



Protecting human rights
in childbirth

Registered address:
Birthrights
Union House
111 New Union Street
Coventry CV1 2NT
0300 400 30 400

6th August 2025

Dear Mr Streeting,

We are writing from the UK charity Birthrights, the leading authority on the human rights of women and birthing people during pregnancy and birth.

We were heartened to hear your recent reaffirmation of the Task Force's commitment to placing racial inequalities at the centre of its investigation agenda in maternity care.

We are writing to follow up on our correspondence from August last year, in which we expressed our deep concern about the impact of widespread racist and Islamophobic violence on Black and Brown women and birthing people, as well as those from other marginalised communities.

Last year, we raised serious concerns about how violence and unrest could restrict access to safe, equitable maternity care. We highlighted how Black and Brown women and birthing people, and others from marginalised communities, might not feel safe leaving their homes to give birth in local hospitals or birth centres. We also warned about disruptions to vital community-based care, like time-sensitive postnatal home visits.

Since then, our concerns have only grown. In an increasingly challenging political climate with ongoing attacks on the European Convention on Human Rights and the rise in racist rhetoric and action against asylum seekers, migrants and refugees, we remain deeply worried about the impact of fear, racism, and violence on access to care.

Our community partners tell us how **"harrowing"** it is to watch their communities be targeted. They share that for maternity services **"the impact is deeply personal"** as **"staff and service users from minoritised communities face discrimination, isolation, and fear"**, within the very systems meant to provide care and dignity. They warn that **"when racism is left unchecked, it can seep into the culture of our institutions and harm those who are already most vulnerable during pregnancy and birth."**

Through ongoing intelligence from community partners across the UK, we remain concerned about:

- **The systematic dismantling of community maternity services**, with home birth teams disbanded, birth centres closed, and midwives overstretched, which continues under the guise of "safety and efficiency." This is particularly concerning for **Black and Brown women and birthing people, disabled people, migrants**, and others who already **mistrust the healthcare system** due to a challenging political climate and lack of accessible, culturally safe options



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- The **fear and threat** felt by minoritised communities, including refugees and asylum seekers, which deters them from accessing hospital or community-based care.
- The **long-term effects** of the challenging environment on migrants' and asylum seekers' ability to access care, including harmful NHS charging rules that deter people from accessing care and force healthcare professionals to act as pseudo-border control officials
- A **growing mistrust** in the healthcare system, which is pushing some to consider **unassisted births**. This is a lawful option, but one that should be a **genuine choice**, not one made out of fear or lack of alternatives.

The starting point, even in crisis, must always be to uphold the human rights of women and birthing people. This includes our right to decide where we give birth, how we give birth, and who is with us when we give birth, our rights to make informed decisions about our bodies and our care, our rights to be treated with dignity and respect, and fundamentally our right to life. These should be built into resilience and emergency planning protocols.

In light of these ongoing risks, we are seeking **clarity on what action has been taken** since last year to ensure NHS Trusts are working with hospitals and community services to maintain **safe access to care during times of crisis**.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to:

- Support efforts to define what truly constitutes **SAFE Maternity Care** (grounded in human rights and voices of the marginalised communities)
- Hear more about your current and planned actions to address the gaps exposed by the events of the past year.
- Explore how we can work collaboratively to urge NHS Trusts to embed fundamental human rights into all emergency protocols, including proactively communicating with women and birthing people about any changes to their care during crises, ensuring maternity teams can reach those who need support at home, and making certain that everyone can access hospitals and birth centres without fear, discrimination, or harm.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.



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Yours sincerely,

Tracey Fletcher
Interim CEO, Birthrights