



**UK BME ANTI-  
SLAVERY NETWORK**

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**18 March 2024**

**“The Safe House Is Not Safe”: BASNET Report Exposes Systemic Racism and Intersectional Discrimination in Some UK Government Funded Safe Houses for Survivors of Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.**

**BASNET - the UK BME Anti-Slavery Network** has today released its report, **"The Safe House Is Not Safe,"** which sheds a light on the distressing realities faced by Black and Asian survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking residing in some government-funded safe houses across England. This report is the outcome of two consultative exercises with thirteen survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking held in 2022 and 2023.

These consultations were prompted by direct cases known to us and our members and numerous complaints to BASNET by survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking, about their experiences residing in safe houses provided by the National Referral Mechanism Sub-Contractors.

The report documents the shared experiences of the survivors, revealing persistent gaps in service provision, ranging from poor, unsafe and inadequate accommodation to direct discrimination on the basis of race linked to their sexual orientation, gender, nationality and ethnicity.

**Debbie Ariyo OBE, Founder and Chair of BASNET** said, “I commend the bravery and courage of the survivors who participated in these consultative meetings. Their contributions have meant that for the first time, the true conditions in some of the government funded safe houses expected to provide care and support for very vulnerable people who have

experienced heightened trauma and the terrible ordeal of slavery and human trafficking, can be publicly known”.

**Dalitso Koroma, Policy and Research Manager at BASNET** said, ‘We are deeply saddened that some survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery are not provided a safe environment for them to recover from their trauma. The conditions in some of the safe houses highlight a clear disregard for the wellbeing of survivors, and the trauma they have experienced.”

A summary of the key emerging issues shared by the thirteen survivors include:

1. **Rampant Discrimination by Staff:** Participants reported they experienced many instances of discrimination based on their race and this is linked to their gender, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and/or sexual orientation.
2. **Sexual Exploitation and Harassment:** Participants reported some instances of sexual exploitation and harassment occurring in their safe houses, raising concerns about residents' safety.
3. **Unprofessional Attitude of Support Workers:** Participants highlighted the poor conduct and attitudes of support workers which either hindered or exacerbated their mental health and recovery process.
4. **Poor State of Safe Houses:** Participants reported structural defects, rat infestations, absence of safety or safeguarding protocols, and dirty living conditions in their safe houses.
5. **Poor Complaint Handling Procedure:** Participants reported their complaints were not consistently followed up, and they reported feeling victimised when raising concerns.

Participants shared their perspectives on improvements they would like to see in the operation of safe houses and services provided for people with lived experiences of modern slavery and human trafficking residing in these safe houses. These include:

1. **Cultural Inclusivity:** Participants emphasised the need for a more culturally sensitive approach in the operation of safe houses, including tailored services that respect the diverse cultural backgrounds of survivors.

2. **Mandatory Training:** Participants advocated for mandatory training for staff, focusing on inclusion, equality, and diversity, to enhance their ability to support survivors from a wide range of racial backgrounds and different protected characteristics.
3. **Trauma Informed Care and Support:** Participants stressed the importance of prioritising the mental health of survivors through the provision of more empathetic services and kind support that meets their individual needs and addresses the unique challenges faced by each survivors.
4. **Annual Audit and Assessment:** The need for regular audits by the Home Office, the Care Quality Commission and Victim Care Contractor to ensure the consistent delivery of high-quality services was highlighted, to promote accountability and transparency.
5. **Complaints and Feedback Mechanism:** A robust mechanism for residents to lodge complaints and provide feedback was recommended to ensure continuous improvement in service delivery.

The issues and recommendations expressed by the participants further emphasised the race equality issues highlighted in BASNET's Action Plan: "Promoting Racial Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An Action Plan for the UK Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Sector" published in July 2021. We call on the Home Office to consider the issues documented in our report as part of its review of the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC). Additionally, we call on the Home Office, the Care Quality Commission, the Salvation Army and its subcontractors to review their commitment to advancing race equality, diversity, and inclusion in the best interests of victims and survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking.

### **Note To Editors**

BASNET is the UK BME Anti-Slavery Network dedicated to promoting race equality, diversity and inclusion in the UK anti-slavery space and is a programme of [AFRUCA – Safeguarding Children](#).

Further information: Email: [BASNET@afruca.org](mailto:BASNET@afruca.org). "The Safe House is Not Safe" report is available to download on our website: [www.bmeantislavery.org](http://www.bmeantislavery.org)