



ANTI-TRIBALISM MOVEMENT

# UNITE SUMMIT 2021

Post-COVID-19 Recovery for the Somali community in the UK

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3RD SEPTEMBER 2021



# INTRODUCTION

On Friday 3rd of September 2021, the Anti-Tribalism Movement (ATM) hosted a one-day summit at Hilton London Kensington. The summit brought together 40 participants across the UK ranging from key drivers of change, in the fields of government, practitioners, academia, policy makers and community leaders.

This summit focused on four thematic areas: Mental Health, Employment, Housing and Education. The summit was guided by presentations and workshops which enabled us to discuss how COVID-19 pandemic has affected the Somali community with specific reference to the above thematic priorities, given greater scope on what the community can do to mitigate this impact while at the same building the framework to influence any future national COVID-19 recovery plan.

# CONTEXT

Since the emergence of COVID-19, ATM has documented the needs and challenges of the UK Somali community in a series of policy briefings. These briefings have two aims: first, to hold local and national policy makers accountable to the community, and second, to provide a starting point for the Somali community to share and discuss issues that affect their lives in light of COVID-19 as well as more generally. These briefings include:

- [COVID-19 – Impact on the Somali Community](#)
- [Improving Mental Health Support for the UK Somali Community](#)
- [COVID-19 and Women: The UK's Horn of Africa Communities](#)
- [COVID-19, Unemployment and the Somali Community](#)

Through presentations and workshops, the Summit participants discussed and worked together to find lasting transformative solutions on these policy areas. The following policy issues and recommendations are based on the contribution of the Summit participants who consisted of 21 leading Somali charity organisations from London, Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester, Manchester, and Wales, 5 practitioners, 3 academics, and representatives from wide-ranging segments of the Somali community across the UK.

*“If this, in any way, enhances our individual and collective contributions and solution to mitigate the ongoing impact of COVID-19 to our communities, then the summit can truly be judged as a success”.*

# EDUCATION

The move to online learning greatly impacted students across the UK. It highlighted the deep inequalities that students face, such as how poverty affects a student's education. This was the case for many Somali students across the UK. Participants at the Summit discussed the ways in which a family's financial situation disadvantage the student, this was the most evident in accessing the required technology for their schooling needs. For example, a large family with only one or two laptops at home meant that not all children could complete their schoolwork or access their classes. This was relevant for Somalis in the UK as Somali families are overwhelmingly low-income households, and the subsequent lack of technological access set students back.

Another major topic in education was the cultural barriers, a lack of representation and relevant data. Somali students fall into the wider ethnic categories which do not differentiate Somali specific issues and needs. This leads to schools not receiving appropriate training which will support them to understand and work well with Somali students. Participants at the Summit shared that the needs of Somali students are often forgotten or misunderstood, and that there is not enough communication between the family of the student and their school. Participants agreed that if this is improved, long-term issues such as school exclusions can be prevented.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create budgets for technology to support low-income families. **Local Authorities and Department for Education.**
2. Support and facilitate mentoring schemes to improve educational attainment and prevent school exclusions. **Community groups, Voluntary Sector Organisations and Department for Education.**
3. Schools must strengthen dialogue with parents. **Schools, Local Authorities and Department for Education.**
4. Make diversity and inclusivity central to all educational policy and curriculum decisions. **Local Authorities and Department for Education.**
5. Provide funding to increase facilities to support young people outside of school. **Local Authorities and Government.**
6. Develop a data capturing system for Somali students. **Department for Education and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.**
7. Provide culturally sensitive training for teachers. **Local Authority.**
8. Incorporate more 'soft' skills in the education system, such as leadership, communication, collaboration, creativity and adaptability. **Department for Education.**
9. Community groups and organisations to organise workshops such as for 'stress management' & 'mental wellbeing' for parents. **Community groups and Voluntary Sectors Organisations.**
10. Address misconceptions and improve communication between local communities and schools. **Local Authority and Schools.**





## MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health was one of the biggest impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its lockdowns. The Summit participants noted that there is stigma around mental health in the Somali community, which causes further issues. This has meant that people are not seeking mental health support when it is needed as there is a lack of awareness and education on the subject. Without challenging and breaking down this stigma, mental health will remain a taboo subject.

Another reason why mental health has remained a major issue in the Somali community is the gap between service providers and the Somali service user. There are cultural differences which means that on the service providers end, they may not understand the Somali patient and therefore not cater to their needs. For the Somali service user, when not feeling understood, they may stop accessing services and not receive the help they need. The Summit participants strongly argued for better mental health advocacy to ensure that the Somali community access the services and that the service providers have better tailored support which

Representation was another big topic during the mental health discussion. Some of the Summit participants work in the mental health field and noted that there is a lack of representation in senior roles which further contributes to this issue. Whilst Somalis have to internally challenge the stigma, the mental health service providers must also improve their diversity and inclusivity to ensure that the Somali community's needs are represented. The Summit participants agreed that this is an issue across the healthcare field, and working to improve representation will have long-term impacts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The community should expand mental health advocacy as part of their general service provisions, which includes tackling the stigma surrounding mental health. **Community organisations and healthcare institutions.**
2. Statutory agencies must be trained in cultural sensitivity, and provide tailored support and service provision which considers specific needs of the community. **Healthcare institutions and Department of Health and Social Care.**
3. Allocating funding for research, and creating a system with disaggregated data which provides evidence of specific community based mental health needs. **Local authority and Department of Health and Social Care.**
4. To improve representation, the Government should work and consult with BAME organisations and BAME community leaders on effective and specific mental health support. **Department of Health and Social Care.**
5. Statutory agencies should bridge the gap between service users and providers by allowing community leaders and individuals to sit on key health decision-making boards such as Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). **National Health Service (NHS) England and The Department of Health and Social Care.**
6. Develop a long-term plan which addresses and tackles the existing inequality gaps in the healthcare sector. **Department of Health and Social Care.**
7. Create and fund holistic programmes for women and girls which addresses healthcare needs as a result of gender inequality. **Department of Health and Social Care, local authority and community organisations.**
8. Ensure that digital mental health services are accessible and easy to use. **Healthcare institutions.**
9. The Department for Education should work with local authorities and mental health organisations to develop guidance for teachers/schools to increase their understanding of trauma (bereavement, abusive etc) and approaches/training that will provide them with the right tools to be able to support children and young people early on. **Department for Education, local authority, community and organisations.**

# HOUSING

Housing inequality is one of the biggest issues facing Somalis in the UK. With rising house costs across the country, low-income families are struggling more than ever. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic meant that families had to spend more time at home, and for many Somali families, this meant that unsuitable housing conditions were affecting the wellbeing of household members. One way this affected Somali households was overcrowding. Many homes are designed for small families which make it unsuitable for large families. Summit participants agreed that there is not enough advocacy and campaigning for suitable and affordable homes for Somalis in the UK.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Commit resources and support to strengthen housing knowledge through advocacy which includes understanding the rights and processes. **Local authority and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.**
2. Ensure that housing is affordable and appropriate to local residents, such as large families needing larger homes, and to review housing policies with particular respect to overcrowding and affordability. **Local authority and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.**
3. Promote greater representation and empowerment of BAME groups at all housing decision-making levels. **Local authority and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.**
4. Communities should undertake research on how Somali families are impacted by housing policies and developments/regeneration. **Community groups, local authority and donors.**
5. Review and address poor housing conditions which implicate health conditions and wellbeing of the resident, such as a new speedy process to assess and remedy the poor housing condition. **Local authority.**
6. Increased engagement between the local community and planning/regeneration developers to ensure that the affected residents are involved in these processes. **Planning/regeneration developers, community organisations and local residents.**

*"Hearing different ideas will give you a lot of information and guidance that you need to tackle grassroot community issues".*



## EMPLOYMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic affected all aspects of employment and unemployment. The pandemic brought a huge loss in jobs, uncertainty and subsequent financial insecurity. Our report [COVID-19, Unemployment and the Somali Community](#) highlighted the ways in which the Somali community in the UK were affected by COVID-19 and employment, this was further discussed by the Summit participants. Many noted that there is a limitation to the types of work that Somalis can take due to a lack of diverse skills, and that many Somalis will work in insecure fields such as those in zero-hour contracts and in the gig economy.

Participants also highlighted that women were disproportionately impacted by unemployment as a result of COVID-19, particularly when it comes to household responsibilities and work outside the home. To eliminate poverty, employment and the adverse effects it has on the Somali community have to be addressed and challenged.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provide tailored support and resources to up-skill community members to attain transferable skills and boost their career options. **Department for Work and Pensions, local authority, and community groups.**
2. Expand non-vocational career options beyond the traditional courses and careers. **Department for Work and Pensions and local authority.**
3. Consider flexible and family friendly employment to ensure that people can work alongside other responsibilities. **Department for Work and Pensions.**
4. Commit resources to employment schemes tailored to people with multiple disadvantages which hinder them from entering employment. **Department for Work and Pensions and local authority.**
5. BAME focused scheme for young people, similar to KickStart to ensure that young people have more employment opportunities. **Department for Work and Pensions.**
6. Introduce stronger regulations to ensure employment rights for workers in the gig economy and zero-hour contracts. **Department for Work and Pensions.**
7. Close the digital gap which prevents people from accessing employment opportunities, such as those who lack digital literacy. **Department for Work and Pensions.**
8. Fund data collection in order to respond to employment needs and challenges/ **Department for Work and Pensions.**
9. Create mentoring schemes tailored to BAME youth to tackle unemployment after school. **Local authority and community organisations.**



# CONCLUSION

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The Unite Summit 2021 was successful in gathering Somalis from across the UK to discuss and challenge issues which have faced the Somali community as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants tackled the issues of education, mental health, housing and employment and through debates and discussions, came up with various policy recommendations. These recommendations represent the views of Somalis across the UK and form the basis of further advocacy.

This brief is a community resource to present to communities, institutions, and local and national government, with recommendations for each actor. The Anti-Tribalism Movement will amplify and push forward the needs and asks of the Somali community using this brief and its recommendations.

**A final thank you to the participants of the Unite Summit 2021. This brief would not have been possible without their contributions which they drew from their extensive knowledge and experience.**

*“Black and Ethnic Minorities are heavily disproportionately affected by COVID, and as the Somali community we have to see why we are affected specifically, and this can only happen through these discussions”.*





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