



MINORITISED ETHNIC GROUPS ACCESS TO SOCIAL HOUSING IN SCOTLAND AT KEY TRANSITION POINTS IN THEIR LIVES

Context

Scotland's housing and homelessness systems are broken and biased. We are in a growing housing emergency with a lack of social homes meaning that more and more people find themselves unable to access a safe, secure and affordable home.

A [recent Scottish Government review](#) highlighted that an evidence gap relating to the housing needs of minoritised ethnic groups, particularly post-Covid, makes it difficult to define policy changes to improve access to affordable housing for minoritised ethnic communities in Scotland.

Shelter Scotland have undertaken research led by Heriot-Watt University, in partnership with CEMVO Scotland and funded by abrdn Financial Fairness Trust, to explore the barriers that minoritised ethnic communities face when accessing social housing in Scotland. The researchers carried out a survey of 34 social landlords. They also spoke to 30 people from minoritised ethnic communities, and 10 white Scottish people.

This paper is a summary of the research and its key findings: to read the full report [click here](#).

Key findings

The research finds that the **shortage of social housing** is a major structural constraint which hinders access to housing for people from all ethnic groups. In particular the lack of larger social homes severely restricts the options available for larger families, which disproportionately impacts some minoritised ethnic groups. These challenges contribute to the higher rates of overcrowding in some ethnic groups.

The policy and legislative framework for allocating housing in the social rented sector in Scotland emphasises equality of access of housing to all. However, evidence of positive change in progress towards increasing minoritised ethnic groups access within the sector is lacking.

Both the **occurrence and fear of racial harassment** is significant for people from minoritised ethnic communities living in social housing. This sometimes resulted in victims of racial abuse having to leave their homes.

"We had our four years of history of racial harassment, verbal, car breakdowns, cars then house windows. To be honest, the downstairs windows I never had to clean. The kitchen window and sitting room windows were replaced every week. We had our TV stolen." - Sakhina, Female, 55, from sample of minoritised ethnic people.

“Yes, I had to move out of this area actually, you know I never reported, and I should have actually... I said, 'I'm not having this, I'm leaving, there's no way I can live in this,' but I didn't complain.” – Abiba, Male, 54 from sample of minoritised ethnic people.

The research found that many people who experienced racial harassment had received little or no support from their social landlords. Where victims of racial abuse did report this abuse to the police the police were often not effective in resolving the issue.

There is some evidence of good practice, for example one housing association shared that they offer translation and interpretation services for their tenants. However, the research found that often **the housing sector does not respond effectively to the needs of ethnically diverse populations.**

Such needs include access to high quality advice on housing options, timely support and sensitivity to personal and household circumstances. Shortcomings in meeting these needs hinders these groups in navigating the housing system and accessing safe, decent and appropriate social homes. In some cases, limited proficiency in English and digital literacy compounds the challenges which some ethnically minoritised people face in successfully navigating the housing system.

“How they speak sometimes, they just read it like a paragraph but you need time to digest it and to think about it, so then I said, 'Please, I sorry from me to ask you step by step, but this is difficult for me to understand all this.” – anonymous, Female, 34, from sample of minoritised ethnic people.

Significantly, participants’ **minoritised ethnicity interacts with other aspects of identity**, such as gender and low income, to complicate the challenges faced by individuals in making the shift to permanent and safe housing. Very little appears to have been done to recognise the complex and overlapping needs, arising from these intersections of identity. Such complications result in insecurity and prolonged stay in unsuitable temporary accommodation.

This is illustrated in the case of Saya, a minoritised woman who the head of a household with children. She has moved multiple times within the temporary accommodation system after fleeing from domestic violence.

Saya (40) is a mother of two who had lived with her husband since her arrival in the UK ten years ago. Saya’s husband is a perpetrator of domestic violence. Following a violent incident, Saya called Women’s Aid who worked with the council to move her into emergency accommodation. Since then, Saya has moved three times to other temporary accommodation before moving into her current temporary accommodation with her children just before the pandemic. She struggles with her mental health and low income.

Saya and other minoritized ethnic individuals require housing advice and services which are responsive to the distinctive nature of the challenges that they face in order to help them secure a permanent home. However, access to such advice and support in the social rented sector appears to be currently very limited.

Recommendations

The report makes a series of recommendations on what needs to be done to remove the barriers which minoritised ethnic groups face when accessing social housing in Scotland:

- There needs to be greater emphasis from senior management to promote and create **an anti-racist culture**. This can be done through engaging with research into race and housing, and creating organisational cultures which promote equality of opportunity

and outcome, supported by more developed processes for data collection, use and sharing.

- More attention needs to be paid to ensure the right **affordable housing stock is supplied**, which is **reflective of the needs of an ethnically diverse population**. The process of designing new stock can build on examples of good practice in other parts of the UK, by recognising the multigenerational nature of households in some ethnic groups as well as diverse cultural preferences. For example, the separation of food preparation areas from living spaces.
- Social landlords need to **proactively engage with minoritised ethnic communities across Scotland**. This engagement needs to be initiated by social landlords, should be authentic, open and targeted. It can be undertaken through working in partnership with organisations which work with such communities. This would increase understanding the needs of these communities and help to design housing and homelessness services which better support them.
- Social landlords supported by Scottish Government, the police and other organisations need to develop more effective **zero tolerance approaches** against perpetrators of racial harassment, and to provide better support for victims to enable to remain in their homes safely. Key steps which can be taken include developing more effective policies and practices against perpetrators, providing better support to victims and investing more heavily in the social infrastructure of neighbourhoods to create safe and welcoming spaces for all. A proactive zero tolerance policy within the housing sector which is communicated to all tenants will encourage individuals who are currently reluctant to report such crimes to come forward.
- There needs to be **a program of capacity building**, for example through training and continuous professional development, in the housing sector to enable social landlords to respond effectively to the needs of an ethnically diverse population. This will also allow those in the sector to better understand the ways in which ethnicity may interact with other dimensions of identity such as gender and disability to pose increased challenges to some individuals in securing appropriate housing for their needs.
- **Increased ethnic diversity in the workforce at all levels** will likely increase the availability of multilingual housing advice and support, as well as build the capacity of social housing organisations to respond to the housing and homelessness needs of an ethnically diverse local population.
- Steps must be taken to **improve the collection, use and evaluation of data on equalities**, in particular on ethnicity, as this will help facilitate greater attention to addressing ethnic disparities in housing outcomes. Without such data, social landlords' ability to evidence changes over time and to demonstrate accountability and transparency to an ethnically diverse population will continue to be severely constrained, hindering progress towards racial equality in the sector.

Next steps

Shelter Scotland, in partnership with Heriot-Watt University and CEMVO Scotland, will use this research to advocate for the changes required to policy and practice to ensure that minoritised ethnic groups are able to secure suitable housing outcomes. We will be facilitating workshops

in July and August 2023 with social landlords, representative bodies, community groups and beyond to share the report's findings and recommendations. These workshops will help to define the key actions that are required to make the changes needed. We will also be using the recommendations to reflect on the work of our own organisation and consider ways for improvement.

If you would like to be involved in the workshops, please sign up by filling out [this form](#).

Project partners



The Urban Institute (TUI) at Heriot-Watt University are a cross-disciplinary group of researchers delivering innovative research towards building sustainable, resilient and just cities and communities. TUI are committed to delivering social impact through their research and work closely with a range of non-academic audiences to codesign policy and practice recommendations and interventions.

Website: [The Urban Institute](#)



abrdn Financial Fairness Trust funds research, policy work and campaigning activities to tackle financial problems and improve living standards for people on low-to-middle incomes in the UK. It is an independent charitable trust registered in Scotland (SC040877)

Website: [Home | abrdn Financial Fairness Trust](#)



CEMVO Scotland is a national intermediary organisation and strategic partner of the Scottish Government with the aim of building the capacity of the ethnic minority voluntary sector. With a network of over 600 ethnic minority organisations throughout Scotland, CEMVO delivers a wide range of programmes to support the sector and its communities.

Website: www.cemvoscotland.org.uk