asylum matters

Praxis
for migrants and refugees



Under Threat: Why UK Charities No Longer Feel Safe

Charities Sound the Alarm on Harassment, Intimidation and Fear

A survey of charities and charity workers
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Compiled by Asylum Matters & Praxis

About Asylum Matters

Asylum Matters campaigns collaboratively, locally and nationally, to transform asylum in the UK to improve the lives of refugees and people seeking asylum.

Contact: info@asylummatters.org
Website: www.asylummatters.org

About Praxis

Praxis is a human rights and social justice charity that supports migrants, refugees and people affected by hostile immigration policies.

Contact: communications@praxis.org.uk
Website: www.praxis.org.uk



Foreword

Charities are under attack. Service users, volunteers and staff have faced death threats, assaults, their addresses being leaked, and their families being threatened. All because they believe in kindness, fairness and supporting one another in times of need - and in providing their services to anyone who needs them. Even elected politicians have openly called for investigations into and prosecutions of charities for simply fulfilling their charitable objectives.

The recent targeting of RNLI volunteers rightly drew a huge amount of public attention and outcry. But these incidents, while extreme, were far from unique.

To better understand the scale of the problem of charities experiencing threats to their work, we asked them. Asylum Matters and Praxis surveyed hundreds of charities across the UK from a range of sectors in 2026. Follow-up interviews were conducted with selected organisations.

The responses paint a stark picture:

- **Nearly half (47%) had experienced actual threats or harassment**
- **Nearly three quarters (72%) felt less safe delivering their services compared to three years ago**
- **Two thirds (65%) had altered their service delivery as a result of perceived threats or risk**

This is devastating to charities. Organisations report diverting resources away from frontline work, introducing costly security measures, restricting public events and spending increasing amounts of time managing risks. Staff, volunteers and service users report heightened stress, fear and burnout. And yet, these charities continue to find ways to deliver vital support to those in need.

This report presents the experiences of charities and charity workers who have united to share their experiences, to share a statement of solidarity with charity workers under threat, and to call for action.

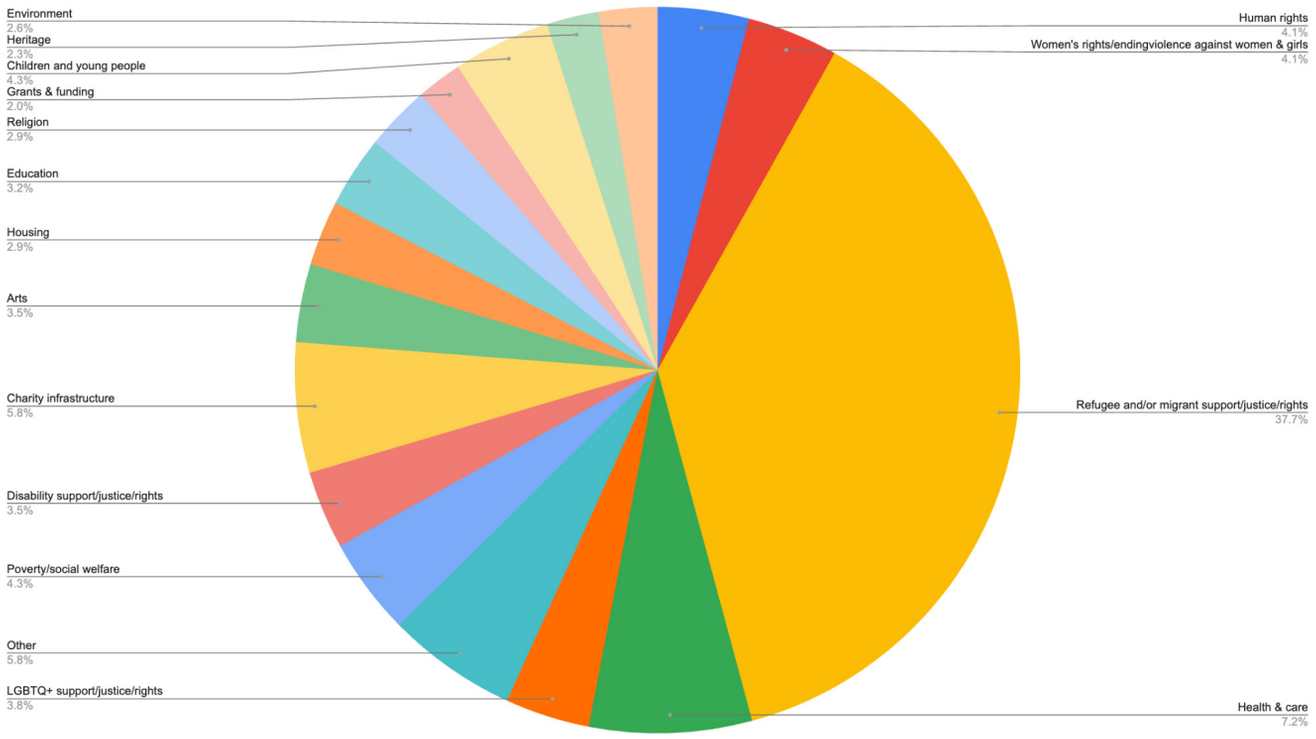
Together, they are urging the Government to meet with impacted charities, and work to provide:

- **A clear message and national leadership**
- **Real protection**
- **Accountability and action on dis-/mis- information**
- **Regulatory support**

At a glance

Key message: Threats, harassment and intimidation are increasingly forcing charities to divert time, money and energy away from supporting the communities they exist to serve.

Sectors of charities responding to survey



What we found

1. **Nearly three-quarters** (72%) of charities who responded felt less safe than they did three years ago.
2. **Almost half** (47%) have experienced threats or harassment.
3. **Two-thirds** (65%) have changed how they deliver services because of safety concerns.
4. **0%** felt safer than three years ago.
5. **Resources** are being diverted from frontline work into risk management and security.
6. **Staff, volunteers and service users** are paying the emotional price.
7. **Despite the hostility, charities continue to find ways to support those in need** and deliver on their charitable objectives.

What charities experienced

- Death threats
- Doxing
- Racist abuse
- Islamophobic abuse
- Homophobic and transphobic abuse
- Filming and online harassment
- Threatening emails and social media messages
- Vexatious complaints
- Sustained harassment campaigns

The cost

- Increased security spending
- Events cancelled or restricted
- Reduced public visibility
- Staff burnout
- Volunteers leaving roles
- Service users avoiding support

The findings:

It is clear that charities feel threatened. 72% said they felt less safe delivering their services compared to three years ago. None said they felt more safe (the rest either reported no change or did not respond to the question).

Meanwhile, 47% of organisations that responded said they had faced threats or harassment because of their work with specific communities over the last three years.

- **Nearly three quarters (72%)** said they felt less safe delivering their services
- **Nearly half (47%) faced threats** or harassment because of work with specific communities
- **0% felt safer** (excluding non-responses)

Among the incidents reported were death threats, rape threats, and doxxing directed at charity workers and volunteers. Charities also described wider patterns of "abuse" and "threats" both online and in person. This included racist and Islamophobic comments. Online abuse usually came through social media and email. One charity run for and by Disabled people reported its social media account being "plastered with slurs against disabled people."

Several organisations supporting migrants and refugees, in particular, reported their staff or service users being filmed without their consent, which led to fears of further abuse after footage was posted online.

"Recently we had someone come into one of our drop in sessions and start filming the people in there. We stopped him and asked him to leave, he told us he was a journalist and that he did YouTube work and he would post the video as we should not be helping 'parasites'. We explained we were a charity who would help anyone in need, his response was to tell us we were a disgrace and that this is not what charities do." Refugee charity

Meanwhile, organisations providing universal services, such as homelessness and health charities, faced abuse for providing services to marginalised communities including migrants and LGBTQ+ people, or reported increased hostility toward marginalised staff. While abuse and threats often came from members of the public, some charities also reported a rise in abuse from their own service users.Many respondents pointed to a wider "political climate" that "emboldened" members of the public to attack and abuse those they disagreed with. Charities also reported that "misinformation" spreading about their work led to abuse.

"We have had staff suffering racist and other discriminatory remarks from service users." Employee of a charity for unpaid carers

"Misinformation online has bred a culture of people not accepting evidence-based information and posting aggressive, abusive comments to healthcare charities like ours who share information rooted in scientific evidence and patient experience… If this continues, our volunteer medical advisors and patients may no longer wish to help us create resources if they know they will be subjected to a torrent of abuse." Healthcare charity

Several organisations directly linked the online or in-person abuse they had experienced to national political trends. Some reported experiencing online abuse as a direct result of negative coverage in the mainstream media, or even after their work was criticised by elected officials, including MPs and Councillors. In one instance, a Member of Parliament was involved in driving complaints towards a charity based on misinformation about their activities. In another, a refugee charity reported "local councillors post[ing] stuff online asking for protests" aimed at them.

"Racism and anti-migrant rhetoric have become increasingly normalised in public discourse, and this is reflected in how openly hostile some members of the public now are towards the people we support and the work we do… Despite this, our staff, volunteers and community have responded with solidarity and continued commitment to the work." Refugee charity

Case Study: Care4Calais

"Far-right intimidation impacts us every single day. Whilst we've been aware of threats to us for some time, a combination of online misinformation, anti-refugee rhetoric from mainstream politicians, and also proliferation of online anti-migrant content creators/auditors has made things worse over the last three years. We've seen regular physical harassment and abuse of community members, volunteers and staff at our distribution and meeting spaces, as well as online abuse including death threats, rape threats, racism and misogyny. Our volunteers and staff have been put on lists, and other charities have been targeted for supporting us.

"Our volunteers and staff members working on the ground are very distressed by these events. They have told of how they feel unsafe and worried about coming to sessions, and are particularly fearful for the safety of those we support. Volunteers and staff have also said they are fearful of going to their local towns in general in case they encounter the protesters and auditors who target us."

Recurrent themes:

- **A growing climate of fear**
- **Online abuse developing into real-world threats**
- **Filming and intimidation**
- **Abuse towards staff and volunteers**
- **The role of political rhetoric and public hostility**
- **A resilience of charities to continue amidst threats**

The impact on services

By definition, all charities exist to work "for the public benefit" and are regulated by an independent public body. When that work is interrupted, the public suffers. Our survey found that both direct threats and a perceived atmosphere of increased risk are having an impact on charities' ability to serve their communities.

The majority (65%) of charities who responded to our survey said they've had to alter how they deliver their services over the last three years as a result of perceived threats or risk from groups targeting charities. Examples of changes to services included:

- Moving activities online
- Making previously public events private
- Restricting publicity around services
- Avoiding media engagement
- Limiting information shared on social media

"We've been Zoom bombed during a training which was deeply unpleasant… a lot of our work has been pro-active. A lot of time and effort has been spent thinking about how to limit access to bad-faith actors, how we keep people and groups we engage with safe… We no longer share the address of a venue for an in-person training on public pages for example." Human rights charity

A much smaller number of organisations reported cancelling planned events, or avoiding making plans perceived to incur risk as a result of the political climate. One local infrastructure organisation said "we are self-censoring rather than being bold". However, far more commonly, the highly dedicated staff, volunteers and trustees of charities reported continuing to provide their services, despite the risks identified.

The most common theme in responses from charities whose services had been impacted was the drain on capacity and need for increased work to manage risks. Extra measures reported included regular crisis planning; making flexible working arrangements; implementing online security measures; removing staff details from websites; and communicating with staff, volunteers and trustees about risks, all of which took up significant time, especially in smaller and grassroots charities without many paid staff.

"We have had to significantly increase the extent to which we risk assess events that we hold that are open in any way to the public, to account for the possibility of disruption and harassment of our staff or other attendees. As well as the cost this has on capacity in terms of time, it also means that there is significantly more stress and anxiety about delivering this aspect of our work, which impacts staff and volunteer mental health and wellbeing." LGBTQ+ charity

Alongside the time and capacity impacts, charities reported a financial impact of the risks they perceived. Organisations had invested in physical security measures, such as CCTV or "arson-proof letter boxes", or spent time and/or money implementing extra online security. One refugee charity heavily targeted by far-right "auditors" reported needing to hire private security to protect 'drop-in' support sessions, at significant cost.

Some charities also reported a perceived impact on their ability to fundraise. A reduction in the ability to be public with their work increased the difficulty for some in reaching members of the public to seek donations, while others perceived that some individuals, community organisations or larger funding bodies were less willing to fund them due to an increased "atmosphere of controversy". Many of the charities which reported a need for increased safety measures negatively impacting on their capacity said time to fundraise was one of the areas significantly affected.

"We are struggling for funding, as the current climate seems to be influencing others to avoid supporting charities that may encounter difficulties."
Refugee charity

Case Study: The Bike Project

"The degree to which thinking about and considering these risks has become business as usual within our organisation and others is deeply concerning. I have found myself having conversations with the team about how we would deal with a brick coming through the window, or planning what we'll do if there was a riot outside our premises, and thinking 'how can this be the conversation that a charity is having while we're just trying to deliver our charitable work - providing people who've fled war and torture with bikes?'

"We've had to close sites, including when we found out that names and addresses of refugee charities were circulating on WhatsApp groups. The preparation required for emergency planning, managing crises and communicating with staff is significant and draws capacity away from core activities, including programme delivery and fundraising. Our regular activities have been disrupted and on occasion we've had to make provision for staff to work from home if they don't feel safe travelling to work. It is deeply distressing for our staff and volunteers, some of whom are refugees and all of whom are passionate about supporting people seeking sanctuary.

"In the past twelve months we have had to revisit our crisis response plans on more than one occasion when the threat levels have risen. We are conscious about how we advertise our events and locations and about drawing attention to ourselves as a refugee charity in certain circumstances.

"Over the past two years we have received anecdotal evidence that refugees feel unsafe leaving their accommodation to attend bike donations or cycling lessons, which has, on occasion, been reflected in lower attendance at our weekly sessions. We regularly limit comments on social media posts because of the racist abuse and threats these receive."

Recurrent themes:

- **Changes to the delivery of services**
- **The diversion of resources from frontline work**
- **New financial costs**
- **Impacts on fundraising**
- **A determination to maintain continuity and support for service users**

The impact on staff, volunteers and service users

One of the most commonly reported impacts of an increasing sense of unsafety was a worsening of mental health among those involved with charities, including staff, volunteers and service users.

Many organisations specifically reported an extra impact on the mental health of staff and volunteers with lived experience of migration, who were often the particular target of abuse or threats, as well as experiencing the mental health impacts of a "markedly more hostile political climate".

Charities reported having to bring in extra support for their staff and volunteers, while some said team members had been forced to take time off work, or even had left their roles. "Fear", "anxiety", "stress" and "burnout" were common. Some reported a knock-on impact on their loved ones, one charity worker said they were "not feeling safe working in this environment which is affecting myself, my children and my family."

"[The] emotional impact on mostly elderly volunteers is enormous. We have increased opportunities for emotional support. We have lost some volunteers who have found it too much although most have just become more determined to stand against it." Refugee charity

Senior leadership at charities reported taking time and care in managing how to communicate with staff about threats, and introducing a range of wellbeing measures to protect staff and service users' mental health.

Many charities reported particular concern for the mental health of their service users, some of whom felt less able to access charity services due to fears of being threatened or abused. Again, this was particularly the case for service users who were marginalised due to migration status, race, religion, disability and/or gender identity.

"[W]e lose sleep, stress levels are high, burnout is a real possibility and we have to adapt our work practices every day to respond to the level of risk - as something as simple as an online comment can kick off a string of threats... We are tired." Refugee charity

Case Study: Carers Leeds

"We are based in a very ethnically diverse city, supporting unpaid carers, and it's important that our staff team reflects the diversity of our city. Some of our colleagues of South Asian heritage have experienced direct racial abuse, including one incident where a staff member was called a "terrorist". That's an extreme example, but we've also had instances where staff have turned up at houses adorned with St George's flags and felt concerned, or we've had conversations with service users that start off with them sharing their political views, which of course they're able to do, but quickly turn into Islamophobia or statements which make staff or other service users feel unwelcome or unsafe.

We are out in communities, going to people's houses, and bringing different people together in groups and we are just seeing more of this. We're having a lot of conversations internally about how we make it very clear that we're here for everyone, but there can be reactions to that - we had one incident where posters we'd put up showing we were welcoming to trans people were vandalised.
These are new experiences, not things people have experienced previously, and we're worried about where it's going. They can have a really damaging emotional impact on staff trying to do their jobs or on the people we support."

Case Study: Southeast & East Asian Women's Association

"The racism ESEA women in our community face, including from local authorities and when they're trying to access vital services, has existed for a long time, and much of it is structural, but what's changing is how explicit and obvious the racism people are experiencing has become. As a women's charity, we are very aware that the women we support feel more vulnerable and visible, especially at times when tensions are heightened. Many do not engage in the public sphere due to fears of attack, affecting their ability to do basic things such as buy groceries, socialise and reduce their work despite many living with significant financial challenges. One of the most shocking incidents we saw was a pregnant ESEA woman physically attacked in the stomach during the summer riots a few years ago.

"We need the Government to find the political will to address the dehumanisation of migrants, not just in rhetoric but in the policies that they've introduced, such as the delays to settlement and reduced protections for survivors of modern slavery, which make migrants, especially migrant women, more vulnerable, and send the false message that this dehumanisation is justified."

Recurrent themes:

- **Impact on volunteers**
- **Impact on service users**
- **Burnout and mental health**
- **Resilience of staff and volunteers to continue service delivery**

Recommendations

Threats to charities mean threats to communities: to the services we all need, and to the fundamental value of supporting each other in times of need.

Action to safeguard charities must be led by central Government, but will also require the support of local authorities, the Charity Commission of England & Wales, the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) and the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI), police and more.

Most crucially, work to protect charitable work must be informed by the experiences of charities, particularly smaller, grassroots and volunteer-led organisations who are often the most exposed and who have the least resource available to protect them.

Government must meet with impacted charities, and should work to provide:

1. **A CLEAR MESSAGE & NATIONAL LEADERSHIP:** From the very top, Government must send a clear message that attacks against charities, their staff and volunteers providing vital services are unacceptable, no matter who is using these services. Reassure our communities that the type of hostile intimidation charities are experiencing is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Alongside this, the Government should show leadership in combating the hostile, anti-migrant rhetoric that many charities feel have emboldened those making threats against them. The Government should set out a clear strategy on protecting charities linked to existing governmental initiatives including the Civil Society Covenant, Protecting What Matters and Pride in Place.
2. **REAL PROTECTION:** Urgently explore how charities can be better protected from such attacks – particularly small charities who are largely volunteer-based organisations with minimal infrastructure.
3. **ACTION ON DIS/MIS-INFORMATION & ACCOUNTABILITY:** Review the sources of mis- and dis-information threats to charities and ensure there are clear mechanisms for removing such information and accountability for those who spread it and put charities at risk. This would include:
    - Action on threatening content on social media that protects charities across all sectors.
    - Reviewing Parliamentary standards so that charities are able to escalate concerns where elected officials are amongst those putting them at risk. For example, charities (and not just individuals) should be able to submit complaints against parliamentarians, and the Nolan Principles of Public Life should be enforceable and in scope for investigation by the Parliamentary Standards Commissioner.
4. **REGULATORY SUPPORT:** Conduct a review of Charity Commission powers to:
    - Improve safeguards for charities by enabling the rapid resolution of vexatious complaints without impact on charitable resources.
    - Remove personal information from the public domain including the names of office holders as a matter of urgency.

Charities exist to strengthen communities, support those in need and contribute to public life. They should not have to operate in fear. The findings of this report demonstrate the need for a coordinated response to ensure charities, their staff, volunteers and service users can participate safely in the work that benefits us all.

Statement to the Prime Minister

This report was based on the testimony of 209 charitable organisations and 125 individual charity workers and volunteers. Invitations were sent to a wide range of charities to sign the following statement, and all signatories were asked questions about their experiences, which have formed the contents of this report.

The statement, signed by all 334 respondents, was sent to Prime Minister Andy Burnham.

To Prime Minister Andy Burnham:
Protect our charities

Charities are under attack. Service users, volunteers and staff from a wide range of charities have faced death threats, assaults, their addresses being leaked and their families being threatened. All because we still believe in kindness, fairness and supporting one another in times of need.

Your Government must act. As charities of all kinds, from across the UK, we are uniting to say: our people deserve to feel safe. It doesn't matter where we come from, or what kind of work we do, no one should be put in danger for trying to help others.

The recent attacks on a charity simply discharging its mission to 'save lives at sea' from far-right linked actors are utterly shocking. But sadly, this was not an isolated incident. Charities of all kinds have endured threats, intimidation and harassment, all for daring to provide their services to the people who need them. Charities that work with women & girls escaping violence and abuse, with LGBTQ+ people, disabled people, and those working in and around migration & racial justice, broader human rights and even funders have all been targeted.

Those of us who have not faced threats stand in solidarity with our colleagues across the charitable sector. We know that if charities and volunteers active in all sectors are not protected from intimidation and threats, the impact on the entire charitable sector and the vital work we do could be profound.

This must be stopped. You have rightly condemned the recent abuse directed at volunteer rescue workers, but you must go further, and send a clear message that attacks against any charities are unacceptable, no matter who is using these services. We urge you to address the environment of fear and hatred that has been allowed to evolve, and ensure those who fuel it with misinformation and discriminatory language, whether politicians or media commentators, are held to account.

Your Government must urgently explore how to better protect all charities and charitable work from such attacks. It must further address the role of social media in spreading threats, to ensure those spreading false information, or participating in the targeting of our work and the people delivering it are accountable for the violence they drive. And it must ensure that vigilantes abusing, threatening and assaulting people in our country are no longer referred to as 'protesters', a term that conveys legitimacy they do not deserve.

No matter what populations we serve, as charities, we are united in a desire to improve lives, for people of all backgrounds, all across the UK. We do not, and will never, discriminate against the people who need our support on the basis of where they have come from, their gender identity, their race, where they live or their faith or belief system.

Attacking us for that undermines the very fabric of our society and of who we are as a country.

Get in touch

For more information on Asylum Matters
visit: **www.asylummatters.org**

You can also email media@asylummatters.org
or Bluesky us: @asylummatters.bsky.social

Registered charity no: 1192664
(England and Wales) Company no: CE022943.

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or Bluesky us: @praxisprojects.bsky.social

Registered charity no: 1078945
(England and Wales) Company no: 3638571.

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