

Race & Justice:

A joint response to the Sentencing Review



CLiNKs

BM4C | FORWARD | Together Women | RR3

There was one glaring omission from the Independent Sentencing Review's final report, race. Despite the hours and hours of consultation and mobilising of evidence on the part of the Black and global majority led organisations and their allies, and despite the entrenched racial disparities within our criminal justice system, the report did not acknowledge them, or develop recommendations designed to tackle racial inequities in sentencing policy.

Notwithstanding this glaring and disheartening omission, we, as a collective, are broadly in agreement with the direction of travel set out in this report – with its focus on a shift away from prison towards more community-based, justice solutions. Yet, ignoring the intersectionality between race and sentencing policy on the part of the panel was a missed opportunity to reset the dial regarding decades of injustice suffered by Black and global majority communities. This omission is exacerbated by the stalled progress on recommendations contained within past reviews, including the Lammy and the Young Reviews. At this moment of significant change for the system, we have an opportunity to kickstart this stalled progress.

In February, Black Men for Change and Clinks – through the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group – published a report exploring these disparities in sentencing policy. It set out how Black and Global Majority individuals receive harsher sentences and fewer rehabilitation opportunities, with Black and Global Majority defendants receiving longer custodial sentences. It also provides recommendations as to how we can address these disparities.

We are now urging the Lord Chancellor to consider these recommendations, shared with the Sentencing Review team, and factor them into the Government's response.

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‘Previous research on the experiences of racially minoritised people in the criminal justice system clearly illustrates that sentencing not only leads to racial inequalities but often compounds them. Outcomes for racially minoritised people are worse when looking at almost every available metric (when compared to non-racially minoritised people), including custodial sentence lengths, access to employment and the use of force in prisons. It is essential therefore, that the implementation of this landmark review is very conscious of the impact of the recommendations on racial inequality.

Not just so that racially minoritised people can get equitable access to the positive recommendations around community options, but also so that space is left to go further in areas in which racial inequalities remain stark. This includes ongoing disparities in longer, custodial sentences, which must be monitored closely, addressed and acted upon.

Too much time has been wasted failing to act upon measures that would play some role in creating a more equitable justice system. At a time of a significant reform, we now have a genuine opportunity to take huge steps towards tackling the racial iniquities that continues to stain our justice system.’

Anne Fox - Chief Executive Officer, Clinks

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‘It’s important that all government policy is routinely viewed through the lens of race, gender and class, especially in relation to the criminal justice system which negatively and disproportionately impacts Black men particularly. We are committed to working with Clinks and other mainstream allies to shift the balance of power in favour of those most impacted by this inequitable and unjust system. Government must use this opportunity to do things differently for the good of the nation.’

Jake Ferguson - Founder and joint Strategic Lead, Black Men 4 Change (BM4C)

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‘Too little is said about the systemic impact that the harm caused by this abusive criminal injustice system has on wider society, particularly the most marginalised. This rotten and unfair system is crumbling, that much cannot be denied. So we must treat this fact as an opportunity to unwind it in ways that are genuinely inclusive, restorative and healing - not rushed and geared towards benefitting the same establishment-supported individuals and organisations. Equally, how additional resources set aside for community based rehabilitation is distributed must be managed in a much more family and community centred way.’

Viv Ahmun - Cofounder and joint Strategic Lead, Black Men 4 Change (BM4C)

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‘At Together Women, we see every day how race, gender and class intersect to shape the harsh realities of criminal justice for the women we support – often in deeply unjust ways. Sentencing policy is not neutral. It is layered with bias, history and structural disadvantage, and to ignore this is to deny the lived experiences of Black and racially minoritised women who are so often sentenced more harshly and offered fewer opportunities for rehabilitation.

The omission of race from this review is not just disappointing – it’s dangerous. Because until we name and tackle the deep racial inequities in sentencing, we will keep reproducing the same harms under the guise of reform. This moment calls for truth, for courage, and for real inclusion – not just at the margins, but at the centre of how we shape justice going forward.’

Rokaiya Khan – CEO, Together Women

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‘Sentencing and the criminal justice system in the UK has never been neutral. We continue to witness daily the disproportionate, harmful, and deeply entrenched outcomes for Black and global majority individuals, families, and communities. These outcomes are not accidental—they are the direct result of systemic racial inequalities embedded at every stage of the criminal justice process, including in sentencing. At FORWARD, we know Black and global majority women experience the criminal justice system in distinct and deeply unjust ways. As primary caregivers, survivors of domestic abuse, mental health challenges, black women face unique intersecting vulnerabilities that cannot be ignored.

This moment presents a critical and urgent opportunity for the UK government to dismantle the structural racism that has shaped decades of injustice. It is time to end the silence, denial, and institutional inaction. This is the time for a more transformative approach to sentencing policy that centres racial justice, gender equity, and community accountability.’

Naana Otoo-Oyortey MBE, Executive Director, FORWARD

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‘The exclusion of race from the Independent Sentencing Review is a glaring and dangerous oversight. It fails to confront the deeply entrenched racial disparities that define the experience of Black and racialised communities within the criminal legal system. At UNJUST, we have seen firsthand how sentencing compounds structural inequality, criminalises identity, and erodes trust in institutions. This was a critical moment to show that lessons have been learned from the Lammy and Young Reviews. Instead, we are left with more silence where there should be leadership. The time for incremental change has passed. What’s needed now is a bold, intersectional approach to justice that centres race, equity, and meaningful accountability.’

Katrina Ffrench, Executive Director - UNJUST UK & RR3 seat holder for organisations led by and focused on racially minoritised people

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Our vision

Our vision is of a vibrant, independent and resilient voluntary sector that enables people to transform their lives.

Our mission

To support, represent and advocate for the voluntary sector in criminal justice, enabling it to provide the best possible opportunities for individuals and their families.

[Click here to find out more about our work.](#)

Join Clinks: be heard, informed, and supported.

Are you a voluntary organisation supporting people in the criminal justice system?

[Click here to join our network of over 500 members.](#)

Clinks membership offers you:

- A voice to influence change
- Practical assistance to be effective and resilient
- Support from a community of like-minded professionals.

Membership starts at just £80 per year and is free for organisations with little income.

The logo for Clinks, featuring the word "CLiNKs" in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The letter 'i' is lowercase and has a dot. The 'K' is stylized with a sharp, angular design. The background is a solid dark blue.