



Improving Race Equality in Housing and Accommodation

Background

The Welsh Government has made a commitment to publish a Race Equality Action Plan designed to tackle structural racial and ethnic inequalities in Wales (Welsh Government, 2020). This policy briefing summarises one of six reports produced by the Wales Centre for Public Policy to provide independent evidence to inform the development of the Action Plan. It focuses on evidence and recommendations for action related to race equality in housing and accommodation.

Introduction

Published Welsh statistics suggest that homeownership rates are lower for Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, with much higher percentages renting in both the private and social rented sector (Statistics for Wales, 2020a). Overcrowding rates are higher for all groups in Wales compared to England, but particularly affect Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, most notably Gypsy and Irish Travellers (28.7% living in overcrowded conditions), Bangladeshi people (27%) and Other Black people (26.9%) (Statistics for Wales 2020b). This compares to 3.9% for the least overcrowded group in Wales, White Irish people, and a 3% average for all households in England.

The relationship between housing and race has been brought into sharper focus by the inequalities highlighted by the Coronavirus pandemic (e.g. Ogbonna, 2020). Although it attracts less attention than some other dimensions of race inequality, the strong links

between housing and other manifestations of race inequality mean that it is a key determinant of health and wellbeing among racial and ethnic minority people. These manifestations include:

- Income and wealth inequalities (visible through lack of access to suitable housing and overcrowding);
- Health (because of the link between housing conditions and health outcomes); and
- Cultural and community cohesion (including questions of segregation and integration).

Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups are more at risk of being homeless.

Evidence and recommendations on what works in reducing race disparities within housing and accommodation are presented below in relation to three broad areas. Whilst the evidence relating to race equality in housing in Wales is lacking and often dated, we have drawn on the best available evidence.

Housing quality and availability

Improving housing outcomes for Black, Asian and minority ethnic people will require action to improve the condition of housing stock of all types (social housing, privately rented and owner occupied), as well as increasing prospects for homeownership. General measures to increase employment and income

prospects for Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups will also help to achieve this. Further to this, specific housing interventions are recommended.

Recommendations

- Consider commissioning research to evaluate the effectiveness of BME Housing Associations in other UK nations, to assess whether one should be established in Wales.
- Collect more recent data on the extent, demographic breakdown and location of overcrowding in Wales. A strategy should then be developed to reduce overcrowding, targeted at the areas of highest incidence.
- Interim measures like prioritising already-overcrowded households on social housing waiting lists could help, if appropriate stock is available.
- Carry out an updated assessment of culturally-specific housing needs, based on a representative sample of Wales's Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.
- Make more effort to engage Black, Asian and minority ethnic tenants and homeowners, including through proactive outreach and engagement. Best practice from within the sector should be learned from.
- Improve understanding of the needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Efforts should be made to obtain better data about the numbers of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in Wales, including those who are 'housed'. Housing needs assessments should take into account the desire of some of those who are 'housed' to return to a more traditional lifestyle.
- Increase the number of quality pitches made available by local authorities to

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, including making provision for temporary stopping places.

- Include data about the needs of Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups in Local Housing Market assessments.
- Ensure that data from Local Housing Market assessments are used to inform the siting and specification of housing developments.
- Continue, and if possible accelerate, efforts to increase the stock and housebuilding rate for social and affordable housing, which will have benefits for Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.
- Work to establish whether the current structure of social housing grants is a barrier to provision.
- Consider interventions, such as renovating derelict properties in inner city areas, that target places where Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities are concentrated, in order to help improve housing conditions.

Homelessness and risk of homelessness

Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups are more at risk of being homeless, and particularly of being assessed as involuntarily homeless under section 75 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 (Statistics for Wales, 2019). The increased disproportionality when moving through the system indicates that there may be ongoing issues in engaging with and meeting the needs of Black, Asian and minority ethnic households.

Recommendations

- Ensure the needs of Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups form part of the Welsh Government's homelessness

strategy, prioritising outreach and awareness raising for vulnerable groups.

- Ensure that refugees have access to move-on accommodation, which could help drive down the disproportionate rate of Black, Asian and minority ethnic Section 75 applicants.
- Use anti-homelessness provisions put in place during the Coronavirus pandemic as the basis for a long term anti-rough sleeping and homelessness prevention strategy.

Community cohesion and residential segregation

Encouraging integration and belonging goes much wider than simply housing policy, but given the impact of location and condition of housing on integration, it is important to consider ways in which it could be used to tackle residential segregation and create more integrated, socially and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods.

Improving housing quality pursued in tandem with greater integration strategy could help reduce segregation while ensuring continued access to community resources, for those members of Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities who require them (Beider, 2012).

The evidence suggests that ethnic diversity reduces social trust, particularly at the neighbourhood level (Dinesen et. al., 2020). Integration strategies and counter-segregation plans would therefore be particularly beneficial if locally based.

Recommendations

- Improve housing quality and situate more housing developments in or near areas where Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities are located, and promote socially and ethnically mixed neighbourhoods.

- Refresh the Welsh Government Community Cohesion Strategy with a focus on increasing social interaction between groups, fostering a sense of common purpose, and promoting a united Welsh culture and society.

Conclusion

As well as the recommendations made within specific areas, there are also more general findings that have emerged from the research and which are worth considering. These include:

- Improving the collection and accessibility of data on race and housing and accommodation in Wales;
- Updating or creating specific Black, Asian and minority ethnic housing action plans;
- Giving consideration to how racial and ethnic minority communities that may not already be engaged with or aware of public services can be best engaged with; and
- Exploring the potential to tie some of the recommendations outlined in this briefing into a post-Coronavirus recovery plan.

Recommendations

- Update the Welsh Government's current Black, Minority Ethnic Housing Action Plan, which is now eighteen years old, with a new, evidence-informed action plan making specific commitments.
- Collect data on housing and ethnicity routinely in Wales, and publish accessibly, following the example of the English Ethnicity Facts and Figures Service.
- Make more effort to reach isolated or disengaged communities, including investigating effective means of communication.

References

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Find out more

For the full report see Price, J. (2020). **Improving Race Equality in Housing and Accommodation**. Cardiff: Wales Centre for Public Policy.

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