Racism, Public Safety and Community Cohesion in Scotland

Supplementary submission from the signatory anti-racism organisations to the Scottish Parliament Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

For the evidence session on 3 December 2026 and the proposed lived-experience inquiry in spring 2027

BEMIS
Empowering Scotland's Ethnic and Cultural Minority Communities

AROS
ANTI-RACISM OBSERVATORY FOR SCOTLAND

cemo
Strengthening Communities Tackling Inequalities
SCOTLAND

CRER
coalition for racial equality and rights

scottish refugee council

ARTICLE 12 IN SCOTLAND

To: Katie Hagmann MSP, Convener, Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee
From: The signatory anti-racism organisations
Date: 25th November 2026

Dear Convener,

Thank you for your letter of 10 November 2026 and the Committee's decision to undertake a two-phase inquiry into community cohesion. We welcome the evidence session with statutory duty bearers on 3 December and the commitment to a lived-experience-led inquiry in spring 2027.

This supplementary submission is made on behalf of the anti-racism organisations that are signatories to our original proposal of September 2026 and this correspondence (hereafter referred to as “the collective”). The term *collective* reflects our shared assessment of the emerging challenges facing Scotland and our commitment to a coordinated response. It does not suggest that every organisation has identical experiences or responsibilities but recognises the recurring patterns of concern identified through our respective community networks, services, research and engagement with public institutions.

Our central message is urgent: the developments now being reported must not be normalised as an inevitable feature of political debate or ordinary community disagreement.

The convergence of rising race-related charges, sustained anti-immigration mobilisation, hostile online networks and growing fear among minority ethnic communities represents a serious challenge to equality, public safety and community cohesion in Scotland.

These developments must also be understood in the wider context of austerity, poverty, deteriorating public services and economic insecurity. Communities across Scotland are experiencing pressure on housing, employment, public spaces, health, education and household finances. These shared difficulties can be exploited through narratives that encourage people to see one another as competitors for scarce resources.

We believe the inquiry must therefore consider not only how Scotland responds to racist offending, but how its economic investment, cultural institutions, public services and democratic leadership can help prevent division and build a genuinely shared sense of belonging.

We will not arrest and prosecute our way out of deep-rooted societal challenges. Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service have essential responsibilities, but they cannot carry the burden of strengthening community cohesion alone.

Scotland must protect people facing racism, challenge the narratives that divide communities and use every available public policy and investment lever to make people's lives materially better.

1. Executive Summary – Essential Points for MSPs

1. The scale and visibility of racism demand urgent attention

The latest evidence identifies several deeply concerning developments:

- **3,990 race-related hate crime charges** reported to prosecutors in 2025–26, an increase of **17%** on the previous year.
- **56% of all hate crime charges** in Scotland related to race.
- Charges concerning the stirring up of racial hatred increased from **29 to 67**.
- Police-recorded racial hate crimes in Glasgow increased by **34%** in the first quarter of 2026–27 compared with the same period the previous year.
- Police Scotland recorded 144 anti-immigration protests across 19 Scottish towns and cities by 22 June 2026.

These figures describe different measures and must not be conflated. Nevertheless, considered alongside organised mobilisation and community testimony, they provide serious grounds for concern.

2. This is not simply a series of isolated incidents

The collective is concerned about the convergence of:

- Rising race-related charges and recorded offences.
- Sustained anti-immigration demonstrations and organised mobilisation.
- Online misinformation and racialised narratives.
- Reports of fear, intimidation and reduced confidence among minority ethnic communities.
- Inconsistent institutional preparedness and preventative responses.

The cumulative nature of these developments must be recognised as a serious emerging societal problem.

3. Lived experience must bring the statistics to life

Across the collective's networks, recurring concerns include:

- People feeling unsafe in public spaces or changing their routines.
- Individuals withdrawing from community events and public participation.
- Threats affecting minority ethnic organisations, staff and service users.
- Racism affecting workers, particularly those in insecure and public-facing employment.
- Reduced confidence that institutions understand or adequately respond to racial hostility.

These qualitative accounts are not a representative national survey, but they identify patterns that warrant parliamentary scrutiny.

The spring inquiry must establish what official statistics cannot show[1]: how racism changes people's everyday lives, opportunities, relationships and sense of belonging.

4. Austerity and poverty create conditions in which division can be exploited

Scottish Government child poverty figures for 2022–25 indicate that **21% of all children** were living in relative poverty after housing costs, rising to **40% among children in minority ethnic families**, **39% among families with a baby under one**, **38% among larger families** and **30% among lone-parent families**.

These overlapping categories demonstrate shared hardship alongside significant inequalities.

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[1] Taking Islamophobia as an example, Peter Hopkins' 2021 report, *Scotland's Islamophobia*, found that:

- 83% of Muslim respondents had directly experienced Islamophobia.
- Verbal abuse was the most commonly reported form of Islamophobia.
- Over 80% of Muslim respondents had a friend or family member who had experienced Islamophobia.
- Only 22% of those who had directly experienced Islamophobia reported incidents to the police.
- In almost all reported cases, respondents felt their complaints were not taken seriously.
- Of the 326 cases where incidents were not reported to the police, 69% of respondents identified as Muslim.

This highlights that the recorded statistics are likely to underestimate the true prevalence of racism and racist incidents across Scotland. Given the extent of underreporting, the scale of the problem could be considerably greater than the official figures suggest.

The collective is concerned that legitimate frustrations about housing, public services, economic insecurity and access to decision-making are being redirected towards migrants, refugees and minority ethnic communities.

Austerity does not inevitably produce racism, but weakened community infrastructure and perceived competition for resources can create conditions in which racist narratives gain influence.

5. Culture and Scottish identity are essential to community cohesion

Racialised online and offline narratives can portray Scottish identity as exclusive, fixed or dependent on ancestry.

Scottishness must provide space for everyone who calls Scotland home.

- Intangible cultural heritage, music, languages, storytelling, festivals and community traditions can create shared experiences.
- Cultural funders and institutions should actively support participation across ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Public cultural budgets should be recognised as preventative investment in belonging, trust and positive community relations.
- Community-led cultural activity can create the shared memories and relationships that help communities resist division.

6. Economic investment must create shared opportunity

Scotland's 2026–27 Budget provided approximately £7.568 billion in capital and financial transactions funding, including approximately £7.324 billion in capital allocations.

This raises a fundamental question: How much of Scotland's public investment is being used to create accessible pathways into skilled, secure and fairly paid employment for young people and communities currently excluded from economic opportunity?

Public procurement, community benefit requirements, apprenticeships, training and emerging industries should contribute to measurable improvements in economic participation and equality.

7. Community cohesion must become a collective societal responsibility

We must move beyond an approach in which schools are expected to address prejudice and, when that fails, police and prosecutors become the remedy of last resort.

Scotland's response must involve:

- Criminal justice and community safety.
- Poverty reduction and public services.
- Economic development, procurement and employment.
- Culture, heritage and shared national identity.
- Political leadership and democratic participation.
- Community organisations and lived-experience-led decision-making.

Community cohesion must become a measurable outcome of Scotland's economic, cultural and social investment—not an isolated policy responsibility.

2. Six Priority Questions for the Committee

1. What explains the increase in race-related charges and recorded offences, and what remains hidden through underreporting?
2. How are statutory authorities assessing the connections between organised mobilisation, online misinformation, intimidation and racist offending?
3. Who is accountable for a coordinated national response across government, policing, prosecution, local authorities and other public institutions?
4. How are austerity, poverty, public service pressures and perceived competition for resources affecting community relationships?
5. How are Scotland's cultural and economic budgets being used to build shared belonging, expand opportunity and reach underrepresented communities?
6. What measurable preventative and protective actions will be in place before spring and summer 2027?

3. Why This Is Not Business as Usual

The collective believes that the current situation requires a level of urgency and scrutiny reflecting the seriousness of the emerging evidence.

These developments should not be viewed as unrelated local disputes. We are witnessing several warning signals simultaneously:

- Rising criminal justice indicators relating to racism.
- Repeated demonstrations linked to asylum accommodation and wider anti-immigration narratives.
- Increasingly organised online communication and mobilisation.
- Recurring accounts from minority ethnic communities that their sense of safety and belonging is deteriorating.
- Concerns about whether institutional responses are sufficiently coordinated and preventative.

Each source of evidence has limitations. Taken together, however, they justify urgent parliamentary scrutiny.

The normalisation of racial hostility is itself a significant societal danger.

When people avoid public spaces, reconsider attending community events, worry about travelling to work or fear being identified because of their ethnicity, the consequences extend beyond individual criminal incidents.

They affect the conditions required for people to participate equally and safely in Scottish society.

The collective recognises that individuals may hold legitimate concerns about immigration policy, housing, public services and economic insecurity. We do not equate disagreement about public policy with racism.

Our concern is that legitimate grievances can be exploited to portray migrants, refugees and minority ethnic communities as threats, creating conditions in which racial hostility, intimidation and exclusion become increasingly normalised.

There is a clear distinction between lawful democratic debate and conduct involving racial intimidation, harassment or violence.

The rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression must be protected. Equally, racist offending cannot be excused or minimised as political expression.

Our September proposal highlighted disorder and arrests associated with demonstrations in Glasgow during July 2026, alongside the growing visibility of organised and choreographed far-right mobilisation.

The Committee should examine:

- Whether the tactics and organisation of racist mobilisation are changing.
- Whether particular communities and locations are being repeatedly targeted.
- Whether online activity is contributing to offline intimidation or offending.
- Whether policing and preventative arrangements have kept pace with these developments.
- Whether institutions sufficiently recognise the cumulative impact on minority ethnic communities.

The question is no longer simply whether Scotland is experiencing racist incidents. It is whether the country is witnessing a broader deterioration in the conditions that allow minority ethnic communities to live safely, confidently and equally.

4. Statistics Show the Scale – Lived Experience Will Show the Reality

The collective strongly welcomes the Committee's commitment to placing lived experience at the centre of its inquiry in spring 2027.

Official statistics are essential, but they cannot provide a complete account of racism and its consequences.

A criminal charge does not capture the full experience of the person targeted. A police-recorded incident does not measure the lasting effects of intimidation.

Increases in recorded offending must also be interpreted alongside possible changes in reporting behaviour, policing activity and recording practices. At the same time, underreporting means that significant experiences of racism remain invisible within official figures.

Across the collective's networks, communities are reporting concerns extending well beyond individual incidents.

People describe:

- Avoiding particular locations because they feel unsafe.
- Reconsidering attendance at community activities and public events.

- Being reluctant to appear in photographs or share personal contact information.
- Feeling anxious about travelling to and from work.
- Worrying about the safety of children and family members.
- Questioning whether public institutions will act effectively when hostility occurs.

Similar concerns have emerged through community engagement in different parts of Scotland, including Dumfries and Stornoway.

These accounts are not presented as a representative national survey. Nevertheless, their recurrence across different communities and settings is a significant warning that warrants further investigation.

Some individuals have expressed feeling more fearful now than at any previous point during their time living in Scotland.

Lived Experience Must Shape the Inquiry

The spring 2027 inquiry should not treat lived experience as supplementary testimony used simply to illustrate statistical findings.

It must be central to establishing what the statistics mean, what they fail to capture and whether public authorities are responding effectively.

Lived-experience evidence can help Parliament understand:

- Who is experiencing racism and intimidation.
- Where and in what circumstances incidents are occurring.
- Why some incidents are never reported.
- How racial hostility affects employment, education, family life and community participation.
- Whether individuals trust public authorities to protect them.
- What preventative measures communities believe would make a meaningful difference.

It may also challenge institutional assessments of whether existing interventions are working.

For example, a public authority may consider an event successfully managed because serious disorder was prevented or arrests were made. However, affected communities may continue to experience fear, intimidation or a loss of confidence long after the event has ended.

Both forms of evidence are important, but they measure different outcomes.

Ensuring Meaningful Participation

The collective believes the Committee should:

- Work through trusted minority ethnic-led, refugee, migrant and community organisations.
- Provide confidential and, where appropriate, anonymous opportunities to contribute.
- Establish appropriate safeguarding arrangements.
- Ensure participation is accessible to communities outside major urban centres.
- Recognise the resources and time required to build trust and support meaningful engagement.
- Ensure that lived-experience evidence directly informs questions to statutory stakeholders and the Committee's recommendations.

Participation must not expose individuals to additional risk.

The Committee should recognise that those most fearful or marginalised may be among the least likely to participate through conventional parliamentary evidence-gathering processes.

5. Austerity, Poverty and the Conditions Driving Community Division

The collective believes the Committee must consider the wider social and economic conditions in which racism, anti-immigration mobilisation and community tensions are escalating.

Rising Energy Costs: A Significant Additional Threat to Community Cohesion

A 26% increase in energy prices in January 2027 represents a significant additional threat to community cohesion in Scotland and across Britain. Coming against a backdrop of sustained austerity, poverty, deteriorating public services and growing racial hostility, an increase of this magnitude risks pushing more households into poverty and destitution. The consequences will extend beyond household energy bills, increasing pressure on the cost of food, essential goods, businesses and public services. As economic insecurity deepens and frustration grows, legitimate grievances become increasingly vulnerable to exploitation through narratives of othering, scapegoating and perceived competition for scarce resources.

The cumulative impacts of austerity, the cost-of-living crisis and pressure on public services have created significant insecurity for communities across Scotland.

These pressures are increasingly experienced through everyday life:

- **Housing:** Shortages of affordable housing, homelessness and competition for accommodation.
- **Public services:** Deteriorating local facilities, reduced provision and pressure on essential services.
- **Health and education:** Difficulties accessing mental health support, educational resources and other services.
- **Household finances:** High energy costs, food insecurity, insecure employment and financial hardship.
- **Community life:** Deteriorating public spaces, concerns about safety and reduced opportunities for participation.
- **Democratic participation:** A sense of exclusion from decisions about how constrained public resources are allocated.

Child Poverty: Shared but Unequal Hardship

Scottish Government figures demonstrate the scale of economic insecurity and its unequal impact across different family circumstances.

Children living in relative poverty after housing costs, 2022–25:

Family or household group	Child poverty rate
All children in Scotland	21%
Minority ethnic families	40%
Families with a baby under one	39%
Families with three or more children	38%
Lone-parent families	30%
Families with a disabled household member	23%

Source: Scottish Government, Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan Progress Report 2025–26. Figures are three-year averages and categories overlap.

These statistics demonstrate two important realities:

- **Poverty affects families across Scotland**, with more than one in five children living in relative poverty.
- **Its impact is unequal**, with children in minority ethnic families experiencing particularly high poverty rates alongside other groups facing structural disadvantage.

Scottish Government statistics also indicate that approximately three-quarters of children in relative poverty live in households where someone is in paid employment. Poverty cannot therefore be understood simply as a consequence of unemployment.

From Shared Hardship to Competition Between Communities

The collective is concerned that sustained economic insecurity and constrained public resources are creating conditions in which communities increasingly perceive themselves to be competing against one another.

Access to housing, public services, employment opportunities, community facilities and decision-making power can become contested.

People from all backgrounds are experiencing real pressures, but these shared challenges are vulnerable to narratives that encourage communities to blame one another rather than examine the structural causes of inequality.

Of particular concern is the exploitation of legitimate grievances about housing, public services and economic insecurity to portray migrants, refugees and minority ethnic communities as competitors for scarce resources.

This risks transforming shared experiences of hardship into resentment, racial hostility and division.

Austerity does not inevitably produce racism, nor does economic insecurity justify racist behaviour. Racism has its own historical, structural and institutional foundations.

However, economic insecurity, weakened community infrastructure and perceived competition for resources can create conditions in which existing prejudices are amplified and organised racist narratives gain influence.

Implications for Community Cohesion

Community cohesion cannot be strengthened through public messaging or short-term initiatives alone.

It requires attention to the material conditions of people's lives, equitable access to resources and meaningful democratic participation.

The Committee should examine:

- How austerity and public service pressures affect relationships within and between communities.
- How legitimate concerns about resource allocation are exploited through racialised narratives.
- Whether public authorities communicate transparently about housing, public services and resource allocation.
- How communities participate in decisions affecting their lives.
- How anti-racism, poverty reduction and community cohesion strategies can work together.

The spring 2027 inquiry should explore these issues with people from different ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The inquiry must understand not only what is dividing communities, but also the shared experiences and interests upon which greater solidarity, fairness and social cohesion can be built.

6. Culture, Scottish Identity and Building a Shared Sense of Belonging

The collective believes that the Committee must examine how culture, heritage and national identity can strengthen community cohesion and challenge racialised narratives about who belongs in Scotland.

Online and offline narratives about what it means to be Scottish can present national identity as fixed, exclusive or dependent on ethnicity and ancestry. Such narratives risk marginalising communities whose histories, identities and contributions are integral to contemporary Scotland.

Scottish identity is not the property of any single ethnic or cultural group. It is a shared, evolving identity that must provide space for everyone who calls Scotland home.

Culture as a Preventative Response

We will not arrest and prosecute our way out of deep-rooted societal challenges.

Criminal justice responses are essential, but community cohesion also requires investment in the relationships, experiences and shared identities that prevent division.

- **Intangible cultural heritage:** Music, languages, storytelling, food, traditions, festivals and community practices can connect people across ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- **Shared national identity:** Scotland's cultural institutions should promote an inclusive understanding of Scottish identity, recognising longstanding traditions and the contributions of diverse communities.
- **Shared experiences and memories:** Local festivals, sport, cultural activities and community celebrations allow people to interact, develop relationships and establish a collective sense of belonging.
- **Cultural investment as prevention:** Culture and heritage funding should be recognised as contributing to equality, anti-racism, community cohesion and public safety.
- **Reaching marginalised communities:** Cultural institutions must engage people experiencing poverty, rural isolation, discrimination and exclusion across all ethnic backgrounds.

Community cohesion is built through everyday relationships and shared experiences, not simply through responses to conflict.

Cultural Funders and Local Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural funders, national institutions and local authorities have a critical role in supporting what might be described as *local cultural diplomacy*: creating spaces where communities meet, participate, celebrate and build trust.

This requires examining how public cultural budgets are allocated, whose participation is prioritised and whether funding supports sustained engagement beyond one-off events.

Cultural investment should not be treated as disconnected from wider public responsibilities for equality and community cohesion.

The Committee should examine:

1. **Scottish identity:** How are cultural institutions challenging exclusionary narratives about Scottishness and promoting shared national belonging?
2. **Funding and accountability:** How are Creative Scotland, national cultural institutions and local authorities using their budgets to advance equality, participation and cohesion?

3. **Intangible cultural heritage:** How can Scotland's living traditions, languages, music and community practices build relationships across ethnic and socioeconomic differences?
4. **Local cultural diplomacy:** What investment supports accessible, community-led activities that create shared experiences and lasting relationships?
5. **Inclusion and access:** Are cultural funding decisions reaching marginalised communities or reinforcing existing inequalities in participation?
6. **Measuring impact:** How do cultural funders demonstrate their contribution to belonging, trust and positive community relations?

Culture is not an optional addition to community cohesion. It is one of the ways community cohesion is created and sustained.

If we want communities to stand together when division emerges, we must invest in opportunities that bring them together long before tensions arise.

7. Economic Opportunity, Public Investment and the Material Foundations of Community Cohesion

The collective believes Scotland must recognise economic participation and public investment as essential tools in confronting racism, rebuilding hope and strengthening community cohesion.

We cannot expect communities to reject division while failing to address the economic insecurity, exclusion and lack of opportunity that make divisive narratives attractive.

Scotland's 2026–27 Budget provided approximately £7.568 billion in capital and financial transactions funding, including approximately £7.324 billion in capital allocations.

This represents substantial public investment in Scotland's infrastructure and economic future.

Yet a fundamental question remains:

How much of this investment is deliberately being used to improve the life chances of people and communities currently excluded from economic opportunity?

From Child Poverty to the Jobs of the Future

With 21% of children in Scotland living in relative poverty after housing costs during 2022–25, and substantially higher rates among minority ethnic families and other priority groups, Scotland must consider what future awaits young people growing up in poverty today.

Emerging opportunities in renewable energy, infrastructure, construction, engineering, technology and other skilled sectors offer the potential to create secure, fairly paid employment and meaningful economic participation.

However, opportunity cannot be assumed to reach everyone automatically.

Public investment should actively address:

- **Access to skilled employment:** Clear pathways from education and training into secure, fairly paid jobs for young people from disadvantaged and underrepresented communities.
- **Inclusive procurement:** Using public contracts, community benefit requirements and supply chains to widen access to apprenticeships, training and employment.
- **Economic representation:** Understanding who currently benefits from public investment, who remains excluded and why.
- **Place-based opportunity:** Ensuring communities experiencing poverty and economic decline benefit directly from investment in their areas.
- **Long-term security:** Prioritising sustainable employment, fair work and career progression rather than short-term opportunities alone.

Public investment should not simply build Scotland's infrastructure. It should help build a more inclusive Scottish society.

Procurement as an Instrument of Community Cohesion

Scotland already uses public procurement to pursue social and economic objectives. The question is whether these approaches are sufficiently ambitious, targeted and measurable in relation to inequality, underrepresentation and community cohesion.

We should be asking:

- Who secures employment, apprenticeships and training opportunities associated with major public contracts?
- Are young people experiencing poverty and racialised communities accessing the skilled jobs being created?

- Are community benefit commitments delivering measurable outcomes for underrepresented groups?
- How are contractors demonstrating fair recruitment, progression and retention?
- Are public bodies using available procurement powers to support inclusive economic participation?

These questions should be considered within applicable procurement and equality frameworks, with attention to fair, transparent and lawful approaches to widening opportunity.

Moving Beyond a Narrow Understanding of Anti-Racism

Too often, responsibility for challenging racism and strengthening community cohesion is framed primarily through education and, when harmful behaviour escalates, through policing and prosecution.

Schools, Police Scotland and COPFS have essential responsibilities. However, they cannot carry the burden of resolving wider societal challenges alone.

We will not educate, arrest or prosecute our way out of racism without also addressing the material conditions, inequalities and opportunities shaping people's lives.

The economy, public procurement, housing, cultural investment, education, health, community infrastructure and democratic participation must all contribute to a coordinated response.

This is not about excusing racism because people experience hardship. Racism must be challenged directly, and those facing it must receive effective protection.

It is about recognising that improving people's material circumstances, expanding opportunity and strengthening shared belonging can help undermine narratives that seek to divide communities.

Questions for the Wider Inquiry

7. **Public investment:** How are Scotland's capital and infrastructure budgets being used to create measurable employment and skills opportunities for communities experiencing poverty and exclusion?
8. **Procurement:** What proportion of apprenticeships, skilled jobs and community benefits associated with public contracts reaches underrepresented communities?

9. **Economic inclusion:** What evidence is collected on participation by ethnicity, socioeconomic background, disability, gender and geography, and where are the gaps?
10. **Jobs of the future:** How are Scotland's emerging industries ensuring that young people experiencing poverty can access training, recruitment and career progression?
11. **Institutional accountability:** What responsibilities should economic development agencies, public procurement bodies, employers and skills institutions have within Scotland's community cohesion agenda?
12. **Measuring progress:** How will government demonstrate that public investment is reducing inequality, improving people's lives and strengthening shared confidence in Scotland's economic future?

Community cohesion must become a measurable outcome of Scotland's economic, cultural and social investment.

8. What the Collective Is Hearing Across Communities and Institutions

Across the signatory organisations and their wider networks, recurring concerns are emerging through community engagement, support services, organisational partnerships and work with public bodies.

These should be understood as patterns requiring scrutiny rather than issues confined to particular organisations or locations.

Threats to Minority Ethnic Organisations and Community Services

Organisations supporting racialised communities are reporting threats, harassment and increasing concerns about the safety of staff and service users.

These pressures can affect their ability to deliver services, organise public activities and maintain trusted relationships with communities.

Of particular concern is hostility directed towards organisations because of the communities they support or the equality work they undertake.

Publicly funded organisations may be especially exposed to hostile narratives concerning their activities and funding.

The Committee should consider whether current funding and safeguarding arrangements adequately recognise these risks, including the potential need for dedicated resources to strengthen organisational safety, resilience and continuity of services.

Racism Affecting Workers and Economic Security

The collective is concerned about racism experienced by minority ethnic workers while undertaking their employment or travelling to and from work.

This includes individuals in low-paid, insecure and public-facing roles, such as delivery drivers.

Racist abuse, threats and violence may affect people's willingness or ability to work in particular locations or at particular times.

There may be consequences for earnings, employment opportunities and household economic security.

The Committee should examine whether these impacts are sufficiently understood within current approaches to employment protection, fair work and poverty reduction.

Public Sector Leadership and Institutional Responses

Through our collective engagement with public institutions, concerns continue to emerge about inconsistent anti-racist leadership and organisational preparedness.

These include:

- Staff uncertainty about responding to racist incidents or community tensions.
- Reluctance to promote inclusive events because of concerns about hostile reactions.
- Equality and anti-racism responsibilities being concentrated within small specialist teams.
- Limited understanding of how equality and human rights duties should inform mainstream organisational decisions.
- Inconsistent arrangements for monitoring community tensions and sharing relevant information.

There are examples of constructive local practice, including community tension-monitoring arrangements.

However, questions remain about national consistency, coordination and accountability.

The Committee should seek comparable evidence from public bodies about what arrangements exist, how they operate and how their effectiveness is assessed.

9. Public Discourse, Political Leadership and Responsibility for Community Cohesion

Political and civic leadership must form part of the Committee's consideration of community cohesion.

The language used by elected representatives, including Members of the Scottish Parliament, and other influential public figures can shape how communities are perceived and how legitimate public policy disagreements are conducted.

The collective is concerned that racialised framing, divisive language and the portrayal of particular communities as threats may contribute to a wider environment in which hostility and exclusion become increasingly normalised.

This does not mean that legitimate debate about immigration, housing, public services or other matters should be restricted.

Nor are we asking the Committee to prejudge the conduct of any individual, party or institution.

However, political discourse cannot be regarded as entirely separate from the wider social environment in which racism and community tensions develop.

It is important that the inquiry's terms of reference are sufficiently broad to examine these relationships where they arise through evidence.

In particular, lived-experience engagement may identify concerns about:

- Language used by elected representatives or other public figures.
- Public commentary that communities experience as racialising or stigmatising particular groups.
- The impact of online political communication.
- Whether political rhetoric contributes to feelings of fear, exclusion or insecurity.
- The standards of leadership communities expect from those holding public office.

The Committee should examine such evidence fairly, with appropriate safeguards and without predetermined conclusions.

This inquiry also provides an opportunity to consider the importance of cross-party leadership in challenging racism and maintaining responsible public discourse.

Avoiding Scottish Exceptionalism

The collective cautions against approaching the current situation through a lens of Scottish exceptionalism.

Developments elsewhere in the United Kingdom undoubtedly influence Scotland's political and social environment.

However, racism in Scotland cannot be understood solely as a consequence of events beyond its borders.

Scotland has its own contemporary manifestations of racism, discrimination, prejudice and exclusion.

These require independent examination, including scrutiny of Scottish institutions, political discourse and societal responses.

10. From Individual Institutional Responses to Collective Societal Action

The collective believes Scotland requires a coordinated, preventative and explicitly anti-racist response.

The Committee should examine not merely whether individual public authorities have relevant policies, but whether those policies operate as part of an effective national system.

There is an important distinction between organisations responding to incidents within their own responsibilities and a coordinated approach capable of identifying emerging risks, preventing escalation and protecting affected communities.

Police Scotland's nationally coordinated arrangements for protest policing, including Operation Leste, provide one starting point for scrutiny.

The Committee should examine how operational intelligence and national coordination translate into local community protection, public communication and preventative action involving other agencies.

Equally, the response must extend beyond criminal justice.

Economic development agencies, cultural funders, employers, education providers, local authorities and community organisations all have responsibilities in creating the conditions for positive interaction, economic opportunity and shared belonging.

11. Questions for Statutory and Publicly Funded Stakeholders

Scottish Government

- Who has overall responsibility for coordinating Scotland's response to rising racism and organised racist mobilisation?
- What national assessment is being undertaken of emerging risks?
- How are anti-racism, community safety, poverty reduction, culture, economic development and community cohesion policies being coordinated?
- What support is available to minority ethnic organisations experiencing threats or intimidation?
- What measures are being considered to strengthen prevention and institutional accountability?

Police Scotland

- How are protest-related risks, hate incidents and online mobilisation assessed together?
- What arrangements exist for identifying and responding to organised extremist activity?
- How are affected communities consulted before, during and after demonstrations?
- How are policing approaches coordinated across divisions?
- What evidence is available about the effectiveness of existing preventative and protective measures?

Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service

- What do recent charge trends reveal about the changing nature of racist offending?
- What limitations should be recognised when interpreting these statistics?
- How is consistency maintained in the application of hate crime legislation?
- What information can be provided about prosecution outcomes?
- How are patterns of offending and relevant evidence shared with other statutory partners?

COSLA and Local Authorities

- What arrangements exist for monitoring community tensions and emerging racial hostility?
- How consistent are these arrangements across Scotland?
- What preventative action is undertaken when tensions are identified?
- How are minority ethnic communities involved in local community safety planning?
- How are local authorities assessing the impacts of poverty, public service pressures and deteriorating community infrastructure on cohesion?
- How are local cultural, community and economic development budgets being used to support positive interaction and shared opportunity?
- How are local authorities demonstrating their responsibilities under equality legislation?

Cultural Funders and National Institutions

- How are public cultural budgets being used to strengthen community cohesion and inclusive national belonging?
- What proportion of investment reaches marginalised communities across ethnic, geographical and socioeconomic backgrounds?
- How are intangible cultural heritage, festivals and community-led cultural activities supporting positive relationships between communities?
- How are funding decisions informed by communities experiencing poverty, discrimination or exclusion?
- How is the impact of cultural investment on participation, belonging and community relationships assessed?

Economic Development Agencies, Procurement Bodies and Employers

- How are public investment and procurement strategies contributing to equality and community cohesion?
- Who benefits from the employment and training opportunities associated with major infrastructure projects?
- How are community benefit requirements monitored and evaluated?
- What action is being taken to widen participation among young people experiencing poverty and underrepresented communities?
- How are secure employment, fair pay and long-term career progression being prioritised?

Public Sector Leaders and Employers

- What protection is available to staff and service users experiencing racism?
- How are organisations responding to racial harassment within and around workplaces?
- How is anti-racism embedded across institutional leadership and operational decision-making?
- What evidence exists that equality duties are producing practical improvements?
- How are senior leaders held accountable for these responsibilities?

The Public Sector Equality Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires relevant public authorities, in exercising their functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The requirement to foster good relations includes having due regard to tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

The collective believes this responsibility should be central to the Committee's scrutiny.

Public authorities should demonstrate how these obligations influence:

- Strategic leadership and operational planning.
- Community engagement and public communication.
- Service delivery and staff protection.
- Cultural participation and access.
- Economic development and procurement decisions.
- Preventative responses to racism.

The Committee should seek practical examples, clear accountability and evidence of impact rather than relying solely on statements of institutional commitment.

12. What Should Happen Next?

The Committee's evidence session on 3 December provides an important opportunity to establish a baseline for its more detailed inquiry in spring 2027.

However, the seriousness of the emerging situation also requires consideration of immediate preventative action.

Our original proposal highlighted concerns about the potential for increased mobilisation during spring and summer 2027.

We therefore encourage the Committee to establish what statutory stakeholders are doing now to prepare for further incidents and protect affected communities.

Immediate Priorities

1. Clear national leadership and accountability

Identify the public authorities responsible for coordinating the national response, including how responsibilities are shared across government, policing, criminal justice and local authorities.

2. A shared understanding of the evidence

Develop a coordinated approach to understanding the scale and changing nature of racism, distinguishing between reported incidents, police-recorded crimes, criminal charges, convictions and lived experience.

3. Effective protection for affected communities

Establish clear arrangements for safeguarding individuals, workers, community organisations and service users experiencing threats, harassment or intimidation.

4. Consistent preventative responses

Demonstrate how statutory agencies identify emerging risks, share relevant information and coordinate preventative action across Scotland.

5. Recognition of wider social and economic pressures

Assess how poverty, austerity, public service pressures and perceived competition for resources are influencing community relations, alongside measures to prevent legitimate grievances being exploited through racist narratives.

6. Culture, heritage and shared belonging

Recognise cultural participation, intangible cultural heritage and inclusive national identity as essential elements of community cohesion, with clear expectations for cultural funders, national institutions and local authorities.

7. Economic opportunity and inclusive public investment

Examine how infrastructure budgets, procurement, skills programmes and emerging industries can create measurable opportunities for young people and communities experiencing poverty and exclusion.

8. Preparation ahead of spring and summer 2027

Establish a timetable for reviewing existing arrangements, addressing identified gaps and reporting progress publicly.

9. Comprehensive terms of reference for the spring inquiry

Ensure the inquiry encompasses:

- Organised racist mobilisation and online misinformation.
- The lived experiences of affected communities.
- Institutional accountability and political discourse.
- Austerity, poverty and public service pressures.
- Scottish identity, culture and intangible cultural heritage.
- Economic participation, procurement and public investment.
- Preventative approaches to community cohesion and shared belonging.

13. Conclusion: A Defining Opportunity for Scotland

The collective welcomes the Committee's decision to undertake this inquiry. We believe it offers an important staging post for Scotland to confront a deeply concerning deterioration in racial hostility and reconsider how community cohesion is understood, supported and delivered.

The evidence of rising race-related offending, organised anti-immigration mobilisation, online hostility and increasing fear among minority ethnic communities must not be normalised.

Racism must be confronted directly, those experiencing it must be protected and institutions must be held accountable for their response.

However, this cannot be the limit of our collective ambition.

Scotland's communities are also experiencing the cumulative consequences of austerity, poverty, economic insecurity, deteriorating public services and growing competition for resources.

These pressures affect people from every background, although not equally. They can be exploited through racialised narratives that turn shared hardship into division and resentment.

Our response must therefore operate across society:

- **Criminal justice and public safety:** Protect communities, prevent intimidation and ensure accountability for racist offending.
- **Economic investment:** Use infrastructure spending, procurement, skills and employment opportunities to improve people's lives and widen participation in Scotland's future.
- **Culture and national identity:** Build an inclusive sense of Scottishness through intangible cultural heritage, cultural participation and shared experiences.
- **Public services and community infrastructure:** Address the material pressures that undermine security, trust and opportunity.
- **Political and institutional leadership:** Challenge divisive rhetoric, uphold democratic standards and take collective responsibility for preventing racism.
- **Lived experience:** Ensure the people most affected shape the evidence, decisions and solutions.

We will not arrest and prosecute our way out of these societal challenges. Nor can community cohesion remain a standalone responsibility of schools, police or specialist equality organisations.

The responsibility must be shared across government, public institutions, employers, cultural funders, economic development agencies, political representatives and communities themselves.

The inquiry presents Scotland with a choice.

We can collectively reset expectations of acceptable behaviour in a democracy, take an unequivocal stance against racism, respond immediately to the growing threat and use every resource at our disposal to improve people's lives and strengthen our shared future.

Or we can allow pernicious narratives, manipulation and division to become further embedded, creating deeper problems for Scottish society as a whole and causing particular harm to those already experiencing racism.

The collective believes Scotland must choose the former.

Community cohesion is not simply the absence of conflict. It is the presence of safety, fairness, opportunity, participation and a shared sense of belonging.

It is created when people have confidence in their institutions, when they can access decent employment and essential services, when their cultures and contributions are recognised, and when they know their rights and dignity will be protected.

The spring 2027 inquiry must bring the lived experiences behind the statistics to the centre of this national discussion.

It should also establish a clear framework of responsibility, investment and accountability across the institutions that shape everyday life.

The task before Scotland is not merely to prevent communities from moving further apart. It is to use our collective resources, institutions and opportunities to move everyone forward together.

We remain ready to support the Committee in facilitating safe and meaningful engagement with affected communities and ensuring that their experiences directly inform parliamentary scrutiny and recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

Danny Boyle
Executive Director, BEMIS
On behalf of the signatory anti-racism organisations (the collective)

BEMIS, CEMVO, CRER, Scottish Refugee Council, Article 12 and the Anti Racism Observatory for Scotland

14. Evidence and References

1. Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service
Hate Crime in Scotland 2025–26
https://www.copfs.gov.uk/publications/hate-crime-in-scotland-2025-26/html

Official statistics on race-related hate crime charges, including annual changes and charges concerning the stirring up of racial hatred.

2. Scottish Police Authority
Policing Events Report – July 2026
https://www.spa.police.uk/publication-library/policing-events-30-july-2026/report-detail/

Evidence concerning anti-immigration protests, their geographical distribution and Police Scotland's operational arrangements.

3. STV News
Racist hate crimes rise by more than a third in Glasgow

https://news.stv.tv/west-central/racist-hate-crimes-rise-by-more-than-a-third-in-glasgow

Reporting on the increase in police-recorded racial hate crimes in Glasgow.

4. The Ferret
Investigation into anti-immigration online networks in Scotland
https://www.theferret.scot/scotland-northern-ireland-rapidly-anti-immigration-network/

Investigative reporting on online anti-immigration networks and their connections with wider mobilisation.

5. Scottish Government
Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan Progress Report 2025–26
https://www.gov.scot/publications/tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-progress-report-2025-26/pages/7/

Child poverty statistics by family characteristics, including minority ethnic households, lone-parent families and larger families.

6. Scottish Government
Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2022–25
https://www.gov.scot/publications/poverty-and-income-inequality-in-scotland-2022-25/

Official statistics on poverty, household income and in-work poverty.

7. Poverty and Inequality Commission
Independent Scrutiny of Child Poverty Delivery Plan Progress 2025–26
https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Full-Report-Child-Poverty-Delivery-Plan-Progress-2025-26-Scrutiny-by-the-Poverty-and-Inequality-Commission-May-2026.pdf

Independent assessment of child poverty and inequalities affecting priority family groups.

8. Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe)
Scottish Budget 2026–27
https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/research-prepared-for-parliament/research-briefings/2026/1/16/sb-2604

Analysis of Scotland's 2026–27 Budget, including capital and financial transactions allocations.

9. Scottish Government
2026–27 Autumn Budget Revision – Supporting Document
https://www.gov.scot/publications/2026-27-autumn-budget-revision-supporting-document/pages/2/

Information on subsequent changes to the capital funding position.

10. Collective of Anti-Racism Organisations
Proposal for a Short-Term Inquiry into Protests and Racism in Scotland – September 2026

Original proposal submitted to the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee.

11. Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee
Letter to BEMIS – 10 November 2026

Correspondence confirming the Committee's two-phase inquiry into community cohesion and its planned evidence session on 3 December 2026.