



THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S CONVENTION

A BLETHER ON...

*Black History
Month*



October 2023

Black History Month 2023:

Every October, across the UK, Black History Month is celebrated, considering the vital contributions of black people to British society. The theme of 2023 was ‘Saluting Our Sisters’, which asked the public to celebrate the continuous achievements of black women. To honour this theme, we held a ‘Blether’ on the 26th of October, asking BME women to consider their experience of living in Scotland, with multiple topics arising: healthcare, community, justice and education. The following report contains a summary of each theme, alongside multiple recommendations which focus on the ways policymakers can better support BME women across Scotland.

4 Recommendations:

1. Work with healthcare providers to challenge racist stereotypes, ensuring good quality, comprehensive care for all residents of Scotland.
2. Enforce a zero-tolerance approach to prejudicial behaviour carried out by judicial employees, including frontline police officers.
3. Re-establish consistent funding streams for community groups, through increased local authority budgets.
4. Actively fight racism across educational establishments through strict regulation and enforcement of anti-racist policy.

The Scottish Women’s Convention (SWC)

The SWC is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK, and international levels.

The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.

Women's Views:

Healthcare

“I’ve had experiences in Scotland of people who have went to the NHS, who are black, and they received... they were not treated nicely because of their colour. They were treated differently just because of their colour, and I found that very heartbreaking”

A key issue discussed with attendees was the provision of healthcare in Scotland. Some gave experiences of facing direct discrimination as a result of their skin colour, with reception staff acting as gatekeepers to treatment. Women explained that when attempting to make appointments they were often dismissed, with language barriers sometimes preventing them from accessing care. It was also explained that those who received appointments were treated with a lack of dignity, with it being assumed they would have high pain tolerance: a remnant of racist, colonial viewpoints. Women also felt that some healthcare workers believed that ethnic minority women attended appointments purely to make use of the free healthcare on offer in Scotland. This was incredibly off-putting for BME women, contributing to poor mental wellbeing and creating a further barrier to healthcare access.

- “If you’re going to the hospital, it’s because you’re not feeling well...But when you get there, and they treat you like that, it can double your disease...they’re stigmatising you”
- “Some of them assume that you’re here just to get the NHS freebies, and it’s sad when it happens, and when it happens to you.”

Justice

“I think all this stereotyping and discrimination, harassment, it’s across the board...the police stopped us, and you should have seen the harassment my son received. They were being very aggressive with him”

BME women also expressed mistrust with regards to the police and wider justice system. They gave accounts of unfair stop and searches, as well as general aggression from some police staff. This added to a feeling of insecurity, with BME women explaining that they did not receive adequate protection from the justice system. It was stated by one attendee that she had had positive experiences with the police, believing that Police Scotland is in a process of change, whereby racist views were being tackled. However, overall, attendees believed that clear inequality faced the BME community, pointing to arrest and incarceration rates. It can be seen that in 2021-22, the rate of imprisonment for ‘African, Caribbean and Black’ people in Scotland was 8.2 per 1,000, while the rate of imprisonment for ‘White’ individuals sat at 3.2 per 1,000¹. Therefore, racist stereotypes unfortunately remain engrained across institutions in Scotland, and without direct action, it is unlikely that effective change will occur.

- “...the discrimination just doesn’t end, and the stats are there, that black crime is exaggerated”
- “They have blinkers on of their own stereotypes, they don’t want to hear, they just listen to the prejudices in their head.”

¹ Scottish Government. Scottish Prison Population Statistics 2021-22. Available at: [Scottish Prison Population Statistics \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

Community

“The community is good for our wellbeing...because when you come together again and you do certain events together...although we are here in Scotland, you don’t forget your roots, where you come from.”

Throughout our ‘Black History Month’ discussions, women highlighted the importance of community. They explained that community groups allowed immigrant women the opportunity to engage in their own culture, while simultaneously facilitating learning for the Scottish populace. Women reminisced about pre-pandemic events which enabled cross-cultural blending, such as Ceilidh’s combined with African dance, focusing on the importance of togetherness and community. BME women stated that community outreach enables this thinking, actively fighting prejudice and racism. Yet, despite the positive impacts of community engagement, funding cuts can be seen across Scottish local authorities, resulting in a loss of community groups. This has been acutely felt by BME women, with attendees pointing to refugees and asylum seeking women. As funding is lost, community projects are unable to go on, removing lifeline services for the most vulnerable. Women were in consensus, believing that local authority budgets must be increased to allow for the reinstating of community groups.

- “...they need to fund these outreach activities, they need to fund it, because without funding, you can’t bring people together. And that’s one way to get to know each other...you can reduce stereotypes”
- “...they’ve cut the fund, and it affects asylum seekers, it’s where they socialise...forget that they’re not in their country”

Education

“The discrimination, the prejudice, this stereotyping, so it means that whatever they [BME children] achieve, they have to work three times as hard.”

Women also discussed their experiences of the education system, with young BME women experiencing increased likelihood of bullying on account of racism. It was felt that teachers and support staff do not effectively tackle racism at school level, with some actively worsening the environment for BME girls. This was again accounted to racist stereotypes, resulting in the regular dismissal of achievements made by ethnic minority children. Women stated that these children often had to work harder than their white counterparts throughout their educational career, with this continuing into wider employment. To counter this blatant disregard of BME children, women recommended a zero-tolerance policy surrounding racism, whether this behaviour was perpetuated by other children or educators, as well as increased accountability for institutions.

- “...my daughter was having braids pulled from the back, they kept saying that it was fake hair, and she burst out crying and left the class...They went through hell from their classmates, their teachers”
- “...a lot of serious thinking and conversations must take place to resolve the institutionalised racism, otherwise the next generation of black ethnic minority children will be confronted with the same problems and the society will be at a loss.”
- “...educators at all levels must be equipped to confront racism, and find solutions to microaggression, bias, etc.”

Thank You!

Thank you to the women who shared their experiences with us. We will continue to advocate for women across Scotland so that their views are included in the policy-making process.



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