

Better
Housing
Briefing

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**Housing
choice and
racist hostility**

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A Race Equality Foundation
Briefing Paper

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Key messages

- 1 Extending housing choice for black and minority ethnic households requires consideration of racial discrimination, social and economic inequality and household needs, preferences and aspirations
- 2 Increased opportunities for the expression of housing choice in new lettings systems has improved the choices of location open to black and minority ethnic households, but there is mixed evidence of impact
- 3 Tackling racist hostility and reducing this constraint on housing choice requires renewed work around a 'Racism Reduction' agenda, together with significant improvements in victim support and enforcement
- 4 Supporting victims and dealing with perpetrators will not change prevailing community-wide racist hostility. More comprehensive strategies are required, and there is a wealth of good practice evidence to inform local action.

Introduction

The promotion of housing choice has been confirmed as the major motive in designing the overall regulatory process for social housing (Cave, 2007). The Cave Review identified three key objectives for the regulation of social housing: (1) ensuring continued provision of high-quality social housing; (2) empowering and protecting tenants; and (3) expanding the availability of choice of provider at all levels. The report emphasises that regulators should promote housing choice for tenants in all the following areas: choices over where they live; how services are provided; different types of service at different prices; and progression to ownership and in choices over the management organisation (Cave, 2007, p. 17). How this broad set of objectives and related provision has impacted on black and minority ethnic households raises a wide agenda of issues and questions which cannot all be answered here. A key focus of this paper is to examine the moves to improve housing choice in lettings systems, the impact this has had in various cities and towns throughout the UK, and the link with interventions to address racist hostility and violence. This paper also draws on research from other European Union (EU) member states.

Constraints on housing choice for black and minority ethnic households

1

The character and extent of racial discrimination in the various sectors of the housing market is one of the most well established aspects of racial inequality in the modern UK (Ginsburg, 1992; Law, 1996; Harrison with Phillips, 2003; Harrison *et al.*, 2006). It continues to be a vital task to identify evidence and patterns of racial discrimination in the housing market. The recently completed formal investigation of urban regeneration agencies and practices, by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE, 2007a), examines allegations of unequal distribution of funds, failure to consider the impact of urban regeneration on race equality issues and failure to consult minority ethnic groups. Across EU member states the hard-won recognition of racial discrimination in the housing market is relatively recent (Harrison *et al.*, 2006). Linkages between housing and other structures of racial and ethnic inequality need to be made, particularly the labour market and patterns of income and wealth. For example, housing tenure patterns and availability of public transport impact on the labour market achievements of black and minority ethnic people (Strategy Unit, 2003). The need for action on underlying deprivation has been underlined by a wide-ranging review of ethnicity and poverty in the UK, which has drawn on research evidence from 350 studies carried out from 1991 onwards (Platt, 2007). Over half of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black African children are growing up in poverty. Stark ethnic differences in poverty rates are determined by a variety of factors, including persistent discrimination, patterns of educational qualifications, labour market outcomes, housing locations, disabilities and ill health.

Across Europe, the failure of nation states to engage with patterns of racialised and ethnicised suffering and exclusion is abundantly clear. Instead, there is a marked preference for political rhetoric over integration, security and immigration, and a failure to grasp the depth of racism and racialisation. Patterns of labour market and unemployment inequality show migrants and minorities suffering worse employment conditions, lower wages and concentration in the most precarious and least desirable jobs. In housing, substantial cross-national evidence shows migrants and minorities experiencing poor housing conditions, homelessness and relative deprivation which have compounded social and economic inequalities (Harrison *et al.*, 2006; EUMC/FRA, 2007). This is most evident for the Roma and Travellers. In many European countries they are living in segregated neighbourhoods and settlements with extremely poor infrastructure, and they are persistently subject to high levels of racial discrimination, evictions and forced displacements. Concerns regarding the extreme deprivation of the Roma and

Resources 1

The Cave Review report
www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1511391

The Cave Review of the regulation of social housing, published in June 2007, highlights the need to strengthen consumer empowerment and choice in social housing.

Resources 2

European Agency for Fundamental Rights

<http://fra.europa.eu/fra/index.php>

The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia became the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights on 1 March 2007. A number of very useful publications are available on this site, including *Trends and Developments in Racism and Xenophobia 1997–2005*, national analytical studies of racism and housing by fifteen member states produced in 2006, and a meta-analysis of these country reports: *Migrants, Minorities and Housing* (Harrison *et al.*, 2006).

Travellers' housing conditions have been placed high on the agenda of member states. Programmes developed in response often aim to implement measures relevant to employment, health care and education.

Some National Focal Points reports from the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC/FRA, 2007) present a very bleak picture indeed. For Spain, housing experiences for migrants and minorities include reference to homelessness, occupation of abandoned buildings, and movement into overcrowded, poor-quality accommodation. One study of the housing conditions of Moroccan migrants in Andalusia, found 75 per cent with no hot water, 57 per cent with extreme dampness, 49 per cent with no toilet, 45 per cent with no kitchen and 40 per cent with no running water. Meanwhile, 80 per cent of the Roma are concentrated in shanty towns, with 30 per cent of households living in sub-standard housing, exacerbated by poor facilities, overcrowding and poor local environments. Even more striking, in Greece, housing conditions of the Roma are described as constituting a 'humanitarian emergency', with no access to sanitary facilities, refuse disposal, sewerage, water or electricity, and with discrimination in access to mortgages, price discrimination for rented housing, and direct and indirect discrimination by landlords.

In many EU states, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers face great difficulties in securing accommodation and can encounter barriers such as discriminatory residential qualifications applied by providers of low-rent public housing. Homelessness and high levels of overcrowding are key features of migrants' housing histories. Over 15 per cent of a national sample of migrants did not have either drinking water or heating systems in their accommodation (Harrison *et al.*, 2006). Housing exclusion for these groups, as for many others, interconnects with discrimination and deprivation in access to education, health care and work. Growing concern in many member states over housing exclusion has been diverted into rather fruitless debates over segregation and integration, as in the UK, Netherlands and France, with most countries failing to address specific measures that target improvements in housing conditions at migrants and minorities. The work of black and minority ethnic housing associations in the UK, despite its problems and constraints, stands out as a model of good practice in the European context. In the UK, the government has recently confirmed the importance of low-cost home ownership schemes, the Ethnic Minorities Innovation Fund and choice-based lettings systems as three key instruments to improve housing choices for black and minority ethnic households (DCLG, 2007). The next section examines the last of these initiatives in more detail.

Increased opportunities in new lettings systems: mixed evidence of impact

2

The introduction of choice-based lettings (CBL) systems, together with improving agency responses to racist violence, has improved opportunities for housing choice. Choice-based lettings allows housing applicants to view details on, choose between, and apply (or 'bid') for currently available-to-let properties. This contrasts with traditional housing allocation systems where applicants are normally faced with only the stark choice of whether to accept or reject a property deemed 'suitable' by a social landlord. In this way, choice-based lettings aim to transform the letting of social housing from a producer-driven function to a consumer-led service. Originating in the Netherlands, the application of choice-based lettings in the UK was given substantial impetus by the English Housing Green Paper of 2000. This backed choice-based lettings as empowering housing applicants by enabling them to play a direct role in selecting their future home. Ministers also saw the choice-based lettings approach as potentially beneficial in:

- facilitating greater 'ownership' of letting decisions by housing applicants themselves; thereby
- enhancing tenants' commitment to their home and neighbourhood;
- promoting greater mobility for those moving into - or within - social housing;
- making better use of the social housing stock (i.e. properties owned by local authorities and housing associations) ([Pawson et al., 2006](#)).

Government targets aim to extend choice-based lettings to all local authorities in England by 2010, following the introduction of such schemes in twenty-seven local authority areas during 2001-03. An evaluation of the impact of these programmes found that in Leeds in 2001, for example, more than in towns such as Bolton and Bradford, minority ethnic social renters were spatially concentrated, with 52 per cent living in three of the council's twenty-nine housing management administrative areas ([Pawson et al., 2006](#)). Reducing racial and ethnic concentration of black and minority ethnic lettings is a direct consequence of the introduction of choice-based lettings in Leeds, with the proportion of these lettings in areas of concentration falling from 47 per cent pre-CBL to only 27 per cent post-CBL. Outside these areas, in some cases this has involved letting properties to households that are immediately at high risk of racist violence ([Hemmerman et al., 2007](#)). In response, choice-based lettings criteria have been amended to allow scope for managers and front-line staff to make an assessment of whether it is safe for a minority ethnic family to move into a particular property. It is clear that many such families are prepared to face such risks because of the insecurity and poor quality of their previous housing circumstances. Overall, there is mixed

Resources 3

Choice-Based Lettings

www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1153186

This section of the Communities and Local Government website provides a guide to government policy in this area, results so far, newsletters and publications, including the evaluation of the longer term impact of choice-based lettings across the country ([Pawson et al., 2006](#)).

Chicemoves

www.chicemoves.org.uk

This website is operated by the Centre for Comparative Housing Research at De Montfort University and provides information and resources on choice-based lettings, including updates from the twenty-seven choice-based lettings projects that comprised the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister pilot programme and other local schemes from England, Scotland and Wales.

evidence of impact on demand, with a doubling of black and minority ethnic bidders in Bolton, for example, and significant increases in Harrow, but little change in Bradford and Newham. Also, looking across all the pilot areas, evidence does not show a consistent improvement in the share of lets to black and minority ethnic households. Upward trends in lets generally for social landlords have occurred at the same time as the introduction of choice-based lettings. Lastly, it is clear that de-concentration of black and minority ethnic settlement has been facilitated by choice-based lettings, which is in marked contrast to the impact of many previous housing allocation processes (DCLG, 2007). This makes more urgent the task of addressing underlying patterns of racist hostility in those often 'unpopular' areas to which black and minority ethnic households are moving.

3 Tackling racist hostility and reducing this constraint on housing choice: a 'Racism Reduction' agenda

Identifying potential factors that make racist hostility and violence more likely, more acceptable and more durable involves consideration of a complex set of interlocking environments. Often, local community and housing strategies fail to impact on many of these arenas. The virtual environment is increasingly important. Internet sites and social networking may be influential in encouraging racist violence. International conflicts and events, including ethnic and racial conflicts, and acts of terrorism, heighten local perceptions of insecurity and are used to rationalise racist violence. Together with national political and media messages on migration, ethnicity and racism, which shape racial hostility, these activities provide a constant 'drip-feed' of negative stories that will reinforce local forms of racism. This will happen unless they are countered on a regular basis by positive messages in a range of local community and institutional contexts. Educational factors that make racist violence more likely are important, such as patterns of underachievement, exclusion, racial and ethnic segregation, lack of explicit focus in schools, and failure to challenge racism through school curriculum and ethos. Physical features of the local area that make racist violence attractive to perpetrators, such as geographical isolation, layout of estates and poor lighting, also need consideration.

The role of family networks can be key where racist hostility is socialised and legitimated across generations and genders, with old/young, female/male attitudes and talk promoting racism in different ways. Local social and community factors, such as the balance between racist violence 'prevents' and 'promoters', and the level and nature of social interaction across

ethnic/racial lines, may also determine the likelihood of racist violence. The role of bigoted or ideologically driven adults and their interactions with young people, together with more independent values and norms of young peer groups, may also be central in driving racist violence. Understanding and engaging with these groups and interactions through outreach and youth work can be an essential plank of anti-racist work. The role of ideologically driven groups, including the extreme right, in promoting racist violence and in racialising pre-existing grievances requires careful surveillance and intervention. Criminal environments may also provide tools, knowledge, motivation and peer pressure which knowingly or unwittingly promote/incite racist violence.

The bulk of work and intervention across the UK dealing with racist violence is not concerned with prevention. As [Isal \(2006\)](#) confirms, policy and practice are primarily concerned with 'punitive and repressive' action. Clearly, such enforcement action is vital, but the dangers of anti-racist activity being drawn into the crime reduction agenda is that 'diversionary' work, keeping young people away from involvement in criminal activity, may lose sight of the broader objectives of a 'Racism Reduction' agenda among wider peer or community networks. As Isal suggests, this means replacing diversionary goals with wider aspirational goals, for example in youth work, such as challenging attitudes and misinformation which underlie racial hostility. The key lesson drawn from the review of the Bede Anti-Racist Detached Youth Work project ([Isal, 2006](#), p. 18) is placing anti-racism as a core project objective. This work involved gaining the trust of young people and engaging with their racist attitudes in the context of various activities in an area of south London that had seen a number of racist murders and increasing racist violence. The Home Office [Racist Incidents Crime Reduction Toolkit \(2006\)](#) addresses the need for holistic approaches, which should include three components: (1) social prevention (addressing offender behaviour and victim support); (2) situational prevention (addressing the management and design of environments); and (3) the rule of law enforcement. These do not address the wider set of causes and contexts of racist violence and illustrate the limitations of a 'crime'-centred rather than a 'racism'-centred approach. Generating institutional and wider community commitment to tackling racist violence is as essential a component of strategy here as dealing with offenders, given that increasing levels of enforcement have failed to bring violent racism under control ([Bowling and Phillips, 2002](#)).

Resources 4

Commission on Integration and Cohesion
www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk

The final report from the Commission addresses the way in which housing policy can contribute to integration and cohesion, as well as identifying key themes for action in this field in relation to shared futures, rights and responsibilities, mutual respect and civility, and lastly, visible social justice.

Resources 5

Housing and Neighbourhoods Research Programme, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

www.jrf.org.uk/research-and-policy/housing-and-neighbourhoods/

This research programme has produced a mass of evidence on housing choice, and housing choice linked to the experiences of black and minority ethnic groups.

Coalition Europe

www.coalition europe.org

Coalition Europe is a platform of pan-European human rights NGOs in which a broad spectrum of human rights, anti-racism, anti-discrimination groups, and migrant and minority organisations, work together on one single human rights issue at a time. Coalition Europe believes that there is a need to build a cohesive NGO community throughout Europe that will develop common campaigns and amplify the unheard voices of those who are suffering discrimination, exclusion and racism.

4 Tackling community-wide racist hostility: more comprehensive strategies required

There is a wealth of available material, both in the UK and in other national contexts, which documents policy, practice and various forms of intervention to tackle racist violence. But much of this needs to be better known among housing practitioners. A recent meta-analysis of good practice on racist violence and housing highlighted a key set of types of intervention ([Law, 2007](#)). There is also evidence from assessment of EU approaches to tackling racist violence, where improvements in data collection, enhanced penalties, youth projects and restorative justice initiatives, anti-racist campaigns and community-building initiatives were highlighted in a review of recent developments ([Goodey, 2005](#)). The EU/NGO campaign on hate crime, Coalition Europe, stressed the need for information and awareness raising, political and legal action and efforts to support and empower victims of racist violence. In the UK, there is both extensive development of policy, practice and various forms of intervention to tackle racist violence as well as extensive evidence of highly durable and pervasive acts of racist violence. A 'Racism Reduction' agenda involves developing community-based campaigning and preventative initiatives; improving reporting, intelligence gathering and surveillance; pursuing crime and conflict initiatives; improving agency practice, cross-sector learning/working, and work with perpetrators and offenders; and developing performance standards.

The CRE [Defeating Organised Racial Hatred information pack \(2006\)](#) and the follow-up report compiling local authority approaches ([CRE, 2007b](#)) provide valuable advice on a range of issues. Initiatives highlighted include building anti-racist alliances through conferences and meetings; building cross-party opposition to political racism through statements, election compacts, community newspapers, leafleting, council free papers and media communications; working in partnership to combat far right messages; and researching and publishing action guidance. Thus, strong leadership from local authorities and presenting cross-party unity can be an effective strategy in challenging and marginalising the far right and associated racist violence. Equally, utilising effective communication strategies is key to reducing racist violence. Sustaining messages and activism throughout the year and not just at times of crisis has also been found to be essential in this arena. The later report ([CRE, 2007b](#)) indicates that too little serious attention is being paid to these issues by many local authorities.

Using youth activities and art as a tool to bring different groups together, breaks down prejudice, and challenging racist attitudes among potential

perpetrators has been identified as an important part of local action. Positive Activities for Young People (Isal, 2006, p. 24), the work of the London Bubble Theatre (Isal, 2006, p. 20) and the Street Life project in Tower Hamlets (Lemos, 2005), which formed part of the voluntary and informal 'Summer University' education service, are flagged up as good practice examples in this area. The impact of the Hideaway Youth project in building cross-community connections in Manchester Moss Side is highlighted in recent research findings on social cohesion in diverse communities (Hudson *et al.*, 2007). Eastside Arts and the Refugee Council have also collaborated in this field using poetry and performance with 7-14 year olds to promote understanding (Bhavnani *et al.*, 2005).

Community engagement and outreach work have been identified in many localities as effective in reducing tensions. The Southampton Community Outreach team have been engaged in work to reduce tension between local black and minority ethnic communities and asylum seekers. This has involved inter-communal dialogue/community mediation, preparing and informing host communities about newcomers, and building the capacity of individuals and groups to lead their own networks and organisations (Amas and Crosland, 2006). A further example from detached youth work in Wandsworth reports a decline in racist violence (Home Office, 2006).

Facilitating face-to-face individual interactions to promote understanding has worked successfully in some areas. Refugee Action believe that the best way to promote understanding is for people to meet a refugee and asylum seeker and hear their story, similar to initiatives in education involving Holocaust survivors. The work of the Refugee Awareness project in the North West, South West and West Midlands of England involves organising awareness-raising sessions, working with the local press, information provision, training volunteers and developing materials (Amas and Crosland, 2006). Using community events to promote belonging and understanding has also been identified as useful here. The Living Under One Sun project engaged with Kosovan, Albanian, Turkish, West African and other groups to build interactions between children and families from different cultural backgrounds through cooking and sharing food and related activities (Hudson *et al.*, 2007). Neighbourhood initiatives in churches, sports clubs, workplaces and schools to promote belonging for new Eastern European migrants has also been recommended (Markova and Black, 2007).

Promoting community leadership, neighbouring and activities to reduce misinformation has also been identified as having beneficial local effects in lowering inter-community hostility (DCLG, 2007). The Home Office Guide Neighbourhoods programme has produced many good practice examples, including the work of the Leicester North West Community Forum (Amas and

Resources 6

IRNHEP, the International Research Network on Housing, Ethnicity and Policy

www.leeds.ac.uk/sociology/irnhep/index.htm

This international network led by Malcolm Harrison brings together over thirty leading scholars in this field. It can provide contacts for advice and discussion on housing, racism and ethnicity issues and also some useful publications.

Resources 7

Research on Ethnic Groups and Racial and Cultural Demography

www.ccsr.ac.uk/popla/researchthemes.shtml#ethics

The Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research includes a leading research group working on racial segregation and related aspects of population dynamics led by Ludi Simpson, and a number of relevant papers are available. The papers from the 2007 conference on *Segregation and Integration – What's going on?* are also available online.

Refugee Action

www.refugee-action.org.uk

Information Centre About Asylum and Refugees

www.icar.org.uk

These organisations provide pocket guides and a range of related resources that can assist agency staff to engage with popular myths and misinformation.

[Crosland, 2006](#)). This involved leadership training for sixty local residents as good neighbours, including twenty-five refugees and asylum seekers; street level 'listening times'; integration workshops; awareness-raising sessions; 'patch walks' bringing agencies and residents together in the area; mixed activity trips; community capacity building; and positive media coverage. The Walsall Wardens Scheme became involved in related work where local people were concerned about refugees and asylum seekers 'jumping' the housing queue. This involved meeting new families, introducing newcomers to local families and community groups, and improving communication with residents ([Amas and Crosland, 2006](#)). These initiatives can also play an important wider role in reversing social and physical decline of poor estates ([Home Office, 2006](#)) and provide information to challenge myths about asylum seekers and refugees.

Improving mapping of racist incidents and data analysis is often also needed. Data is often collected and little effective use is made of this. Many local partnerships and agencies are now collating data to pursue this objective, but a range of problems persist in merging data and evaluating existing evidence ([Home Office, 2006](#)). The importance of identifying patterns and clustering in racist violence and the link with perceptions of street or neighbourhood territory and belonging has been highlighted by [Webster \(1993\)](#) and [Hesse et al. \(1992\)](#). Better evidence can improve the targeting of racist incidence hotspots through increased surveillance, patrols, special operations and other initiatives which have been taken to reduce racist violence in specific localised areas ([Home Office, 2006](#)). In addition to identifying patterns of incidents, wider patterns of racist hostility also need to be identified for preventative work; for example, through qualitative research. Such evidence can also inform risk-assessment programmes. The London Borough of Merton has introduced racist violence risk assessment in housing lettings with specific attention given to the history of racist victimisation relating to both individuals and properties, and increased tenant support is given where risks are identified. Also providing victim and witness information packs can help to empower victims. Leeds Racial Harassment Project is cited by the [Home Office \(2006\)](#) as an example of good practice in this area, providing victims and others with a range of useful advice, guidance and information.

Conclusion

In the UK, despite declining rates of overcrowding and dissatisfaction among black and minority ethnic households over the last ten years, these households continue to experience higher levels of dissatisfaction, overcrowding and poverty than white households (DCLG, 2007). Racial discrimination, racist hostility and violence and increasing divisions of income and wealth combine to produce a powerful set of external constraints on the housing choices of black and minority ethnic households. It is vital to continue to pursue anti-discrimination, anti-racism and anti-poverty work in order to ease these constraints. In addition, creative and innovative work to develop new approaches to delivering increased choice through initiatives such as choice-based lettings, have been shown to be successful in extending housing choices and reducing racial segregation in the housing market, although local impact is uneven. The explicit focus on tackling racist hostility and racist violence needs to be renewed in many agencies. Despite growing understanding and evidence, it is clear that much policy and practice has failed to shift highly durable forms of racism across local communities and it is necessary to confront this racial crisis both in the UK and across the EU.

Resources 8

Housing and Black and Minority Ethnic Communities: Review of the evidence base

www.renewal.net/Documents/RNET/Research/Housingblackminority.pdf

The online guide to what works in neighbourhood renewal contains a number of very useful reports and links, and in particular the comprehensive review of the evidence base on housing and minority ethnic communities produced for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister by Malcolm Harrison and Deborah Phillips (2003).

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