

## **Racial Equality and Homelessness: A Briefing from the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights**

The Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER) is a Scottish strategic anti-racism organisation which works to eliminate racial discrimination and promote racial justice across Scotland.

We note the Local Government and Communities Committee is undertaking work on the issue of homelessness as part of its work programme. Ahead of the Committee's evidence sessions with stakeholders, CRER has compiled a short briefing to ensure the Committee is aware of racial equality issues associated with homelessness, in the hopes that this may be useful during the inquiry.

### **Race Equality Framework for Scotland 2016-2030**

During the development of the Scottish Government's Race Equality Framework for Scotland 2016-2030, CRER engaged with many minority ethnic communities around issues of housing and homelessness. Housing inequalities emerged as a significant issue for many groups.

This is reflected in a key goal of the Framework: *Minority ethnic communities experience fewer housing inequalities.*

The Framework also recognised several housing inequalities faced by minority ethnic communities, including:

- Statistically higher rates of overcrowding for some communities;
- Disproportionate renting from private landlords, leaving communities more vulnerable to higher, unstable rents and poor quality housing; and,
- Under-representation in social housing.

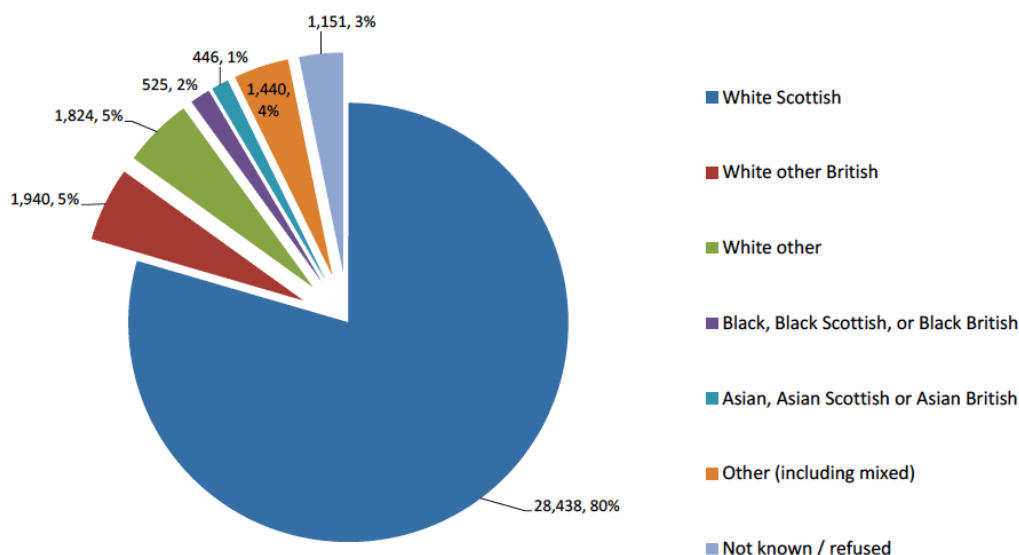
### **Statistical Evidence**

The "Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland: 2014-2015" reports that in 2014-2015, in 90% of applications the main applicant was recorded as white, while 1.5% were recorded as Black, Black Scottish or Black British, 1.2% were recorded as Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British, and 4.0% were recorded as other ethnic groups. 3.2% of applicants did not record an ethnicity. The proportion of homelessness applications by ethnic group has remained unchanged since 2007-2008.<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to make additional comparisons for other ethnic groups, as the ethnicity categories given in this report are different than those used in the Census (with, for example, 'mixed' included alongside 'other' ethnicities). However, it appears that Black, Black Scottish or Black British and 'other' (including mixed) ethnic groups are over-represented in homelessness applications compared to the population as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> The Scottish Government. [Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland: 2014-2015](#).



Utilising the categories of the 2011 Scottish Census, the lowest proportion of homelessness applications is from the Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British category (32 per 10,000) and the highest proportion is from the Caribbean or Black category (246 per 10,000).

It was noted that higher rates of homelessness from some non-white minority ethnic groups may be due to the way the asylum system operates as, once granted leave to remain, households may proceed to make a homelessness application as the route to obtain housing.<sup>2</sup>

Much of the data that examines ethnicity and homelessness either does not distinguish between refugee or asylum-seeking groups and the rest of the population, or does not make it clear which groups are included in the data. This in itself is a barrier to fully comprehending the issue and further work will be needed to achieve better understanding.

The Scottish Government also reports that between April 2014 and September 2014, the six-monthly rate of approach to homelessness prevention services was approximately 50 approaches per 10,000 of the population. The lowest from a known ethnic category was from Asian people (22 per 10,000) and the highest was from the other ethnic group category (262 per 10,000) with a high proportion from the Caribbean or Black ethnic groups (191 per 10,000) and the African ethnic group (98 per 10,000).<sup>3</sup> This data does not distinguish between refugee or asylum-seeking groups and the rest of the population.

A 2012 Joseph Rowntree Foundation report found that having to vacate the home of a friend or relative was a particularly common reason for homelessness among minority ethnic households. Changes in household formation due to relationship breakdown, marital problems, violence within the home, inter-generational conflict and financial difficulties were major contributing factors to homelessness. A majority of homeless individuals are unemployed, but those who are employed also experienced difficulties in gaining access to affordable accommodation, with many reporting that their low-incomes made accessing affordable accommodation very difficult.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The Scottish Government. [Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland: 2014-2015](#).

<sup>3</sup> The Scottish Government. [Housing Options \(PREVENT1\) Statistics in Scotland: 1 April 2014 to 30 September 2014](#).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012). [Poverty and ethnicity in Scotland](#).

In minority ethnic groups, homelessness due to alcohol addiction, substance abuse and stays in mental health institutions were rare, as was repeat homelessness; this is in direct contrast to the majority ethnic population.<sup>5</sup>

A 2007 study of A8 migrants in Glasgow found that 55% of respondents had experienced some form of homelessness, whether living temporarily with friends and family (38%), living in bed and breakfasts (16%) or sleeping rough (1%). Another study noted that one of the main causes of homelessness among migrants was the attachment of accommodation to a particular job; if the job ends, a migrant can become homeless without much warning and with little funds to find alternative housing.<sup>6</sup>

## Issues for Consideration

In addition to issues surrounding the publication of data, from our engagement with minority ethnic communities CRER knows that there are particular issues to consider regarding homelessness.

Homelessness does not only manifest with individuals sleeping on the streets, but rather in overcrowding. 9% of the approximately 2.4 million households in Scotland are overcrowded.<sup>7</sup> Previous research has found that minority ethnic households are more likely to suffer overcrowding.<sup>8</sup> This is a common issue among certain minority ethnic groups. White Scottish and white British households were the least likely to be overcrowded (8% and 6% respectively), with white Polish (30%), Bangladeshi (28%) and African (28%) households the most likely to be overcrowded, according to Scottish Government statistics.<sup>9</sup>

Minority ethnic people affected by homelessness appear to have little informal support from families and friends, apart from the provision of accommodation, relying instead on a number of organisations who provide targeted services accessible to minority ethnic individuals. Minority ethnic services were more likely to provide specialised services than mainstream agencies, including translation and advocacy services. Because specialised services address the particular needs of minority ethnic communities, these are favoured greatly over mainstream services. However, large portions of Scotland, including rural areas, have few or none of these services. Furthermore, widespread awareness of these services is lacking.<sup>10</sup>

Measures which the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests to reduce homelessness in minority ethnic communities include:<sup>11</sup>

- Provision of high quality advice and information;
- Increased recognition of the existence of hidden homelessness and the particular accommodation needs of minority ethnic families; and,
- Ethnic monitoring of service provision and regular review of services.

A study found that safety from racial harassment continues to be a source of concern for minority ethnic communities, particularly surrounding accommodation. In some cases, harassment drives individuals and families to other (often poorer quality) accommodation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012). [Poverty and ethnicity in Scotland.](#)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Scotland's Census 2011. [Detailed characteristics of housing and accommodation in Scotland.](#)

<sup>8</sup> Scottish Ethnic Minorities Research Unit and Heriot Watt University (2004) [Black and Minority Ethnic Communities and Homelessness in Scotland.](#)

<sup>9</sup> The Scottish Government. [Equalities Summary: Housing and Regeneration.](#)

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012). [Poverty and ethnicity in Scotland.](#)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

At times, a belief that inappropriate temporary accommodation will be offered may deter people affected by homelessness from seeking support. Furthermore, minority ethnic individuals may wish to live in areas where their religious or cultural needs can be better met. The need for accommodation in these areas, and in areas with less fear of harassment, is not often understood by service providers. Limited specialist provision for older minority ethnic people and for women escaping violence in the home was also noted.<sup>13</sup>

## **Contact**

CRER asks the Committee to keep these issues in mind during its inquiry into homelessness, as we believe the evidence is strong that a different approach will be needed to address homelessness in minority ethnic communities. Racial equality must be given appropriate consideration.

For further information on this issue, please contact:

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012). [Poverty and ethnicity in Scotland](#).