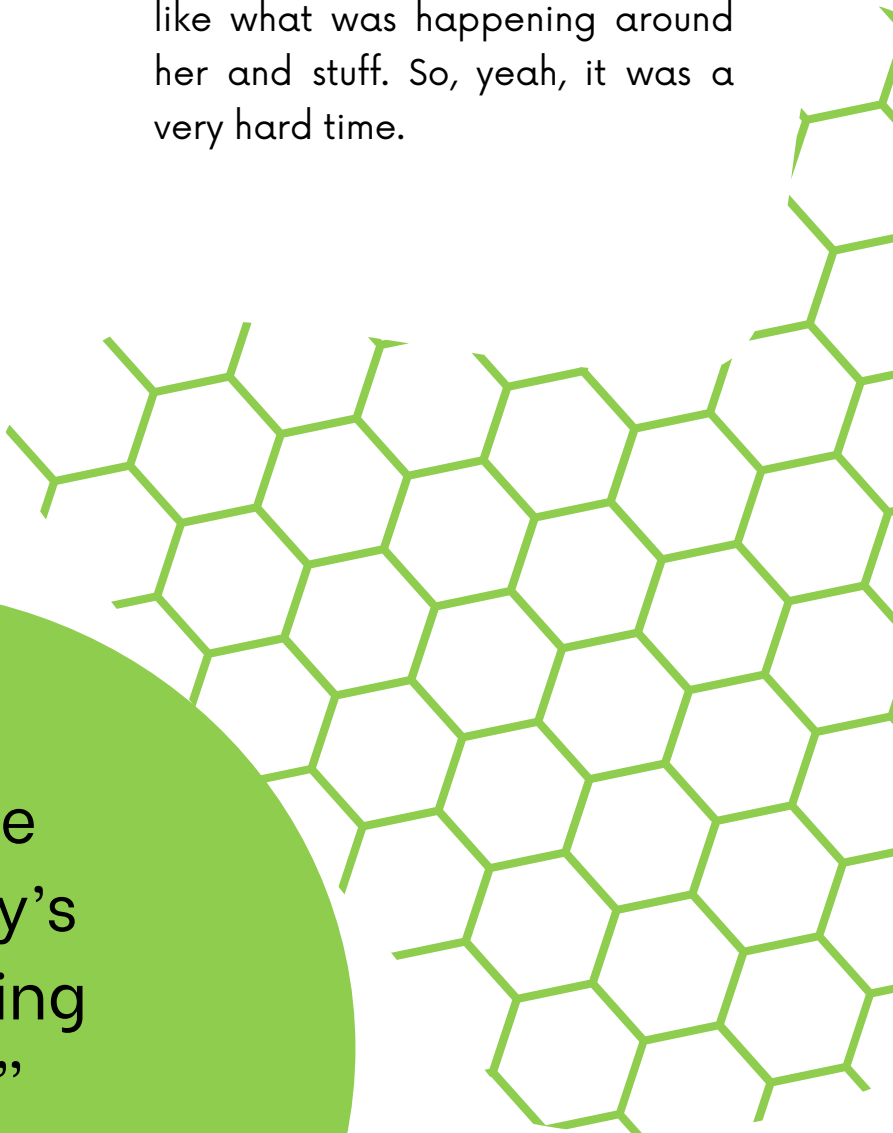
My daughter was in college, it was difficult for her and for her friends who were people of colour who chose to stay at home., The college said come whenever you feel safe: it's safe within college but we can't take responsibility of your travel.

H

One of [my friends], she didn't want to take her kid to school, actually, because she was afraid. So, yeah, she was very anxious and like fearing for her life and for the kid as well, because the kid didn't know what was happening, you know. So, the mother had to explain and she didn't know what kind of words or how to say it for her to understand like what was happening around her and stuff. So, yeah, it was a very hard time.



“It was scaring the children. Everybody’s children were starting to ask questions.”



3. The current sense of security

A

If it comes to five o'clock, even if I wanted to go somewhere, I wouldn't. And even up to now, it's not easy to go out, to stay out in the dark because you still have those feelings. But I didn't actually go out at night and then traveling anyhow. Because even on the train, somebody would just outburst. So it was scary. So it's like us being in a world mess around here.

To add a little bit about feeling safe, you will never feel safe in this country. Because they are eager to get on somebody. As always, they do, you know. The crime, the stabbing and the knife. Now, it's getting worse.

Like the young ones, everybody going, most of them going out with a knife. So you will never feel safe. So there is. Exactly. There is foreignness as a scapegoat, you know, to get people, to get into danger. So if you are not careful, anything can trigger just within a minute.

Even as my sister said, when you get to the bus stop, or on the bus, they look and everything. If you are not stumbling, you know, trying to take care of yourself, they try to provoke you for you to do something, then you end up being injured or anything.

B

So, safety, well, as she said, is crucial. But you should always be alert. Anything can happen.

I can't stay indoor. If somebody says two words, just ignore the person. Just move on. That's what I was trying to say. People try to annoy, say things in very, very strong ways. Even the eye contact was very bad. Especially in the shopping centre. The eye contact. You can see the person is bad, eye to eye.

You had a direct impact. Yes. The eyes!.

They use their eyes. To tell a story. The person behind me. The eye spirit during the riot was so... Very distressing.

[do you feel safe now?] Now, I would say it's 50-50. I wouldn't say 100%. I feel safe and I feel not. For sure, yeah. You don't know what somebody is thinking and what somebody is planning. So it's like, I would say, 50-50. Yeah.

E

So it wasn't easy to get through. But because even now, the thought of you just maybe taking a walk when it's dark is traumatizing because you think that maybe they are just out there to get me or something like that. So it's never gonna go away anyway. Even though it's gone, it happened, it's still in my mind, yeah, because even if you see somebody coming your way, you just flashback to what happened. it really took a very long time for me to come to terms that the riot is over, not that it just stopped for a little bit.

I had to push myself. I started going to college, I said I'm not going to stop going to college because of this.

So I'm just going to face this and see how it goes. And then I started going to school, slowly but surely, and then I went back to my routine. But even now going out in the night is not easy. you have to make sure that you go home before it gets dark.

G

The riots gave women who were living with domestic abuse situations back into the control of their perpetrators. In a skewed way it was like you're not safe to go outside, so stay indoors, you're not safe to do this, stay here, give me back your phone, come on give me back control. Lots of these women lost their right to freedom of movement in this way so there was a big loss within our communities.

It also impacted on the process of integration, already made difficult because of differences in skin colour, religion, language skills or who you're around with. For those surrounded with hostility, the riots heightened a constant fear so after a while women withdrew from the process of integration itself.

This meant having to reconnect, having to use all the tools they had been given to start all over again afterwards.

Another effect was on cancer screening. We had funding from Answer Cancer and we were heavily into messaging go for screening go for screening Then the women just stopped. They cancelled all their screening appointments. This was several months after the riots. Most of them were No, no, no, I don't want to go, it's an unknown place. I don't want to go. So literally we had to get the bus from the place where we do our activities to that venue, to get the women. We had to ask Answer Cancer for more support.

Many women stopped going for their cancer screening appointments, because they were scared.



H

I did experience, I think, three to four different occasions where it was not pleasant. It was not pleasant at all. I was on the bus coming, I'm a student, so I was coming from school, going home, where I did experience racism. And then people on the bus didn't mind that these kids were, they were younger kids, I think they were 10, 11 or maybe, I don't know the age, but they looked younger by their faces when they were shouting at me. And nobody cared. I was on the bus. And then another accident was, I was also on the bus, I get like that, but then they were throwing stones from outside. So, the bus driver was driving, and then they came on their motorbikes, like, they were wearing masks on, like, black masks on, so then they were throwing stones at the bus, when we were on the bus. And then another accident was in city centre, in Manchester, but luckily there were two people that managed to help us. And then the other accident was, I think it was in front of Lidl, you know, Lidl. It was in front of a shop, it was in front of Lidl, where I did also experience that as well.

[what about the community?] I think it did at some point because in our street, like, I don't know how to explain it. It's like a double, we're staying this side and them this side. So, I think the people from this side of the street, the first two houses, I don't think they are asylum seekers. So, because their approach towards us changed during that time. And their kids will sometimes throw stones at our house, at our asylum house. So, I think that alone also did put us in fear of going out. Because we thought that if they, the ones that we stay with in the same street, are throwing stones at us, if the other people come and attack us, who will help us? You

J After and before the riot I have had bad experience on buses but after the riot I had an incident where we were three getting on the bus but the driver closed the bus on me. I asked for an apology but he insisted he did not see me. Even when I said I am not invisible he did not apologise to me.

Second incident I was hospitalised because the driver pressed the break abruptly and I banged my head on the pole and was rushed to the hospital.



“The riots gave women who were living with domestic abuse situations back into the control of their perpetrators.”

4. The value of media and social media

B

For me, it was a safe haven for me. I would say, at that time, social media was the best thing ever, because that was the only place I could get comfort. I could call my mom and say, they're here, they're coming, there's no way out. She would say, calm down, calm down. That was the only tool that I could use to call friends, the only tool I could call my family to say we are in danger. We don't know whether we'll be out. Guys, I love you. If this is it, then.

There were things that I could take in, but I had to sieve, because I was alone with the children, I had to sieve what I'm taking in and what not. But to tell you the truth, sleepless nights was a thing at that time. I don't know how long I could not sleep at night. I would just lay there thinking. okay is it the last time let me just see ... if for the last time yeah. So for me it really came in handy with the television, the social media, everything. It was good at that time because that's where we got to know a lot.

The only filtering was to not think too much about it, but it was happening and I couldn't say who was wrong, and who was right, the only thing I could appreciate was that I know what's going on. I was not in the dark. I could not walk out and go to Stockport because I know what is going on.

I feel like even those who are informing us, you know, that today or tomorrow, don't go to Piccadilly, there'll be a force of far right there. Don't go to the left. Look at how they're supporting the others, I don't know what they're called, the other ones who are not fighting us. Look at the masses who are supporting you. You are not alone. That, for me, the television showing that, okay, there are riots. There are people who are against you. But yes, there are others who are saying, leave them alone, you know. And for me, it was giving me stability in a way, and I really appreciated it at that time. It was a hopeless situation, because we didn't know when it was going to end and how it will end. But at that time, social media was very, very important for me.

A

Yeah the same for me as well, because when you don't watch the TV, you don't get the news, you just wonder. It's good to know what's happening so you want to hear people talk telling you, so you better watch the news and see what extent it has gone to. Okay, sometimes you feel that, okay, maybe there's bad news because they're showing some others, but they're also showing the other bit where they're giving support to the migrants. So that brought comfort to me. that actually some people are rising up to this far right and supporting the migrant. So that gives you comfort.

C

I did receive information from family updating me on what's happening. I was so eager to know what's happening. Whether it's calmed down or what's happening. I was very concerned. Are they okay? How are people supporting them in their community? Especially the area they live in. Especially in Manchester, there are certain

areas... Some are very, very, very racist... They have that thing.

I was just concerned. I was just checking on them. How things are going with them. Even though I was not... I was away during my holiday. When I had that... I didn't have that sound mind again.

D

I remember I received one message from one of my friends [on the phone]. She said, in case somebody is trying to hurt you, they put a number. She sent me that link. She said that in case somebody is threatening you or someone is trying to harm you, you can ring that number or that email.

It was like, through the phone, [we were] trying to encourage ourselves. When I called some of my friends, I said, don't stay inside. Especially when you have to go to work. You have to go. Just be careful. If somebody is trying to say something that annoys you, just ignore it. Just go on with what you are doing. It's trying to... I don't know how to put that without saying bad words. You

want to interrupt, or you want to challenge the person. The phone It's like the family and lovers and friends. When somebody calls me, I say, what can I do? I have to go to work or do my shopping.

E

Seeing this stuff on the TV. Yes, it's unbelievable. Especially what was said in one of the hotels. And there was this hotel which was burnt down. So you think that maybe they will come to a hotel and do the same. So you just be in a hotel and you will lock your room so that no one will come inside you. it was even just watching the news. Even on social media it was really scary for us. It was really scary. It wasn't easy.

Especially on WhatsApp. So somebody will just send something on WhatsApp. I went to the shops, and I saw people coming with dogs and everything, and they were just saying go back to countries.

H

We were talking more about our safety, like, asking how you were feeling and all that.

, our whole being as a woman, being too more into fear, no more free, no more talking about anything that is going to make us happy. So I think it was more... more of bad news or sad news, each and every day. So I think [phone conversation] was a constant of just talks about fear and all that.

My mum would sometimes call and say, no, don't go out, just stay home, you know, and all that stuff. So they were like afraid for my sake as well. So, yeah.

The anxiety of, like, closing your eyes a lot. Like I said before, it's like I was feeling that they might know where I stay. Like in the street, people might maybe point our house and say, oh, that's one of the asylum seekers' houses. So, I was in constant fear, like looking over the window and I couldn't sleep. It's like, what if they can find me while I'm sleeping? So, I would really say that sleeping at night was very hard. I would rather keep myself busy with maybe watching movies, Netflix until in the morning and then maybe I might rest during the day because I don't know. To me, I felt more safe here during the day

than at night. I don't know why, but in my head I was like during the day maybe I'm, I don't know, safer than during the night. So, I did not sleep, I'm not going to lie because I had that anxiety of saying that what if people show them our house or something.

[impact on the riot ?] I think it did have a very big impact. Sometimes some things were true, others were not true. so in some instance they were like educating you on what is happening in order for you to know. And then some instance was like they were just maybe putting out false information, and so I think that also put on fear into us of going out because you're afraid of what you saw or, like, what said the right ... the next that they're going to be targeting is going to be your location and stuff like that. But then nothing happened you know.

I would say both yeah I would say [social media was] both good and bad



“I would say, at that time, social media was the best thing ever, because that was the only place I could get comfort.”

5. Ways of nurturing trust among asylum-seeking, refugee, and migrant women

A

I had to learn how to trust again because I don't have other means. I only have the bus to take but there was days, there was scary looks there, everything was there but I had no choice. I had to trust, I know that these are the people, some of them, because I already knew that some of them, are not against us. Some of them are but I had to relearn how to ... you know because I came here for freedom, so I wanted to be free from what I was running away from, and then when the trauma came it took me back, you know, backwards. I had to talk to myself that this has to stop because I came here for a better stay, and I had to calm down, because if I don't trust them, then which way else I should move because, if there's no trust, then how do I live among them. It's a struggle, it's still something that we are going through. We are not talking about this as history, a once upon a time, a story that happened then - we are still on it because there are still signs that this thing is still among us.

I am managing it, trusting one person at a time. One step at a time, we'll get there, but it's difficult. It's not easy even now.

B

The trusting issues is a problem, because you know when you walk down the streets, and somebody is just smiling? Before, I used to smile back, but nowadays you don't know whether the person is smiling, or they want to do something bad. You're not very sure. So I kept on looking at people's faces just to see what they feel like.

I become so self-aware that anybody, even at the supermarket, look at somebody's face, that's what will tell me if somebody is cursing you from within, or maybe they don't want to tell you in your face, like the ones who are protesting.

So, it's just being aware, and it's not something very, very comfortable, because you feel

you have free space to walk although there could be racism. That's not very obvious, but that became so obvious to me, so now I could look at a person. I'm not very sure if this person was friendly to me or not.

At that time there's no time to think of whether this is right or wrong because it was happening, already it was on the ground, it was not fiction, it was action, you were seeing it, it was happening even in my presence so there was no time to think this is wrong this is like he's scaring me. No, no, I was already scared, I was already fearful. All I had to do was to ask God to calm me down, we just needed calm something. You know that if you feel like you're going to fire into the depression ,the stress, and everything, call somebody, laugh about something. There were still things that you can laugh about and say oh did you see that? did you see this one? oh but it's even better there - the fires were not too. There were still positive things that we could pick to show that things would be better, you know, but there was not for me.

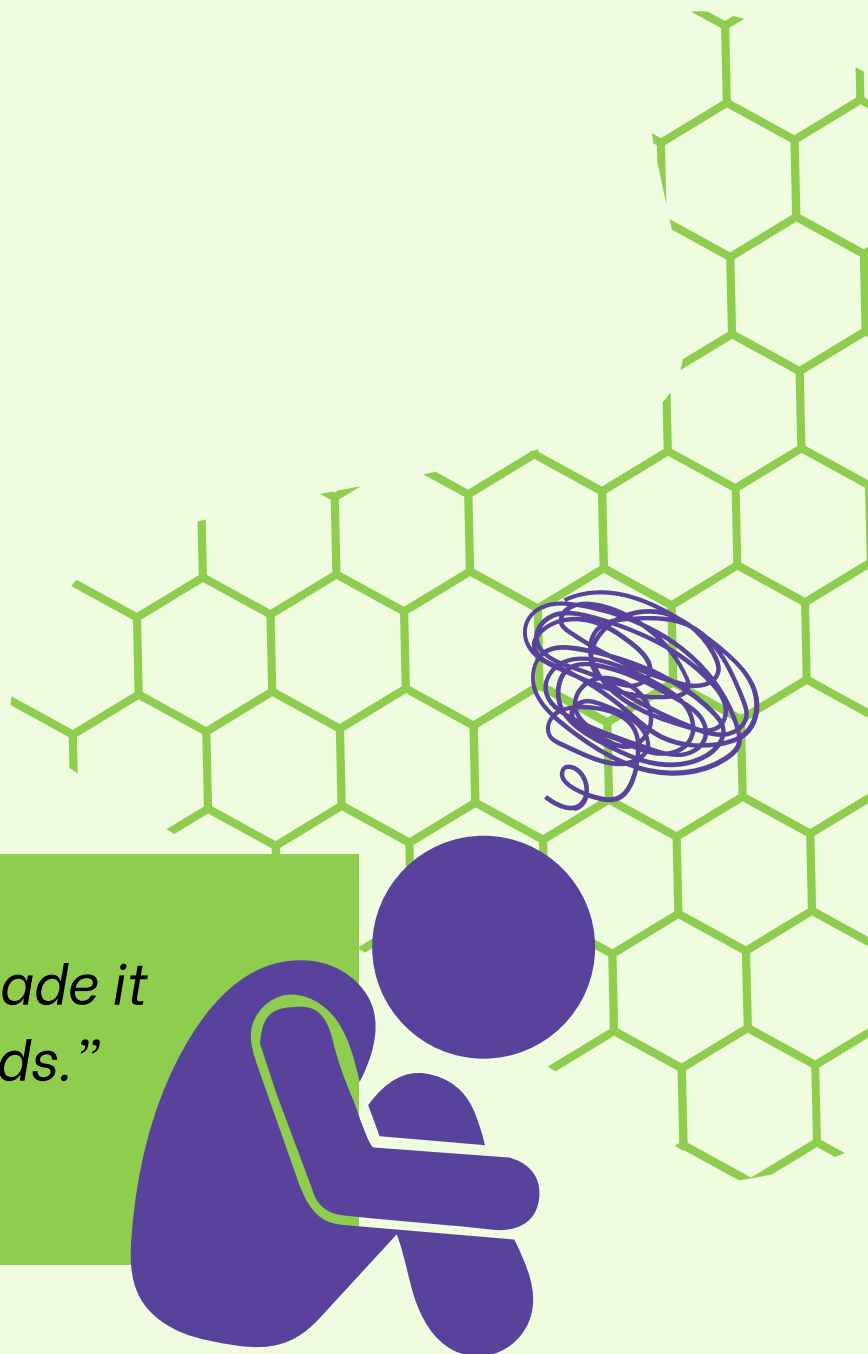
E

When I was in a hotel, being at school, let me say I'd be at school, because that's when I usually meet, like, so many people from different, especially British people. At school, they were okay because I think they were kids. Kids actually they just concentrate only on school. Yes. It's not everybody who understand what's really going on. Yes. But as for outside, I don't really... let me say, I'm kind of antisocial. I don't really pay attention to who's doing that to me, who is not giving me attention, who's that. If I need help, okay, I'll go and ask. But if I ask, they will just help, those who can help, those who are kind. Yes. I haven't really, really get too much into the community because I just moved in May. Yes. So I don't really know much about the new community I moved in. Yes. But I'm just hoping that I'll - what what is English word? - I'll just interact or integrate well with them because I'm one person here who want to make friends. because I'm a sports person. I do play volleyball. So to be there for people, or try to

know people, is something I love, and getting to know people and learning new culture, new language, and new everything. It's something I want to learn. So that's what, that's something I want. I'm aiming to that new community I joined recently.

ITrusting anyone is difficult because since I'm old, young people don't want to be friends with me. The riot has even made it worse to have friends.

“The riot has even made it worse to have friends.”

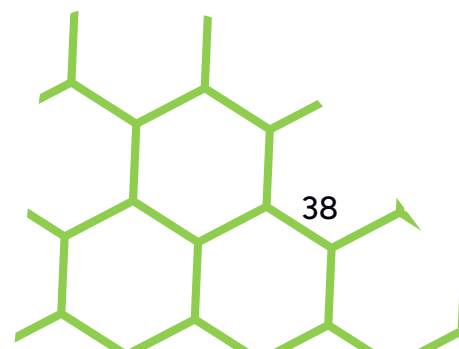


6. Support received during the riots, including support and faith groups and/ or local organisations:

A

Yeah, I would say from my side, I had a home. I was so fortunate because before this riots started, I already had a family called WAST. Women Asylum Seekers Together. So we have a big WhatsApp group there, and we've made ourselves sisters, you know, like we call ourselves sisters whenever we meet, so they were my backbone. Though if I hadn't met them before this, I think I'll be in a mental institution somewhere, because it was hitting me seriously hard, but the WAST women stood with me, we created friendship, big friendship there, serious ones where we poured out our hearts, we poured out ourselves into each other and they really, really supported me and the organization itself, even later on organized mental well-being courses for us, I attended the trauma, all those things, small workshops, we attended them from WAST and it really helped me heal, it helped me know that okay, I'm not going to go through this forever, it will come to an end, I have to know how to, to you know. to live after that. I have to live and trust people and live with them, going to the shops. And the church was a big support also for me, but because like I say, even the day when I was coming from church, I'm a church person, so that is where I get my strength.

They prayed, they supported, they talked to us and all that. So I think building trusting communities, it's a personal thing, it's a thing do you want to trust again? It's a personal thing. Do you really want it or you don't? Some who don't want, I still feel like they are victims, [they feel like] it was only them who were hunted. But you know, it was all of us. So it's us who choose to say that we're here, we are in their place, we are in their country, and if some of them feel like they don't, it's ... knowing that it's not all of them.



B

on that day, I saw a positive side that it is... not everybody. It's not the whole people who are against us because the police came to our hotel on that night, the Sunday night, the whole night, different colours of police. I've never seen the blue, the red, the black, everything, everybody was there. And there was a flying helicopter over the whole night. That alone still brought a lot of fear and uncertainty. We didn't know, why is it still hovering? It means we are still in danger. Because by the time I was with the policeman, one white man came and said, the Far Right are just a few minutes away. And the policeman quickly said, Ma and the kids -run into the hotel now and called back up right away in front of us.

C

To be honest, I did not get any support from any group. I get support from the friends and family, yeah, and myself. I try to pull myself together as well, to be honest, yeah.

Okay, for the right side, the police, they tried their best. They tried their best. They get out of hand because it was too much. So, they tried their best. I remember one time when I was going to work on my roadside, the police, because that road is very quiet. So, one police car and the police just waved me and I waved him as well.

They keep always going, because that road is very, is it Jewish? Is it Jewish? Yeah, Jewish area. So, it's like the police are always just patrolling, going somewhere. I think they noticed me that time, around 7 o'clock, Twice, police, they just saw me on the roadside and they just waved me and I waved them as well. So, they did their best. That's all I can say. They tried their best during that time. The only thing is that it was too much for them. They did their best. That's all I can say.

E

We had this lady from WAST. she called us and asked how we were doing. the chatting with the lady who was from WAST really helped us. I forgot the name of the lady but she was there to see us, how are we doing, especially for us, in hotels.

The support I'm getting from WAST and from other organizations like Sisters Not Strangers and other organization, it's really it's really helpful, actually. It shows that I'm not alone. I have people who are looking out for me, who are they're willing to help me.

We usually go to places with WAST. Like, now we were supposed to go for just an outing, with the management as well. We went to London recently For the LEAP, LEAP project, The best thing is that you have to interact with the community. You have to learn and also to learn the system. Mhmm. Yes. So just with WAST, it's let me say, I'll call WAST home. Yes. Because ever since I came to this country, I've been in WAST. So WAST is my home. Every Friday, I always look forward to go to WAST . Yeah.

G

My church wrote to everyone saying if you want someone to collect you or to walk with you to church. I also have an online meeting, we get a Church of England invite every week from whichever church they are doing it at that week. My church they're very open to things like that , very close knit, beautiful community. We did get an e-mail, our pastor said he was so sad that something like this is happening. We understood that this was a shared emotion, not just us then - it's everyone was feeling sad that something like this was happening.

H

Women Seeking Asylum Together. It's called WAST. It's in Manchester. And from the church. From my church as well. Yeah. I think that's it.

There was a time that I couldn't, I couldn't go out after the accident and after the crash when I was coming from school. So, they bought food for me and came to drop it off at my house. because I was afraid.that's WAST yeah WAST yeah W-A-S-T yeah

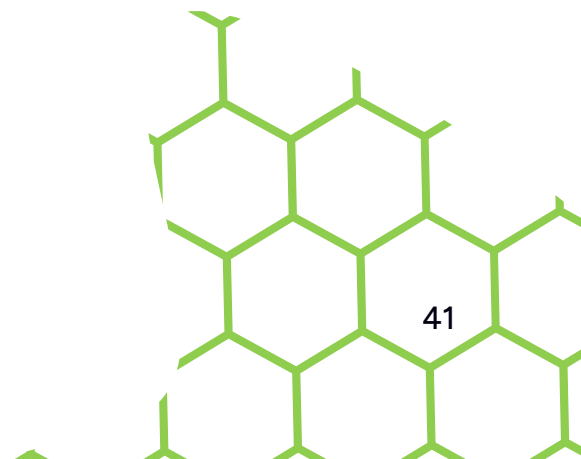
(church)

on Sundays they will arrange like a transport for us to go to go to church or they might just call in to us how we are doing how we are holding up and like to talk whenever we needed something and stuff like that so what the transport does it comes to pick us up and then take us to churches

I

Nobody supported me or helped me except for my local mosque who informed me about the situation and advised me to stay indoors. I told them I already did that because I knew it was not safe for me to be out there.My house is opposite the mosque and local people drove up and down the street to protect it from rioters however the fact stay with that made me feel even more anxious .

One source of a sense of safety is when I wear my traditional clothes. I feel good always. It makes me feel safe and I forget all my concerns. I take no notice of anything when I wear my traditional outfit.



7. Identify ways to rebuild trust and community.

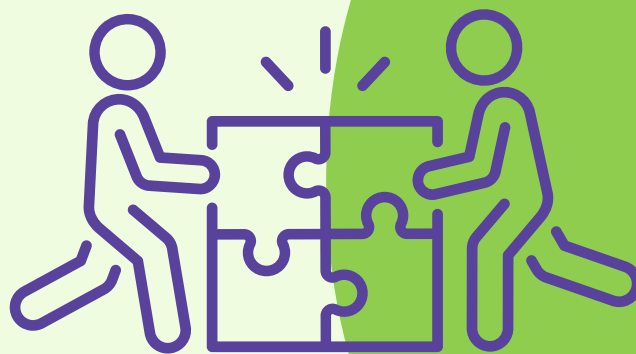
A

Because I'm here, I have to learn how to live with them and understand them. As much as they are also, they also want to learn who I am, they might be just scared because of my skin colour, they might be just scared because they've heard a lot of things, but how do I show them by living among them that I am not dangerous, I'm not here for evil, whatever you think, I'm not here to steal anything, I'm here to live peacefully with you.

Yeah, building trust, it's a continuous process, but the solidarity we get from my community, they were able to stand with me and assure me that there are few people who just want to force struggle, so it will be over, and they should support, more support.

It was the fact that they were saying that if it was them in the same position, they would really be scared. So the trust issues, I think it's something in progress. It's something in progress. So yeah, I'm building trust.

So it's a day to day, every day. But I'm just with the right people who give me support all the time.



H

Q: So if you met the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Sir Keir Starmer, in the lift and he gave you one minute of his time to share your experience and how he as a Prime Minister can stop that from happening. What would you tell him?

It's a magic wand, just very simple, how would you share your experience with him and what is the advice you would give him to avoid future riots?

I'd say, I will try. I'd say tricky one. Under one minute, I don't know, I don't think. I won't. minute will do but I think I'll start off by telling them that every life matters and that we don't choose to come or to run to the UK we run for our safety so mind you for me running away from my home coming here it's for my safety so if I'm coming here and I'm not safe so it's the same as what's happening I will relive or I will be stuck where I was before like I ran away from this but I'm coming straight into it again so I'm not going anywhere so I'll be stuck in between and then I think that it will come to a point where I tell him that you know we don't it's like we don't choose that one day we gonna wake up and say I'm going to run to the UK to look for safety it's obstacles that makes us do that and if I don't feel safe in where I said I will come in for like solidarity, how will I feel safe you know ? and then I'll ask him as a person that if it was your child or if it was your family member how would you feel running from the UK going to look for safety in another country.

I think the advice that I will give him is that you know they should look more into the experience of people like the rules that they implement affects the people so I think they must start changing their rules and then see how it goes

J

“Things like this should not happen because we face the consequences together.”

E

I came here, 2023, November. So I've been in a hotel for a year and five months. I got housed, this month, May 13. you know, you're moving into a new place, and your expectations are not of hatred What really keep me going,, that is kindness. So my kindness. for you to receive kindness, you have to give kindness. Yes. And also me going to school really made me think positive about my expectation. Mhmm.

Yes. I came to this, new country, which I do appreciate. They gave me refugee, and they allowed me to go to school, which I'm really, appreciative to that. And that's one thing that really it really keep me going. And for me to think positive that at least I'm learning something for my future. Back at home, I did tourism. So I decided to change course and do something different. Yes. Because I want to give back to the community. I want to take care of people who are in need. Yes. That's why I choose to be to do health and social care. Yes.

Because we are all in the community ,we are all community members, which I'm meaning every day that we don't have to have that hate in your heart If you have hate in your heart, it's like poison. Poison fills you. You poison yourself. Poison yourself, nothing will go right in your life. You just will be stuck there. So I just told myself that you go to school, you do what you have to do. You come to Sisters not strangers. You get to know people. so it's something that you go to interact with. that's something I keep me positive, you don't have to think negative all the time. So just think positive. If you think positive, positive, then you'll come too.

Yes. Yes. this is something that really made me go and overcome this trauma. the trauma is not is gone 100%, but you have to try by all means that you live your life. You can't just let the trauma to stop how you live your life. one of the things that was so traumatic is the way it broke your life and you lost the patterns to give you a shape. Mhmm. one of the ways back is to get a shape.

SECTION 3: SUPPORT DURING THE RIOTS

This final testimony is by a woman still in the asylum system and a member of Sisters not Strangers. She is a committee member and lead volunteer in Herstory Salford, a group that supports asylum seeking and migrant women. Her testimony reveals the impact of the riots over the geographical area of Greater Manchester but also shows the importance of personal initiative and co-operative action in providing support.

Herstory Salford works with migrant women who have had a background of exploitation, abuse, or any kind of persecution. We are a registered community group that receives funding from the local council, from the local health watch, from the local CVS (Community Voluntary Services). Currently, we are also working with Salford University and Salford Libraries. We hold weekly sessions around issues of mental and physical health, exploring how and who to best approach and what is available in Salford, what's available in Greater Manchester.

Our women are from Middle Eastern countries, South Asian countries, African countries with a range of language skills. Salford has had a big influx of Ukrainians and Hong Kongese so we occasionally have women from these groups too. There are a lot of women from Iran, some from Egypt and a few from Yemen who don't speak English at all.

When the riots started many did not understand what was happening. They were all fearful of leaving the house, even to go out shopping so even those who spoke English were isolated. So I called a Zoom meeting to explain, telling them what the councils and police were doing.

Nothing happened in Salford. But seeing what was happening in Manchester was distressing. And some of the women were in Manchester when the riot happened there. That really put the fear into them. The fear of violence and the fear of aggression is the same for everyone. But the added pressures of race, religion, status, and language skills were very evident during the riots.

Everybody was scared. If you were a person of colour, you feared being targeted. Or if you had to travel a long distance to your mosque or to your temple or to somewhere else where you could be seen and targeted. Women stopped wearing their burqas, they stopped wearing the hijab, and some stopped going out completely. They were panicking. I contacted my group to say, please, guys, if you can spread the word, I'd like to hold some sessions alongside mine. I was fearful myself, and I shared this in the group. They got on board. We did a lot of these online zooms. We contacted MIND. We got two teachers. Then awareness of the zoom sessions spread to about 200 people. We ran a few of these sessions once a week and this went on for about a month.

We have around 45 women in the WhatsApp group and for every Zoom, I had 15 - 20 women. Each came whenever they could and stayed for as long as they wanted. Somebody would volunteer to interpret if needed. They could come for the whole session or just for the meditation and then leave. They didn't need to share anything.

One thing that came out of the riots was that the attacks were aimed at ethnic minority women, not only migrants. A very wide range of people came to the sessions, not only asylum seekers or refugees. I'm part of a group of ethnic minority students in university, and university colleagues, teachers and tutors were also feeling threatened. I invited them and they found a space where it was safe for them to talk and they could understand what others were feeling.

I think the most profound thing that came out of the zoom meeting was that the riots, though fuelled by political interests, can't be solved by political interests. They need to be solved within communities. Instead of saying, let's attack each other, try to find out how we are interrelated, how we are interdependent, how we are, what are we doing to survive here. They can only be solved when communities are brought together, recognise their similarities, and build them into a solidarity.

This testimony is from a woman with long experience of giving mental health support to women who are going through the asylum system or who have experience of it. While still within the system herself, she has been enormously busy, voluntarily running mental health support groups and volunteering with mental health charities such as MIND and NESTAC. She recently completed her Masters in Psychotherapy.

SECTION 4: RESEARCH CONTEXT

It is widely recognised that the violence of last summer's racist riots was generated by, as Race Equality Foundation put it, 'years of public policy failures and the flourishing of toxic and Islamophobic discourses', but the immediate cause is always traced to the misinformation following the Southport murders. However, the timeline documented in the Home Affairs committee report on the, 'Police response to the 2024 summer disorder', reveals that major disturbances had already taken place over the previous months, establishing the pattern for these incidents by frequently targeting hotels used to house asylum seekers. Most significantly, 100,000 people had marched in London in support of Tommy Robinson just two days prior to the first incident in Southport.

In their January 2025 statement the IRR is clear that their research on

charging and sentencing after the far-right-orchestrated racial violence in England in summer 2024 ...finds that attacks could be traced back to scare statements about immigration and two-tier policing and that courts failed to acknowledge the full extent of the racism behind the riots.

Yet despite repeated warnings from multiple agencies, from the Institute of Race Relations to the Refugee Council, such precedents weren't taken seriously. The police's own report admits that they were not prepared, and had no action plans ready. Since then the parliamentary committee preference for the term 'disorder,' and the governmental references to 'thuggery', seem to present the riots as isolated incidents, obscuring the issue of a government-sanctioned hostile environment. Yet without addressing what most reports describe as the persistent racist hostility continuing to simmer below the surface, it is clear that communities cannot heal, and that violence will re-emerge.

The Institute of Race Relations and The Race Equality Foundation refer to these events as race riots. Obviously, there were, and continue to be, wider racist incidents but a key focus of the riots was the presence of people seeking asylum - not, as the media are increasingly calling them, 'migrants'. (After all, there were no attacks on groups of, say, Italians.)

The Race Equality Foundation drew on 400 participants and 21 expert speakers in 4 targeted webinars, with the stated aim to

ensure that the insights and any recommendations from the webinars were shaped by those working within affected communities, groups, and sectors – voices that had been notably absent from the national agenda.

It is a powerful report but, somehow, this representation fails to include the voices of asylum seekers in general, and women seeking asylum in particular. And although the second of their webinars, 'Preventing Violence: Race, Gender and the Racist Riots,' sought to examine how 'far-right racialised and gendered narratives fuelled the violence; and the preventative measures needed against this,' there was no discussion of, or representation by, women asylum seekers: figures who, as we shall see, both encapsulate the conjunction of racialised and gendered nationalism. Their summary of 'the intersection of factors behind the riots - systemic racism, increasing gendered violence, inadequate protections in health and care, and the spread of demonising racist and Islamophobic narratives' - omits the core role of hostility towards asylum seekers. A contributor to the third webinar, 'Recognition of the long-term causes of violent behaviour', drew attention to the issue of immigration:

decades of anti-migrant discourse, policies and the legislation - the introduction, and the fostering of a hostile immigration environment... [has] problematised migrants and racialised people, and regarded them as a threat, a burden, a danger, and that has accumulated in individual acts of violence.

So it was unfortunate that the recommendations of this considered report chose to omit changing attitudes towards migration when summarising their key aim:

If leaders are able to shift the conversation to talk about what promotes belonging and address what undermines belonging such as Islamophobia, racism, violent behaviour and inequality, more proactive steps might be taken.

As the Institute of Race Relations points out, the riots 'clearly mirrored dominant political and media statements, including slogans such as 'stop the boats' and 'taking our country back' while the attacks 'were accompanied by threats to kill and calls for mass deportations, and the public identification of buildings and community resources accessed by migrants and refugees.' Although the IRR does note the significance of male violence in the rioters' claims that police are 'protecting them while they target kids,' and describing them as 'nonce protectors', they do not discuss the experience of women asylum seekers either.

John Drury *et al*, ' Understanding the 2024 Summer Riots in the UK: Three Case Studies' is a far more detailed report, compiled by 20 researchers across the UK, and it chooses the term 'anti-immigrant' to describe the violence. Despite a welcome recognition that 'at least four different parties were involved [in the riots] – anti-immigrant participants, police, counter-protesters, and the targets of the actions (asylum seekers and Muslims)', which suggests that the experience of asylum seekers was integral to a more comprehensive analysis of the situation, they do not discuss this issue, noting the difficulty of getting feedback from those most affected. At a different point they note, like IRR, the significance of gender in justifying the far-right aggression:

anti-immigrant, Islamophobic, anti-refugee (with 'Muslims' and 'refugees'/'migrants' conflated in this racist worldview), English nationalist, anger at seeing their (white) ingroup as 'victims', and therefore protecting vulnerable categories - children, women - from those they perceive to be 'non-English' 'predators'/'threats.

The authors omit a real discussion of the element of either gender or the perspective of the target groups in the hotels - even though one of the case studies (Redcliffe Hill, Bristol, 2 August) concerned the targeting of a hotel which housed 'over 300 asylum seekers, of which more than half were children'. A similar omission mars an otherwise admirable report when it considers "the impact of the riots on the perceptions of local communities regarding anti-immigrant sentiment" without noting that 'local communities' include immigrants. Communities, like anti-immigrant actors are mixed.

There was a furore following the Children's Commission report on children charged with their role in the riots because it so obviously omits consideration of the children on the receiving end of that violence. But there is a general omission of the experience of the women targeted by the attacks. This, in the face of reports such as that by Action Foundation - which does foreground the lived experience of its asylum and refugee clients - and notes that 70% of those impacted were women. The attention of this report, however, is split two ways: on the one hand documenting the experience of male and female asylum seekers and refugees, and, on the other, on its staff, many of whom had been through the system. In the light of these omissions, it does seem that a specific focus on women asylum seekers is necessary to address fully the riots' human impact.

A report in the Bristol-based Transforming Society publication considers the importance of discussing the long-term effect on the communities that experienced rioting:

For many, the fear was overwhelming. Families were afraid to leave their homes, businesses in diverse neighbourhoods were forced to close, and targeted attacks on minority communities surged. Some individuals, particularly those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, expressed disbelief that such large-scale racial violence could still happen in the UK today.

In the light of this comment it is clear that the riots were about more than asylum because they inflamed hatred further afield, spreading throughout communities. This is why the Race Equality Foundation focuses on the need to rebuild communities. They argue that 'trust-based relationships were essential for serving communities before and after the riots, and these require sustained energy and investment.' They astutely point up the pernicious effects of privatisation and commercialisation of those relationships:

Local communities and councils have been turned into more like service deliveries. We are supposed to build, protect and serve communities, not just numbers of residents.

Commentators in The Institute of Race Relations Fortnightly Bulletin are rightly wary of an uncritical agenda of community cohesion, pointing out that:

such proposals have a history of blaming racialised communities, particularly Muslims, migrants and refugees, for 'failing to integrate', and that such policies have also previously by-passed issues of economic scarcity in desperate communities deprived of assets and resources.

They argue for the crucial need to address the root causes of racism through inclusion as well as policing. Marking the six-month anniversary of the riots, the IRR draw attention to the input of key community members, citing, 'over 60 racial justice and Muslim organisations,' who contributed to a letter coordinated by the Runnymede Trust and supported by themselves.

However although there is discussion on the long term impacts on minority ethnic communities, Islamic communities, and ethnic minorities working in the NHS, there is no discussion of the issue of immigration and gender which scaffolds such racism, nor of the ongoing impacts on the women and children asylum seekers. These are figures whose vilification stands as a marker for the fractured community.

Sisters not Strangers comprises 7 organisations drawn from across England and Wales. Our members contribute to demonstrations, panels, podcasts, and debate across the UK. For example, at this April's Yorkshire Solidarity summit two of them contributed to the panel on 'personal testimony of experience of race riots, its impact and what was done to keep communities safe'; while a third was on the panel that reflected on the 2024 summer riots, asking 'how do we organise more effectively to counter racism.'

Addressing a Behavioural Sciences UK webinar on 'Understanding the 2024 English riots: Insights into social unrest and racial dynamics' (10/06/25), John Dury sees a supportive community response as part of the solution. He argues that the counter-protesters who turned out in such numbers to defend asylum seekers in Bristol were key to the cessation of violent anti-immigrant mobilisations:

After that Wednesday the 7th of August it wasn't just in Bristol, it was across the country. I went to one in Brighton, and it was absolutely huge, it was hundreds and hundreds of people and it was a good atmosphere and there were varied people, all sorts of people ... you got that sense that people were saying this is the community, this is the community public opinion and ...speculatively you could say the people that would otherwise be mobilising for the anti-immigrants would be saying well...public opinion is not so supportive of us as we thought.

The lessons of communal fracture and shattered trust resulting from the riots must be remembered at a time the right is fomenting yet more hostility towards immigrants; and always it is women who suffer the most – and, as our research reveals, those rendered helpless to protect their frightened children. We believe that our research testifies to the necessity and value of lived experience testimony in rebuilding trust and hence achieving the inclusive communities that are the only way effectively to counter racism and prevent anti-immigrant violence.



Recommendations: Rebuilding Trust and Communities

1. Counter disinformation and rebuild public understanding

- Permit independent visits to asylum hotels (e.g. by the Children's Commissioner) to assess and publicly report on actual living conditions. This will help debunk false narratives about luxury provision and highlight the often-overlooked needs of women and children.

2. Improve safety and communication

- Establish consistent, direct communication between residents of asylum accommodation and local police/emergency services. Timely updates about security threats, especially protests or far-right activity, are essential to safeguarding residents.

3. Strengthen local emergency response capacity

- Invest in regional infrastructure to ensure police, emergency services, and counter-terrorism units can be rapidly mobilised in response to targeted incidents.

4. Phase out the use of asylum hotels

- Recognise asylum hotels as high-risk sites for conflict and community tension, often attracting far-right mobilisation and resulting in escalating security costs.
 - Instead, invest in appropriate community-based accommodation.
 - Improve and expedite asylum decision-making by increasing legal aid and caseworker capacity.
 - Prioritise dignity, privacy, and wellbeing in housing policy for people seeking asylum.

5. Take stronger action against far-right threats

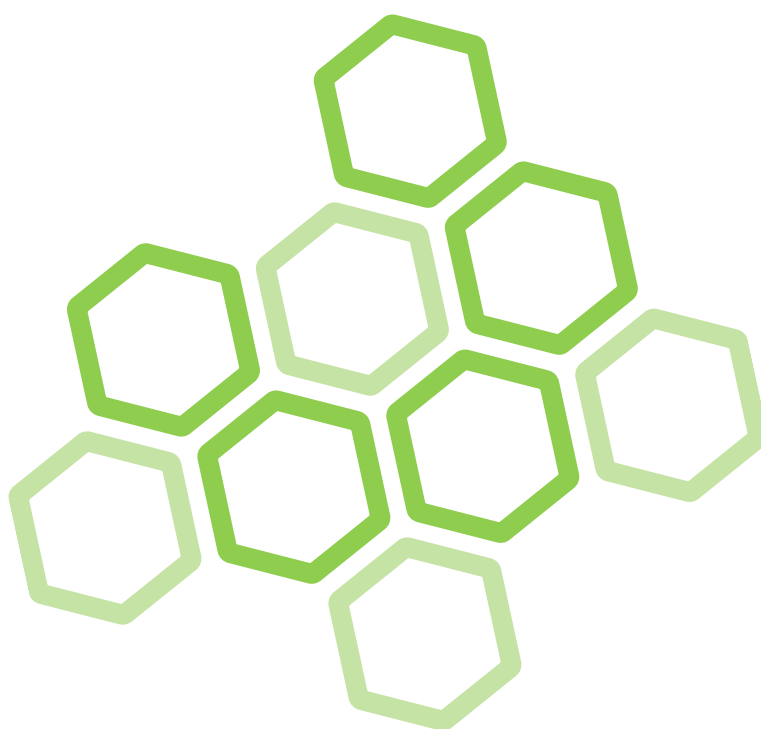
Expand the list of proscribed organisations to include far-right groups engaged in coordinated efforts to incite fear, intimidate, or carry out attacks against asylum seekers and their supporters.

6. Create local healing and resilience spaces

- Support the development of women-led healing and peer-support groups.
- Enable safe, regular gatherings where refugee and asylum-seeking women can connect, share, and build community resilience.

7. Longer Term Recommendations

- End the Hostile Environment and its vicious anti-immigrant rhetoric.
- Reverse austerity as creating the community tensions exploited by the far right
- Introduce penalties for malicious claims by far-right politicians and media



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#SistersNotStrangers

The image features a solid purple background. At the bottom, there is a bright green shape that resembles a stylized hill or a wavy line. The text "#SistersNotStrangers" is written in white, sans-serif font, positioned above the green shape.