

EIS BRIEFING:
FIGHTING THE
INFLUENCE OF
THE FAR-RIGHT

2025



**This briefing aims to
support reps, activists,
and members to have
informed conversations
together on the far-right
as a part of the EIS
strategy to oppose
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Contents

- 4 What is meant by the ‘far-right’?**
- 5 The Far-Right in the UK today**
- 6 Spotting the far-right in Scotland**
- 7 How are issues being presented: misogyny, racism, reactionary and anti-LGBT language and actions**
- 8 Know the facts on immigration, domestic and sexual abuse, equality and diversity: stop the flow of misinformation and disinformation**
- 11 How issues are presenting in schools, colleges and universities**
- 12 Causes**
- 12 Why is this a union issue?**
- 13 How does the EIS fight the influence of the far-right?**
- 14 What more is to be done?**
- 14 The EIS Way Forward**

EIS Briefing: Fighting the Influence of the Far-Right

Many countries are experiencing a troubling resurgence of far-right politics. Historically, trade unions have been at the forefront of anti-fascist and anti-racist struggles, as we are rooted in principles of solidarity, social justice, equality, and collective action. The EIS has long-standing anti-racist, anti-fascist policy and will continue, along with the TUC, STUC, and sister trade unions, to play an active role in tackling far-right politics when it presents in our places of learning and wider communities.

This briefing aims to support reps, activists, and members to have informed conversations together on the far-right as a part of the EIS strategy to oppose the influence of the far-right.

1. What is meant by the 'far-right'?

The 'far-right' is not just a collection of extremist organisations, but a political tradition and social force, rooted in authoritarianism, nationalism and division. An aim of the far-right is to split the working class by blaming social and economic problems on marginalised groups. This is most often migrants, ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, disabled people and women.

The term 'far-right' is a label that can be used to encompass a wide range of ideologies. The TUC states,

*"If there is one thing that defines the contemporary far right, it is the shared emphasis on racial or ethnic and cultural superiority, rooted in the myth of natural inequalities and nostalgia for an imagined past."*¹

A definition of the far-right proposed by Ravndal and Bjørge (2018) is: acceptance of social inequality, authoritarianism, and nativism.²

Common aspects of far-right ideologies that are fundamentally opposed to trade unionism include:

1. Being **pro-business and pro-wealth** in that they seek low regulation and **low taxation, with fewer worker rights**
2. A **smaller role for the state** run by an authoritarian government that **restricts democracy and free speech**
3. Targeting and **denial of the rights of minorities**

The origins of the modern far-right lie in the fascist movements of the early 20th century, which combined racist ultranationalist ideology with authoritarian politics, leading to street violence and suppression of organised labour. Trade unions have always been amongst the key enemies of the far-right because our role and principles are liberal and pro-worker, and we unite workers across communities. The far-right has continually evolved, ebbed and flowed, reshaping itself to fit new political and social contexts.

In current times, the far-right draws on several sources to stir up discontent and summon support:

- **Economic insecurity** – rising inequality, insecure work, and declining living standards create fertile ground for far-right narratives. People facing hardship are more vulnerable to arguments that 'outsiders' are to blame, or that a return to traditional cultural or family roles will provide solutions.
- **Cultural and social change** – the far-right feeds on fears about migration, demographic shifts, feminism, and the extension of rights to minority groups. These anxieties are recast as threats to the supposed 'national culture' or a 'way of life' by targeted social groups.
- **International influences** – far-right ideas and networks are increasingly international, borrowing strategies, language, and large swathes of funding from counterparts across the world.

¹ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/TheRiseoftheFarRight>

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/834424/Ben_Lee_-_Overview_of_the_far_right.pdf

- **Digital platforms** – the internet and social media have accelerated the spread of far-right narratives, arguably especially amongst younger people, young men in particular. Algorithms feed content to users that they already believe or are drawn to, speeding up radicalisation. This has enabled the rapid proliferation and circulation of conspiracy theories, disinformation, and hate speech at an unprecedented rate and scale.

The far-right is now not only visible in street movements or fringe parties, but its ideas are influencing mainstream political debate through parties such as Reform UK, which is currently riding high in national election polls.³ This has begun to affect the political discourse in the UK as mainstream parties move to the right in order to mitigate Reform’s policies and scaremongering. This runs the risk of normalising the undermining of equality, and framing workers’ struggles as conflicts between communities (illustrated by the hostility to migrants, for example), rather than with exploitative employers or, more widely, unjust capitalist systems.

In short, the far-right is best described as a recurring political force that thrives in times of social and economic crisis, exploiting fear and division to build its support, particularly from the working class. From a trade union perspective, this makes the far-right a dangerous threat to workers and our aspirations for a more equal society.

2. The Far-Right in the UK today

Over the summer of 2025, the far-right across the UK, including in Scotland, has become notably more prominent and emboldened, featuring aggressive policy proposals (such as the Reform mass deportation proposals), intensifying anti-immigrant protests using the dog-whistle⁴ of ‘protect our women and children’, and increasing political momentum for Reform UK.

Human rights organisations and political leaders, including the Archbishop of York, have condemned these ‘knee-jerk’, isolationist, and illegally precarious measures.⁵ There are many potential impacts which attacks on the Human Rights Act, proposed by Reform UK, could have on the labour movement organising politically and industrially.

Since mid-July 2025, anti-immigration protests have increased across the UK, beginning after an incident in Epping and rapidly spreading across the country, including to Falkirk and Aberdeen.⁶ Protesters have amassed outside hotels housing asylum seekers. These protests have sometimes escalated into disorder, leading to increased police deployment, dispersal orders, arrests, and confrontations with counter-protestors. In some areas, far-right or neo-Nazi groups have been implicated in organising these protests via online networks. The UK government has responded by committing to phase out hotel housing for asylum seekers, but critics warn that this doesn’t address the underlying scapegoating fuelling the unrest.⁷

Reform UK

Reform UK, led by Nigel Farage, is technically not a democratic political party, but a company majority owned by its leader. Reform has been described as a “far-right” party by some analysts,⁸ and as a “populist radical right” party by others.⁹ The Scottish Government deliberately did not invite Reform to the Anti-Far-Right Summit in April 2025, which implies that it believes Reform to be a far-right party.¹⁰ Reform denies it is a far-right party and previously threatened legal action against the BBC when one article described it as such.¹¹

³ <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/uk-opinion-polls>

⁴ “Dog whistle” messaging refers to the use of coded language, phrases, or symbols in political or public communication that appear innocuous to the general public but carry a specific, often controversial or extremist, meaning to a targeted subgroup.

⁵ Reform deputy Richard Tice hits back after Archbishop of York’s intervention on migrant policy | Politics News | Sky News

⁶ Hundreds face off outside Falkirk hotel in asylum seeker protests - BBC News

⁷ UK will end use of asylum hotels by 2029, Reeves says - BBC News

⁸ <https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2025/01/01/what-is-a-far-right-party/> <https://bylinetimes.com/2024/10/07/why-reform-uk-is-far-right/>

⁹ <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/its-a-mistake-to-call-reform-uk-far-right/>

¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwy7gwg1rq4o>

¹¹ BBC apologises for calling Reform UK ‘far right’ | Reform UK | The Guardian

Politically, Reform UK issued a Manifesto in 2024, and has made further policy announcements since then. Reform UK believes in lower taxation for both businesses and individuals, whilst simultaneously promising a better NHS. However, the primary strategy of Reform UK is immigration. Core to its strategy is “Operation Restoring Justice” - a plan to withdraw the UK from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR, the Human Rights Act, and the Refugee Convention, and pass legislation titled the Illegal Migration (Mass Deportation) Bill.¹² The plan advocates for mass detention and deportation, potentially removing up to 600,000 asylum seekers, including women and children, via military-run detention and offshore centres.¹³ This rhetoric has gained traction, despite the figures being confused, as there are fewer than 110,000 asylum seekers in the system at present.

Reform has gained electoral ground through local by-election victories, and, as of September 2025, has secured four parliamentary seats at Westminster, one member of the Scottish Parliament, one member of the Senedd, one mayoralty (Greater Lincolnshire), and 875 Councillors (including 16 in Scotland).¹⁴ This signals a substantial challenge to both Labour and the Conservatives, especially in England, but we cannot be complacent in Scotland. With a Scottish election slated for May 2026, Reform UK could continue to gain on vote share unless a substantial and organised political defence is mounted.

The current far-right iteration in the UK is characterised by:

- **Mainstreaming extremist policies**, with Reform UK growing in prominence and promising radical immigration reforms and the dismantling of human rights protections
- Grassroots mobilisation of **anti-immigrant sentiment**, often coordinated via social media and manifesting in protests at asylum accommodations
- **Escalating tensions** with increasing polarisation and police interventions alongside counter-demonstrations from anti-racist and trade union groups.

This evolving scenario lays bare a shift in which far-right politics are not confined to fringe elements but are entering mainstream electoral and community spaces. This poses a profound challenge to social cohesion and democratic norms.

3. Spotting the far-right in Scotland

Different far-right groups hold ideologies in varying configurations. The Scottish Defence League (SDL), Patriotic Alternative, the Homeland Party, and Britain First have all organised anti-migrant protests in Scotland over the past few years. They organise, in the main, online and hold sporadic, well-publicised but usually relatively low turnout demonstrations. Now, ‘Save Our Future’ and ‘Our Kids Futures’ are facilitating the anti-migrant protests at hotels, and they are extremely active online on community Facebook pages where they post allegations of child or sexual abuse by asylum seekers. They are recruiting more women and more families to their protests, and their narrative is evolving to draw in more people – one narrative is that these protests are simply to protect their local community. As well as anti-immigrant views, they often criticise the operation of public services, believing the public sector is run by the ‘elite’ or ‘the woke’ who favour immigrants’ rights at the expense of local people.

These organisations are believed to have had some involvement from known ex-BNP or National Front (NF) activists.

Reform UK espouses the same rhetoric as these organisations in terms of anti-immigrant sentiment, an anti-equality agenda, and less taxation on business and people. The EIS AGM (2025) resolved not to provide Reform UK with a platform in future political party hustings organised by the EIS, as it promotes far-right ideologies, is anti-education, and anti-trade union.

¹² REFORM_Immigration_Enforcement.pdf

¹³ Reform UK prepared to deport 600,000 under migration plans - BBC News

¹⁴ Open Council Data UK - compositions councillors parties wards elections emails

It is important to note that anyone can be influenced by far-right disinformation as this is devised to be persuasive, and to appeal to strong emotions, stoking up fear and uncertainty. Being influenced by far-right disinformation does not make someone right-wing or mean that they have ill-intentions.

4. How are issues being presented: misogyny, racism, reactionary and anti-LGBT language and actions

There are several ways that far-right sentiments are manifesting in Scotland today. Scotland has seen repeated **anti-asylum protests**, particularly around hotels housing asylum seekers. In Falkirk, the Cladham Hotel has become a frequent flashpoint with hundreds gathering for demonstrations organised by “Save Our Future & Our Kids Futures”, with protesters chanting slogans like “Send them home” and “Stop the boats”.¹⁵ These protests have been met with counter-demonstrators, organised by Stand Up To Racism Scotland and the Falkirk Trades Council, calling back with a message of solidarity.

In Erskine, far-right groups like Homeland organised weekly protests outside the Muthu Hotel, spreading “hate, misinformation and lies” over 2023/24.¹⁶ Over time, police inaction has reportedly led to increasing tensions and “in your face violence”.¹⁷ Similar scenes have been seen in Dumfries, where extremists have resorted to intimidation tactics, and in Peterhead/Aberdeen. A successful local campaign, Perth Against Racism, quelled anti-refugee protests in Perth.

The Saltire has recently been used in **symbolic co-option to reinforce Scottish nativism and thus sow cultural division**, with anti-immigration activists deploying it at protests and within communities. This has promoted backlash from cultural and political figures who stress its roots in inclusive solidarity. First Minister John Swinney and others have sought to reclaim the flag’s meaning, opposing its appropriation for exclusionary messaging.¹⁸

Whilst organised far-right groups argue their need to ‘protect women and children’, a growth in **misogynistic rhetoric** reflects the far-right reactionary undercurrents. Far-right groups are described as misogynistic because their ideologies and rhetoric frequently promote traditional gender roles, oppose feminism and other equality objectives. Far-right groups often have patriarchal conceptions of social hierarchy, and often legitimise violence as a means to achieve political or social goals.

There has also been government-level **policy backtracking** regarding misogyny, as the Scottish Government recently scrapped plans for standalone misogyny legislation. Instead, they opted to fold protections into existing hate crime laws, drawing criticism that this was a retreat from meaningful structural protections for women and girls.¹⁹

Far right ideologies tend to be strongly rooted in patriarchal ideas, inter alia, which frame gender and gender roles as determined by biology, and have a long history of oppression against LGBT people. The media narratives surrounding transgender people in recent years fits into existing far right tropes regarding gender norms and ‘threats’ posed by an ‘outgroup’ or minority group – feeding into harmful false information about transgender people. The far right, as well as other groups who oppose LGBT rights and presence, tend to frame their interventions as being motivated by a desire to protect people, specifically women who are not transgender, and children, from harm, which openly or inadvertently signals fear and mistrust towards LGBT people. There has been a number of anti-trans protests in Scotland in recent years and widespread media attention.

In Scotland today, the far-rights footprint is evident in:

- **Racialised public actions** – anti-immigrant protests, often intertwined with national symbols like the Saltire.

¹⁵ Hundreds protest outside Falkirk asylum hotel as counter rally chant ‘refugees are welcome’ - Daily Record

¹⁶ Erskine locals celebrate at MGM Muthu Glasgow River Hotel | The National

¹⁷ Erskine: Violent incidents after Police Scotland stop attending hotel | The Herald

¹⁸ ‘Reclaim our flag’: saltire becomes cultural battleground in Scotland as tensions rise over asylum housing | Scotland | The Guardian

¹⁹ Scottish ministers drop plans to outlaw misogyny and conversion practices | Gender | The Guardian

- **Tactical escalation** – social media-fuelled intimidation and targeted harassment of both residents and staff in refugee housing.
- **Misogynistic and anti-LGBT setbacks** – a broader cultural atmosphere marked by regressive attitudes, particularly amongst young men, and political withdrawal from promises to strengthen protections, such as against harassment of women, and advancing trans rights.

These trends, in the context of ever-increasing economic insecurity for many, reflect an extremely worrying convergence of cultural reactivity and political inertia.

5. Know the facts on immigration, domestic and sexual abuse, equality and diversity: stop the flow of misinformation and disinformation

A 2024 nationally representative study²⁰ by the Alan Turing Institute found that 94% of adults in the UK reported witnessing misinformation on social media.

Definitions - migration

An **asylum seeker** is someone who has fled their home due to fear of persecution and applied for protection in another country, but has not yet been granted refugee status.

A **refugee** is someone who has been formally recognised as a refugee by their 'host country' as having a well-founded fear of persecution and being unable to safely return to their country of origin. There is a backlog of cases in the UK system, which is, in part, due to an under-resourcing of the Home Office teams processing the claims.

A **migrant** is anyone who moves to another country for any reason - often for work, study, family, or better opportunities.

All of these are 'legal' ways to live in a different country, but can be subject to certain restrictions (visas), time limits (often refugees are only granted five years in the UK), no right to work, and limited social security, depending on status.

Where are they from and where are they going?

The top five countries from which people seek asylum when coming to the UK are Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Eritrea, and Bangladesh.²¹ The top five host countries in the world for asylum seekers are Iran, Türkiye, Germany, Colombia and Uganda.²²

The 2021/22 census showed that the majority of people who have migrated to the UK are originally from India, Poland, Pakistan, Romania, and Ireland. Around 16% of the UK's population was born abroad,²³ which is roughly average for other Western EU countries. Luxembourg, Malta and Germany have between 51%, 30% and 20% respectively.²⁴ Compared to people born in the UK, migrants are more likely to be of working age or have a university degree.²⁵ Around 13% of those born abroad are asylum-seekers or refugees.²⁶ In 2021, a majority of those born abroad had been in the country for 10 years or more.

²⁰ <https://www.turing.ac.uk/news/publications/how-do-people-protect-themselves-against-online-misinformation>

²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-june-2025/how-many-people-claim-asylum-in-the-uk#:~:text=from%202024%20onwards.,2,through%20the%20Afghan%20Resettlement%20Programme.>

²² <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics>

²³ <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-an-overview/>

²⁴ [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?oldid=665533#:~:text=The%20highest%20relative%20share%20of,%25\)%%20and%20Slovakia%20\(3.9%25\).](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?oldid=665533#:~:text=The%20highest%20relative%20share%20of,%25)%%20and%20Slovakia%20(3.9%25).)

²⁵ <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-an-overview/>

²⁶ <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN01403/SN01403.pdf>

'Small boats', hotels and houses

'Small boat crossings' of the English Channel existed before Brexit, with people gradually shifting tactics from using lorries to boats around 2014/15. The practice grew after Brexit due to the removal of the UK's ability to return people to the EU under the 'Dublin Regulation'. Around 93% of all those who cross the Channel on a boat claim asylum, and 75% of them are successful.²⁷ The demographics of migrants have also changed since Brexit, with a net decrease of EU nationals migrating to the UK and an increase in non-EU citizens migrating to the UK.

The PCS trade union, which represents civil servants in the Home Office and Border Force, launched a report in March 2025 alongside Care4Calais, outlining how a more humanitarian system of safe passage could be achieved,²⁸ similar to the visa system operated for Ukrainian nationals. The report outlines that a 'safe and secure passage' model would save money, instead of the current system of operating a hostile environment while paying for private hotels.

Hotels, B&BS and other forms of temporary accommodation are used by the Government and local authorities to house homeless people to meet their statutory obligations. It is not only asylum seekers being housed in hotels. Nonetheless, there has been an increased use of hotels as temporary accommodation for asylum seekers as the policy of dispersal to housing has been rolled back and hotels have been used more during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁹ The Home Office decides where asylum seekers are accommodated. Hotels and dispersal accommodation are procured by a private company, Mears, in Scotland, on behalf of the Home Office. The hotels being used are not (or are no longer operating as) 4-star hotels with quality food and room keeping. They operate now on a sparse service with very basic food and little housekeeping. Asylum seekers spend most of their time feeling trapped in their room which they often share with strangers.³⁰ The cost of housing anyone in this temporary accommodation is not sustainable because the hotels are making a profit. It would be much more cost-effective to implement a sustainable housing strategy which seeks to eradicate homelessness, help with community integration, and stop the exploitation by private landlords.

The housing crisis in the UK is not related to asylum seekers or refugees. The number of refugees is relatively small compared to the overall housing demand in the UK.³¹ Refugees and asylum seekers are victims of the housing crisis, not its cause. (The cause being long term chronic underbuilding in the UK, cuts to social housing and planning restrictions.)

Cost of living and working

Asylum seekers are not allowed to work and receive £49.18 per week in asylum support, which equates to approximately £7 per day, to cover essential living costs like food, clothing, and toiletries.³² This cash support is provided on a Home Office-issued debit card for weekly withdrawals. A reduced amount of £10 per week (£1.43 per day) is given to those in accommodation with meals provided.

Refugee Action notes "When a person is given refugee status, they have just 28 days to find accommodation and get a job or apply for mainstream benefits before they are evicted from asylum accommodation. Many refugees become homeless at this stage. This is a huge upheaval and causes many complex ongoing issues – especially as so many have been in the asylum system for months or even years."³³

²⁷ <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/people-crossing-the-english-channel-in-small-boats/>

²⁸ Safe and Secure Routes for Refugees | Public and Commercial Services Union

²⁹ <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/asylum-accommodation-support-use-of-hotels/#:~:text=7%20July%202023-,2.,and%20approximately%209%2C500%20in%20October.>

³⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwy8ee2w73jo>

³¹ <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/asylum-accommodation-in-the-uk/>

³² <https://www.gov.uk/asylum-support/what-youll-get#:~:text=Cash%20support,person%20in%20your%20household%20instead.>

³³ <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/about/facts-about-refugees/>

Economic and social contributions of migrants

Migrant workers fill essential jobs, particularly in sectors like food and drink, agriculture, and tourism, which are vital for Scotland's rural economy. They are essential in public sectors, including the NHS, education and social services, helping to build and maintain services. Migrants are often underpaid across certain sectors in the sense that they are often on less than minimum wage and/or in tied accommodation and/or must pay back illegal intermediaries who have arranged the work.³⁴

Immigration provides a vital counterbalance to Scotland's ageing population and declining birth rates. Migrants often have a higher employment rate than the UK-born population and are less likely to claim benefits, making a positive net fiscal contribution.³⁵

Equality, diversity and positive action

'Equality' in the workplace means equal job **opportunities** and fairness for employees and job applicants. It means not discriminating against people because of protected characteristics or trade union membership. It does not mean promotion or getting 'extra points' for having a protected characteristic.

'Diversity' means including a range of people with different ages, religions, sexualities, ethnicities, people with disabilities and genders. Inclusivity means valuing everyone equally by giving them the opportunity to express themselves and feel safe to come up with ideas, raise issues and suggestions or try doing things differently than how they've been done before.

Positive action is about taking a proactive approach to support under-represented groups to overcome barriers and reduce disadvantage by enabling them to compete fairly for opportunities on merit, but without giving them preferential treatment over more qualified candidates.

Protecting women and children

The coalition, End Violence Against Women³⁶, is a coalition of 200 organisations across the UK who have warned against the weaponisation of violence against women and girls by far-right groups and mainstream politicians.

The coalition has pointed out that.

"Not only do these falsehoods fail to keep women safe, they serve as a racist distraction that actively impedes the urgent work of addressing gender-based violence...it is an uncomfortable reality that it (VAWG) is committed in every economic group, ethnicity, age and social group, and overwhelmingly by the men who are in women and girls' lives. VAWG is also perpetrated by people who move to the UK, but the racist idea that it is solely an imported problem flies in the face of women and girls' daily experiences in the UK. These horrifying facts must be addressed with sustainable investment in prevention and support services, and by removing state-imposed barriers to support for survivors."

They go on to say,

*"Over recent weeks, people claiming to care about the 'safety of women and children' have left families, women and children living in temporary asylum accommodation, afraid to leave their front door. They follow in the footsteps of the rioters who used the appalling murder of three young girls as an excuse to bring violence to our streets, with targeted attacks against migrant, minoritised and Muslim communities. **That two out of five of those arrested for that disorder themselves had police histories of domestic abuse illustrates not only the pervasiveness of gender-based violence but the disingenuous nature of***

³⁴ <https://labourexploitation.org/app/uploads/2023/12/Joint-Position-Paper-on-Preventing-Exploitation-in-the-Adult-Social-Care-Sector-Dec-2023.pdf>

³⁵ [https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/83501/html/#:~:text=Key%20Points,CEP\)%5B1%5D%20shows.](https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/83501/html/#:~:text=Key%20Points,CEP)%5B1%5D%20shows.)

³⁶ <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/>

many of those who claim to have the interests of women and children at heart. Meanwhile, members of Parliament freely share false statistics about the nationality of perpetrators. Government ministers have even endorsed some of this summer's demonstrators as having 'legitimate' concerns, which risks normalising and enabling the spreading of racist narratives by the far-right."³⁷

The coalition notes:

- 1 in 3 women experiences domestic violence in the UK;
- 2 women are murdered by a partner or ex-partner every day,
- more than 90% of perpetrators of rape and sexual assault are known to their victim,
- 1 in 2 rapes against women are carried out by a partner or ex-partner,
- more than 90% of stalking perpetrators are known to their victim.

Transgender people

Transgender people have always existed across the world and in every society. In Scotland, Trans people are a minority group that make up about 0.4% of the Scottish population based on the 2022 Census of people aged 16 and over. Transgender people are rarely visible in discussions about their lives and rights, or able to safely contribute their perspectives from their lived experience.

Some groups may exploit a lack of knowledge and of familiarity with transgender people, and media sensationalism, to spread disinformation which can have serious consequences. This can sometimes mirror discourse surrounding Section 2A – a harmful piece of legislation in Scotland which prohibited the 'promotion of homosexuality in schools' and inhibited the delivery of LGBT inclusive education. It was enacted in 1988 and repealed after lengthy campaigning and organising, in 2000. Twenty-one years later, Scotland became the first country in the world to commit to rolling out LGBT Inclusive Education across all schools.

6. How issues are presenting in schools, colleges and universities

The EIS survey of school branches showed that 39.4% of branches thought that prejudice-based violence and aggression had increased in the last four years (to December 2023)³⁸. This finding is evidence supporting anecdotal reports that prejudice-based violence and aggression in schools have increased in the last four years, i.e., since the period before the Covid pandemic. Teachers reported that "Female teachers are on the receiving end of misogyny from male pupils. We seem to have to deal with things that other workplaces wouldn't tolerate."

Prejudice-based incidents in schools may reflect society's attitudes and be linked to wider "hate crime", as the Scottish Government's own figures show that this is also rising³⁹.

Similar issues are presenting in further education, as EIS-FELA President, Anne Marie Harley, states,

"Following the events in Falkirk recently, we have concerns about the safety of our ESOL students within the college and in the local community. There is also concern about young people being drawn into the far-right. I am aware that there will be a backlash from some union members who are not like-minded. I know the GMB reps got a lot of stick at the protest in Falkirk. Not that it should stop us but we need to be aware of this."

³⁷ <https://www.wbg.org.uk/article/not-in-our-name-100-womens-rights-groups-warn-against-racist-weaponisation-of-vawg/>

³⁸ Violence & Aggression Branch Survey Report and Campaigning Recommendations: F

³⁹ CBP-8537.pdf

7. Causes

The growth of the far-right is driven by a complex mix of factors, including economic insecurity, social anxieties, cultural fears, mainstream party failures, global far-right networks, social media, social polarisation and the fragmentation of the political left.

The 2008 economic crisis and the ensuing pursuit of neoliberal deficit-control and austerity measures increased income and wealth inequalities, which have been compounded by cuts to public services. This has allowed cynicism of the public sector to fester as public services (GP, dentist, transport, housing, education) are under strain and can appear less accessible and more remote.

This has been compounded by social changes which have shrunk the former industrial working class, traditionally supportive of classic left-wing parties that organised around issues of welfare and social justice, but are now fragmented. Many areas targeted for anti-refugee protests have been victims of deindustrialisation, for example, the running down of Alexanders and Grangemouth in Falkirk has led to increased insecurity, lower wages and less of a connection between trade unions & working-class communities. In this context, the far-right capitalises on the dissatisfaction of those who feel they have been left behind.

In the UK a crisis of trust, exhaustion and struggle, a rising perception of threat, and a loss of agency (all highlighted as being causes of 'shattered Britain' in a 2025 public opinion poll)⁴⁰ can combine to fuel a desire for a simple, unifying narrative offered by nationalism. This disillusionment with politics, which people often perceive as having done little more than keep the status quo, alongside concerns (often weaponised) about personal, societal and cultural identity, and national decline, has provided fertile ground for far-right parties internationally.

This is set in the global context of economic and foreign state policies which seek to destabilise countries in the Middle East, Africa and South America for the reinforcement of their own values and interests. As part of this destabilisation process there has been an 'othering' of countries and peoples, coupled with trade tariffs and blockades, sanctions and decreased humanitarian aid. This has caused a hardening of public discourse around immigration and identity. Immigration is a feature of humankind and always will be. Climate change, war, genocide, scarcity, and abundance all cause people to uproot their communities and seek shelter elsewhere. Far-right politicians prefer to cultivate people's social anxieties around these geopolitical changes by disseminating nationalist, unorthodox messages which seek to blame migrants or "the other" for capitalism's ills. It is much easier to do this in the context of public sector cuts to ESOL, integration services and community development work.

The strategic use of social media to disseminate these messages allows the bypassing of traditional media (usually fact-checked) to reach more disaffected, including younger, members of society with tailored, persona-based accounts and a constant flow of content.

8. Why is this a union issue?

The rise of the far-right is concerning because it is counterposed to the fundamental values of trade unionism. The rise of the far-right is cultivated by many wealthy people, such as Elon Musk, and creeps out into the workplace, schools and the streets.

The far-right and right-wing populists – when in government - attempt to suppress collective worker action, replace democratic principles with autocratic rule, and undermine principles of solidarity and equality which trade unions champion. The Trump administration in the US has repealed workplace safety rules⁴¹ and targeted unions. Bolsonaro in Brazil and Orbán in Hungary have also attacked workers' rights and trade unions.⁴²

⁴⁰ <https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/our-work/research/shattered-britain/>

⁴¹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/labor-department-deregulate-workplaces-rules-changes-repeals/>

⁴² <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/hungary>

The global rights index 2025 from the International Trade Union Federation (ITUC) highlights that worldwide trade union repression is a severe and worsening problem, with 87% of countries violating the right to strike and 75% excluding workers from establishing or joining unions in the past year. The repression includes legislative restrictions like outlawing strike action, criminalisation, dissolving independent unions and confiscating union assets and persecuting activists. In many cases, prominent trade union leaders can be targeted with false criminal charges or are attacked or killed.

The ITUC notes that the worsening situation is caused by the growth of the far-right, being used by billionaires to do their bidding:

“We are witnessing a coup against democracy: a concerted, sustained assault by state authorities and the corporate underminers of democracy on the rights and welfare of workers. Increasingly, this attack is orchestrated by far-right demagogues backed by billionaires who are determined to reshape the world in their own interests at the expense of ordinary working people.”

The impact this has on the workers’ movement, individual rights, and social progress is enormous as people become more cynical, afraid and insular. Ultimately, far-right politics clamp down on challenge, opposition, and defiance. Whilst using the rhetoric of being anti-establishment, they are often the most autocratic of regimes. The divisive rhetoric and tactics of the far-right make minority groups scapegoats for problems created by wealth inequality which causes division amongst workers and undermines solidarity. We must always be mindful of our sources of news in this respect. Newspapers and news outlets which are historically anti-union (e.g. The Sun, News of the World, Daily Mail) should be viewed with scepticism when it comes to their reporting on immigration, and politics more generally.⁴³

The trade union movement is, and always has been, key to defeating the division caused by the far-right which is borne from poverty, wealth inequality and serves only to protect the excesses of the capitalist economic system.

This means continuing our opposition to privatisation, which serves to take public services out of democratic ownership and control and allow a small number of people to profit from a large number of people’s everyday needs; campaign against closures and cuts which further alienate and isolate people in our communities; and ensure a fair and equitable standard of living for all which reduces the pay and wealth gaps across society.

9. How does the EIS fight the influence of the far-right?

We, the EIS, are an education union. As educators, we deliver and facilitate education for children and young people to acquire the skills and knowledge to be responsible citizens who have a respect for others and participate responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life. Educators have a long tradition of being pro-democracy and anti-authoritarian, and hence, educators are often targets of authoritarian regimes.

All the EIS’s activity and work are in favour of policies that are fundamentally opposed to far-right ideas and thus innately anti-far-right. Furthermore, the EIS has an explicit and strong policy of opposing the far-right across a range of workstreams, including working with the TUC and STUC to foster policies and workplans to oppose the far-right, and affiliation to bodies that are fundamentally opposed to the far-right (such as Show Racism the Red Card, Scottish Refugee Council, Stand Up to Racism, etc.).

The EIS is not affiliated with any political party, but it does engage all mainstream parliamentary parties in Scotland in hustings and other engagements. The latest AGM resolved to exclude Reform from any hustings and thus is part of the concerted strategy of opposing the far-right.

The EIS attends marches and rallies that support values and policies that are the antithesis of the aims of the far-right.

⁴³ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/09/sun-publish-far-right-conspiracy-theory-labour#:~:text=The%20piece%20directed%20readers%20to,wards,caveats%2C%20as%20apparently%20trustworthy%20sources.>

The far-right seeks to change the boundaries of acceptable public debate. Furthermore, alternative websites and social media are proving to be increasingly sophisticated, disciplined and effective means of radicalisation of young people. The EIS's media strategy is used to challenge far-right narratives and amplify union values.

The EIS Equality Committee is cognisant of the changing landscape in terms of advancing the equality agenda. The EIS Equality-related work is, therefore, underpinned by a broader aim of addressing the influence of far-right on wider equality issues. The approach to this is multi-faceted: to increase knowledge and awareness in our membership; to mobilise and empower our Equality Networks; and to represent the EIS's interests in decision-making fora. The Equality Committee works across several different areas, including, but not limited to, LGBT equality, gender equality, and anti-racism. In 2025, the Committee will publish guidance on Addressing Misinformation and Disinformation and develop a new teaching resource on tackling misogyny.

The Education Committee's work also has an impact in advancing the EIS's challenge to the far-right, in supporting members to prepare pupils to be responsible citizens via the focus on political literacy in CfE; and facilitating learning for sustainability, which includes 'Education for Peace'. These aspects of the work of the Education Committee are also somewhat within the remit of the Executive Committee.

10. What more is to be done?

Trade unions remain the largest organisations of the working class in the UK. Trade unions are uniquely placed to act in the interests of working-class people in a way that, collectively, strengthens their position in society and does not undermine one section. We are also uniquely placed to have difficult conversations with people across many different workplaces to try to ensure they are politically literate and make decisions on facts, not flimsy rhetoric.

The values of the trade union movement are far more intrinsically linked to protecting the vulnerable and marginalised, promoting justice and free speech (with responsibilities), and holding those in power to account, than those of the far-right.

Schools, colleges, and universities need to be anchors in our communities as focal points for fighting far-right narratives and promoting integration and community development work. This means having difficult conversations with staff and students. It means actively seeking to engage with members, non-members, and others in our community about topics we may wish to shy away from. It means reclaiming the narrative on where the problems in society lie and building an alternative by organising within our workplaces and wider communities.

To do this, we must first build trust with colleagues. We do this by listening to their concerns, developing strategies to address people's fears, and winning on issues that matter to them.

We have the difficult conversations (see Advice to Branch Reps – Fighting the Influence of the Far-Right) and use different resources and tactics to engage. We need to protect our most marginalised (e.g. ESOL students etc) but also those at risk of being radicalised by the far-right. Different tactics are needed to engage with different audiences, including humour, facts, and rigorous debate.

11. The EIS Way Forward:

- Understand the arguments used by the far-right, and understand why their arguments are persuasive.
- Understand how far-right narratives are populist and flawed, and how to counter them (for further information, please refer to the companion document – Advice to Reps on Beginning the Branch's Fight Against the Far Right).
- Encourage colleagues and friends to learn about the issues contained in this briefing.
- Understand the Employment Rights Act and be able to highlight wins from this to colleagues.

- Branch meetings - ask members to be proactive in challenging populist far-right narratives or tropes when you hear them by referring to the challenging misinformation section in this resource and the companion document – Advice to Branch Reps: Fighting the Influence of the Far-Right.
- Campaign to increase EAL provision in your area.
- Encourage learning another language. USDAW, for example, has their union materials in 36 different languages and signpost members to learn another language (and culture).⁴⁴ This could be a collective CPD offer for EIS members.
- Get involved in local initiatives which tackle poverty and cuts, and provide space to collectivise as a community (via church, football clubs⁴⁵, Living Rent⁴⁶ etc).
- Encourage local association/branch reading groups, film clubs and other political education.
- Solidarity visits (for example, the FBU went to Calais refugee camp on a solidarity visit in 2019⁴⁷), reach out to those living in temporary accommodation in our areas, organise local association/branch/student visits with refugee charities, violence against women organisations, etc.
- Encourage colleagues to undertake the digitaldiscourseinitiative.scot free learning on teachers identifying and responding to online prejudice and misinformation.
- Take part in online discourse, including writing to local newspapers and engaging online (using digital discourse online organising conversations) to reclaim the narrative.
- Familiarise yourself with the EIS' Guidance on Addressing Misinformation and Disinformation.
- Stand up for pupils and students facing potential persecution by the far-right, including those being targeted by the far-right for recruitment. Take examples from UTLA, the teachers' union in LA, on protecting students from ICE enforcers.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ <https://www.usdaw.org.uk/learning-and-development/online-learning-gateway/languages/>

⁴⁵ <https://scottishleftreview.scot/towards-a-fairer-deal-for-football-fans/>

⁴⁶ <https://www.livingrent.org/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.fbu.org.uk/blog/calais-solidarity-community-full-pride>



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