

## Knowsley riot crisis communications

On 10<sup>th</sup> February 2023, protesters gathered outside the Suites Hotel in Knowsley, near Liverpool, which was being used as asylum seeker accommodation. The protest was sparked by a video which had been circulating since late January showing an unnamed man attempting to chat up a teenage girl on the street. Far-right groups such as Britain First and Patriotic Alternative had seized on the video and linked it to the hotel. The protest on 10<sup>th</sup> February, which was attended by many locals as well as a small group of counter-protesters, was initially peaceful but later descended into a riot, with some throwing missiles and burning a police van. The physical riot was accompanied by online trolls targeting journalists, charities and individuals showing concern for those inside the hotel.

IMIX already had strong links to Liverpool refugee charities and had visited the local Knowsley charity's drop-in centre. On the weekend of the riot, IMIX worked with Together With Refugees and other national charities to co-ordinate a letter urging political leaders to take a stand against inflammatory language, and ensure that Merseyside charities were among the 100 signatories. The letter was covered in the [Daily Mail](#), [Guardian](#), [BBC](#), [ITV](#) and [Sky News](#) among other national news organisations.

Knowsley is one of the most deprived boroughs of England, but also ethnically homogeneous, with more than 93% of residents born in England and 95% identifying as white. In the weeks after the riot, asylum seekers continued to be targeted, to the point that local charities were forced to change their outreach routines. IMIX arranged a triage system for media requests to ensure that frontline Knowsley charities could focus on supporting their clients while others with more resources could speak for the city region. We also provided messaging advice that clearly condemned the behaviour in the video while emphasising asylum seekers' right to safety.

Some residents in the hotel actively sought out Liverpool charities in the wake of the riot. By providing safeguarding and liaising with journalists, IMIX set up an [ITV Granada interview](#) with two asylum seekers in hotels, one who was in the Suites Hotel at the time of the riot. This included arranging for the individual to be brought to a safe filming location outside Knowsley where he could be kept anonymous. IMIX also supported the same individual to write about his experience in [The Metro newspaper](#).

After the incident, Liverpool City Council approached IMIX to create a series of videos with local refugee charities highlighting the real stories of refugees. IMIX also partnered with Hope not Hate to deliver workshops to local journalists raising awareness of the far-right's exploitation of local news. The Suites Hotel was one of the first hotels to be closed as part of the government's shift away from hotel accommodation, with at least some asylum seekers resettled in the local area.