

The fight for home is a fight against racism

Everyone deserves an affordable, decent, and secure home. But too many people don't have one. People working every hour they can are forced to choose between feeding their families and keeping a roof over their head. Private rents are soaring higher than ever and now there are over 145,000 homeless children in England. This is the housing emergency which is ruining lives every day.

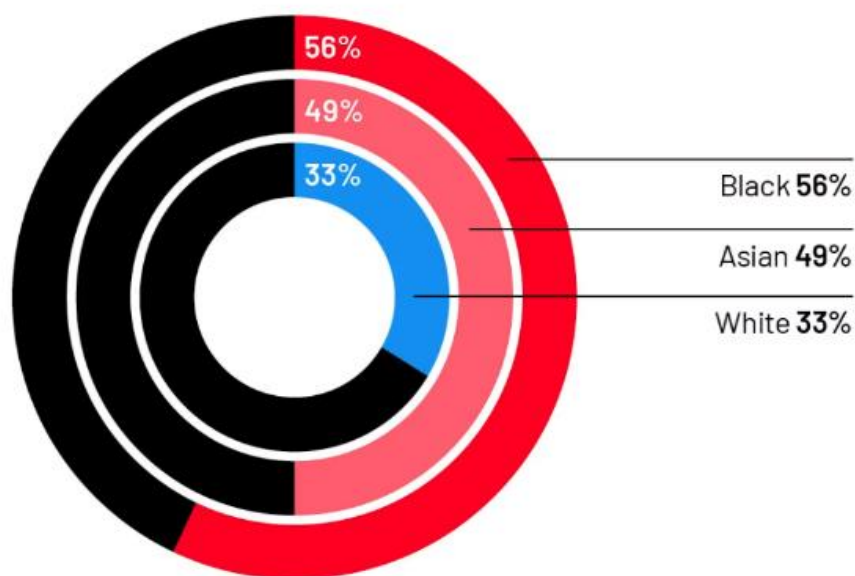
Not everyone experiences the housing emergency in the same way. Black, Brown and other communities of colour face additional barriers to accessing a safe and secure home. Historical inequities, modern policies and systemic racism mean that, while there is huge variation between different ethnic groups, people of colour are disproportionately more likely to be made homeless, live in deprived neighbourhoods and poor-quality homes.

Some people in positions of power are also pushing poisonous narratives that seek to scapegoat migrants and communities of colour for problems they did not create to distract from the failure to take action to end the housing emergency.

The only sustainable way to end the housing emergency is to build a new generation of good quality and genuinely affordable social homes, with rents tied to local incomes. To make sure that everyone has the right to a decent and permanent home, we must put race equity at the heart of the fight for home.

How do race and housing interact?

There is huge variation between different ethnic groups, but people of colour [are in general more likely to live in more deprived neighbourhoods](#) than White households. And our [2021 survey](#) found that **Black and Asian people are far more likely to be denied the right to a safe and secure home.**



KEY STATISTICS

- **More likely to be living in poor conditions, which can affect life chances**
 - o Black and Minority Ethnic renters are 51% more likely to have put up with poor conditions to be able to rent their home compared to White British/Irish renters.¹
 - o Black and Minority Ethnic renters are 22% more likely to have experienced damp/mould in the last year compared to White British/Irish renters.²
 - o Mixed White and Black Caribbean (13%), Bangladeshi (10%), Black African (9%) and Pakistani (8%) households were more likely to have damp problems than White British households(3%)³
 - o Black renters are more than twice as likely as white renters to say their children's mental and/or physical health has been affected by poor conditions. More than a third of Black renters reported this.⁴
 - o Black renters are more than twice as likely as white renters to say their child(ren) had missed school because of poor conditions.⁵
- **More likely to face discrimination or poor landlord behaviour**
 - o Black and Minority Ethnic renters are 87% more likely to have experienced illegal acts by their landlord in the last year compared to White British/Irish renters.⁶
 - o Ethnic minority residents are less likely to feel their landlord treats them with respect and feel satisfied with their home.⁷
- **More likely to be on low incomes / spending higher proportion of income on rent:**
 - o Black Caribbean households spend the highest percentage of household incomes on rent.⁸
 - o Black households (54%) are most likely out of all ethnic groups to have a weekly income of less than £600.⁹
- **Highest levels of overcrowding**
 - o The highest rates of overcrowding are in Bangladeshi (23%), Arab (17%), Black African (16%), and Pakistani (14%) households.¹⁰
- **More likely to be homeless and less likely to have a secure home**
 - o [Shelter's 2023 analysis](#) found that Black households are **11 times more likely** to be living in temporary accommodation than White households.
 - o [2022 homelessness figures](#) show people of colour are less likely to have a safe or secure home. 23% of people who seek help as they are homeless or at immediate risk of becoming homeless in England are Black (10%), Asian (6%), from a Mixed ethnic background (3%) or from an Other ethnic group (4%) - despite making up just 14% of households in the [2021 census](#).
 - o The private rented sector has the highest proportion of ethnic minority households compared to other tenures (homeownership and social renting).¹¹

¹ YouGov/Shelter survey of private renters 2023

² YouGov/Shelter survey of private renters 2023

³ [Damp and Mould - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures](#)

⁴ YouGov/Shelter survey of private renters 2023

⁵ YouGov/Shelter survey of private renters 2023

⁶ YouGov/Shelter survey of private renters 2023

⁷ GOV.UK: [Social Housing Quality Programme Residents Survey](#)

⁸ [Social housing lettings - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures](#)

⁹ [Household income - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures](#)

¹⁰ [Overcrowding - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures](#)

¹¹ [English Housing Survey 2022-3 - Annex table 1.3](#)

What is driving this inequality?

Structural Racism

Historically, [many people of colour have faced significant prejudice in our housing system in Britain](#). In the wake of the Second World War, many migrants arriving from former colonies were refused jobs, excluded from social housing or refused a rented home due to overt racism from landlords. Many were forced to rent crumbling homes from unscrupulous slum landlords like the notorious [Peter Rachman](#).¹² [In the 80s and 90s several investigations found racist practices by local authorities allocating social housing](#) as some councils offered Black, Asian and minority ethnic households only poorer quality properties or barred them from being rehoused.¹³

Historical discrimination like this can have a lasting intergenerational impact which can be hard to break. For example, children growing up in homes that harm their mental or physical health (e.g. damp and mould or no space to play or do their homework), or who are forced to move every few years, do worse at school and find it harder to get ahead in life. And wider socio-economic inequalities like poverty are a major driver of structural racism in our housing system.¹⁴

Direct Discrimination and Racism

People from racially minoritised communities may often face direct discrimination from landlords. For example, private landlords may refuse to rent to them or choose other prospective tenants. Tenants may not even know this is happening and it can make it extremely hard to access a decent home in the first place and puts people at the mercy of slumlords renting out sub-standard homes.

In addition, racist attitudes can mean tenants feel they are ignored when they ask their landlord to fix serious health hazards in their home. This can force people from racialised communities to live in sub-standard homes – and as [the tragic and avoidable death of 2-year-old Awaab Ishaak](#) showed, discriminatory or racist attitudes can have lethal consequences.

Racist migration policies that exclude people from housing support

[Modern policies designed to create a 'hostile environment' for migrants](#) create additional barriers to accessing a safe and decent home. This can [disproportionately push people into homelessness and destitution](#). For example:

- **Right to Rent** rules require landlords to check prospective renters' immigration status. This [causes discrimination in the housing market](#) based on nationality, race or ethnicity, as some landlords looking to avoid the bureaucracy of checks refuse to consider renters from minority ethnic backgrounds or migrants with the legal right to rent.
- **No Recourse to Public Funds** is a condition forced on people with certain types of immigration status that bars them from accessing housing benefit, homelessness assistance or a social home. This [pushes families into abject poverty, overcrowded housing and forces many people onto the street](#).

We need more social homes, not scapegoating

Some people in positions of power are pushing racist and divisive narratives designed to scapegoat migrants and communities of colour for problems they did not create, to cover up for the failure to

¹² See also: 'Housing and neighbourhoods: a European perspective', in *Race and Ethnicity in the 21st Century*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, Eds: A. Bloch and J. Solomos (2009)

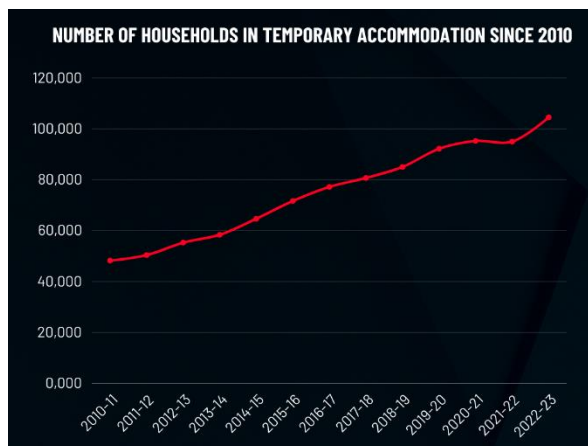
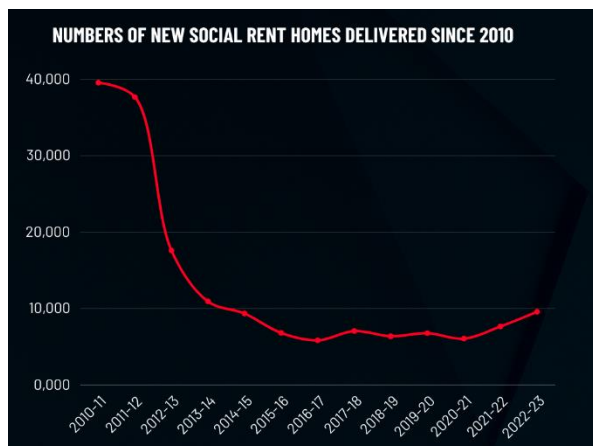
¹³ See also 'Dark Strangers: A Sociological Study of the Absorption of a Recent West Indian Migrant Group in Brixton, South London, Sheila Patterson (1963)

¹⁴ Briefing: What's causing structural racism in housing?, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/housing/whats-causing-structural-racism-in-housing>

fix our broken housing system. This poisonous narrative doesn't exist in a vacuum. It has a knock-on impact across the country: as it becomes more part of everyday discourse on the news, in parliament and social media, it further fans the flames of racism.

A clear example is the recent proposals on social housing allocations policy. Despite the fact that many new migrants are already barred from accessing social housing,¹⁵ that [90% of lettings were to UK citizens](#) in 2022-3 and that the overwhelming majority of new social housing is [allocated to White British people](#), some political figures have attempted to blame migrants for the shortage of social homes. Instead of allocating homes according to need, the government has proposed barring more people based on their nationality and how long they've been in the country. This policy is unnecessary and unjust. [As many organisations have warned, it will increase homelessness](#) and leave families trapped homeless for years in expensive and unsuitable temporary accommodation. Given the huge lack of social housing – a direct result of the failure to replace homes that were sold or demolished – this will not likely help many people left on the waitlist into a social home. The best way to get people on the waitlist suitably housed is to build more social housing.

There is one clear cause of the housing emergency: the failure to build enough genuinely affordable social rented homes. Social rented homes are the only genuinely affordable type of home because their rents are set by a formula tied to local incomes. But last year we delivered 11,400 social rented homes – and because so many were demolished or sold off – we actually lost 23,000 social homes, including conversions. This is the reason homelessness has doubled since 2010.



The decision to reduce social rent delivery is a political choice – and it has directly fuelled the insecurity that we see today. It's the reason the private rented sector has doubled in size in the last 20 years. We need at least 90,000 social rented homes built every year to end homelessness and house most of the 1.3 million people on social housing waitlists. This will help build equity into our system and [bring huge benefits, adding over £50bn to the economy](#), improving the health and wealth of the nation. And we need to see [an overhaul of private renting so that tenants can have the security of a decent home](#), without fear of being unfairly evicted for no reason.

But we must also strike down damaging rules like the [Right to Rent](#), which encourages discrimination. To stop migrants being forced onto the streets, [everyone should have the right to emergency accommodation](#). And we must use our voice to hold our leaders to account and say loud and clear that **the fight for home is a fight against racism**.

¹⁵ Just 10% of non-EU migrants with less than 5 years' residence received any type of public funds, Migration Observatory, University of Oxford, <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/deprivation-and-the-no-recourse-to-public-funds-nrpf-condition/>