



Ethnic Minorities  
& Youth Support  
Team Wales

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## EYST Wales Response to 'Our Future Wales' Consultation

***Given the very high price paid in every sense by BAME people in Wales for keeping everyone in Wales safe during the Covid-19 pandemic, we now need a new social contract, and it is a moral imperative that Welsh Government prioritises the wellbeing of BAME people as we enter the recovery period. The pandemic has also coincided with the Black Lives Matters movement, further underlining the urgency of placing social justice and race equality at the heart of efforts and policy directives to 'build back better' after Covid-19. We need a green, diverse and just economy at the heart of a fairer Welsh society, and this vision must be backed up by practical action and resources. We need the rhetoric to match the reality, and we should no longer tolerate the 'implementation gap' as work in progress, rather we should view it as a serious failure of policy and government to improve people's lives.***

EYST Wales is an award-winning Wales wide charity established since 2005 which aims to support ethnic minority young people, families and individuals living in Wales and help them to contribute, participate and feel a valued part of Wales. It does this through a range of services targeted variously at ethnic minority young people, ethnic minority families, refugees and asylum seekers and also the wider public. We are a team of 45 staff with 5 core service areas: 1) BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) Young People; 2) BAME Families; 3) Refugees and Asylum Seekers; 4) BAME Community groups and; 5) Tackling Racism in the Wider community.

EYST Wales is funded by Welsh Government to deliver the All Wales BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) Engagement Programme, aimed at gathering the views and experiences of BAME people living in Wales and improve the evidence base from which to positively influence public policies and services to better reflect the needs of BAME communities.

Since the outset of the Covid-19 Pandemic, EYST Wales has hosted weekly online topical forums exploring the impact of COVID 19 on BAME people and communities in Wales. During this period we have hosted 18 forums attended by over 749 participants in total, covering the following key topics: Impact of Covid-19 on BAME Communities; Impact on Muslim communities, Impact on BAME people's Employment & Businesses; Impact on children and

young people; Impact on BAME Pupils; Impact on International Students; Food Security, Mental Health, Return to Schools and; Community Cohesion in the Covid Era. We also held two forums for children aged 11-16 and one for young people aged 16-25. This response draws on the feedback and learning from these forums as well as additional intelligence from EYST's wider work.

The Coronavirus pandemic has exposed and exacerbated pre-existing and long-standing inequalities in Wales. BAME people, who were already poorer than their white counterparts and with worse health, have lost their jobs and income at higher rates, and have also experienced worse health outcomes with higher mortality rates from the virus. Perversely, BAME people have also been at the core of efforts to keep essential services running, being over-represented in frontline occupations such as nurses, dentists, doctors, care workers and in transport and food production. BAME Children and young people have also suffered disproportionately from the lockdown, particularly the closure of schools, due partly to high levels of digital exclusion, stemming from prior financial disadvantage. BAME communities in general have all suffered from worsening mental health due to the grim prognosis for BAME people's health and economic prospects.

Given the very high price paid in every sense by BAME people in Wales for keeping everyone in Wales safe during the Covid-19 pandemic, we now need a new social contract, and it is a moral imperative that Welsh Government prioritises the wellbeing of BAME people as we enter the recovery period. The pandemic has also coincided with the Black Lives Matters movement, further underlining the urgency of placing social justice and race equality at the heart of efforts and policy directives to 'build back better' after Covid-19. We need a green, diverse and just economy at the heart of a fairer Welsh society, and this vision must be backed up by practical action and resources. We need the rhetoric to match the reality, and we should no longer tolerate the 'implementation gap' as work in progress, rather we should view it as a serious failure of policy and government to improve people's lives.

Our specific recommendations to achieve this are as follows:

## **1. BAME workers and their economic contribution needs to be better valued and remunerated**

### *Pay*

There is a live socio-political debate about work being properly recognised and rewarded in a range of historically low-paying and low-valued sectors which have high levels of BAME and migrant workers. These sectors include health and social care, cleaning, transport, distribution, food processing and agriculture to name a few. Now that we clap for these workers, it is time to make sure they are paid according to the value that society now recognises. Welsh Government should use its full procurement and commissioning power to abolish zero-hours and other precarious contracts and oblige any employer benefiting from

Welsh government funding to pay the real living wage. Employers should also be required to publish their ethnicity pay gap and to publish targets towards achieving an ethnically representative workforce, at all levels of employment.

### *Protection*

BAME workers need to be properly protected from the apparent increased risk they face from worse Coronavirus outcomes. The All Wales Workforce Risk Assessment Tool needs to be supplemented with clear and accessible guidance for employees and employers on employment rights in the case of higher risk being identified. BAME workers as a group need better protection and legal recourse in the case of employer discrimination should they be seen as less employable due to this increased risk, or should their own views of appropriate adjustments differ from their employers'. Welsh Government should work closely with BAME groups, Trade Unions and EHRC to monitor this.

### *Job Creation*

There are big concerns that BAME people will be disproportionately affected by unemployment both during the pandemic and in the recovery period. Evidence, including that from the aftermath of the 2008 recession, shows that ethnic minority people experience higher unemployment rates during recessions are more likely to go jobless for a longer period. Efforts to rebuild the economy post-COVID 19 need to account for and take steps to remedy this inequality as a moral and financial imperative. UK and Welsh Governments should work together to devise a stimulus package that will result in job creation targeted specifically at those most affected by Covid-19 unemployment, with particular focus on marginalised groups such as BAME, young and disabled workers and those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

## **2. BAME Children and Young People need to be supported to recover from the losses of the Pandemic, to level the playing field, and achieve their full potential**

### *Mental health impact*

BAME children make up 11.8% of school age pupils in Wales, and we have heard significant evidence that their experience of lockdown has been severe. BAME children already have twice the poverty levels of their white counterparts, are more likely to live in overcrowded housing, and have less outside space to play in. We heard that their mental health had been affected with high levels of anxiety about the virus itself and depression about their future prospects. Targeted Mental health interventions need to be developed for BAME young people and increased cultural competency amongst existing mental health providers.

### *Digital Exclusion & Lost learning*

The vast majority of BAME children we spoke to had not felt able to continue with their learning while schools were closed. Because of higher poverty levels, BAME children have been affected disproportionately by digital exclusion, not having the technology or data to

undertake schoolwork remotely. Despite the Welsh Government's financial commitment to address this, this has not filtered through to all young people, and BAME Families in particular, have struggled to access this support. We recommend that in *Our Future Wales*, access to technology at home is considered a fundamental pupil right, with each child to be given a laptop as they enter secondary school; and broadband in every home to be considered an essential utility.

#### *Support for BAME Parents & Children with English as a second language*

Additionally, due to language barriers, BAME parents have been less able to assist their children with schoolwork. Therefore, pre-existing attainment gaps are set to widen. We also need schools and Welsh Government to grasp the new reality that more than one in ten pupils in Wales has parents with English as a second language therefore targeted interventions for both parents and children will be needed in order to level the educational playing field.

#### *Provide positive opportunities for young people*

There was a sense from young people we spoke to that the unprecedented amount of time available to young people was wasted during the Covid-19 lockdown. Young people expected and wanted more options to be available for them to fill time in a positive and constructive way, including digital and remote opportunities. Building back better will require re-investing in previously decimated youth and community services and co-producing with them a range of such opportunities, from volunteering, to environmental, intergenerational or international projects. This is crucial to rebuilding young people's sense of hope, citizenship and stake in society.

#### *Jobs, apprenticeships and business support for BAME young people*

Young people stressed the need to make quality employment opportunities available to those in disadvantaged and stigmatised areas, particularly in neighbourhoods where young people have experienced long-term exclusion. A fair and just recovery will require creation of living wage jobs with progression opportunities and high-quality apprenticeships with clear targets for including BAME young people. Also, entrepreneurial education and increased support for young people to start and grow businesses, particularly intensive support in initial seed and start-up phases.

### **3. Take swift and decisive steps to address inequities in health and social care**

Sustainable and fair economic recovery is impossible without shared good health, and the devastating disparity in Covid 19 health outcomes has shone a spotlight on long known truths about ethnicity and class-related inequities in health. Now is the time to tackle these inequities with swift, deliberate action. Emerging from our engagement forums, we propose the following solutions:

- Systems to ensure rigorous collection of data relating to health and healthcare outcomes vis a vis race and ethnicity. Healthcare workers will need to be trained in collecting such data accurately and sensitively.
- Investigate the state of health inequity in Wales and work with communities to co-produce plans to close those gaps, especially in those fields where disparities have been well documented and persistent, such as maternal health, mental health and social care. Such an investigation will require statistical data on healthcare practices and health outcomes but must also include qualitative studies on healthcare experiences and healthcare pathways.
- Advocacy for BAME people, especially older people, to understand their rights and complaints processes and get support to access them when they experience discrimination or a low standard of care.
- Speedy, comprehensive and compassionate care assessments for people requesting them and respite for carers – especially older carers – who may have been providing sole care for a loved one during the shielding period.
- Work with GPs, communities and mental health care professionals to forge effective mental health care pathways for BAME people, particularly for Black Males (four times more likely to be involuntarily sectioned than White peers), Refugees and Asylum Seekers, and BAME Young people. Much stronger links are needed between BAME community organisation and healthcare professionals to overcome these gaps and ensure appropriate mental health care.
- Invest in innovative ways to provide a high standard of culturally appropriate care for BAME older people such as social enterprises run by young community members or quality volunteering programmes to create services drawing upon a wealth of languages and sociocultural knowledge. One forum attendee said, “In the spirit of the Future Generations Act, let’s support our young people to support our older people – but the message to Welsh Government is that initiatives like this will need support in beginning.”

#### **4. Work pro-actively with institutions to recognise and address the needs of vulnerable sections of the BAME population in Wales**

##### *International Students*

Many BAME international students currently residing in Wales are having extreme difficulties including food poverty and mental health crises due to coronavirus, as they depended on part-time jobs which are no longer available. Moreover, their home countries are also in lockdown, meaning that family cannot send them money. Most of these students are NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds) and do not have access to support in Wales. International students pay substantial fees to attend Welsh universities and are thus key contributors to the Welsh economy. In order to protect these individuals and not deter future applicants to Wales, Welsh Government must work with HEFCW and Universities in Wales to strengthen support structures for these students. Consideration should also be given to restructuring

fees and payment schedules to allow greater flexibility, tighter regulation of private landlords, and access to housing support for potential homelessness cases.

#### *No Recourse to Public Funds*

The relaxation of restrictions on people with no recourse to public funds during the lockdown has been welcomed and has avoided many instances of homelessness and food insecurity. Moreover, domestic violence organisations have reported an increase in numbers of people seeking refuge from domestic violence and/or trafficking as they finally have recourse for refuge. However, there are serious concerns about what happens to NRPF families post-Covid, and what will happen for example, to those women and children who have finally escaped domestic abuse and their children if they no longer qualify for refuge? We recommend that Welsh Government work with think tanks, universities, and voluntary sector organisations to undertake a cost-benefit analysis of the impact of relaxing restrictions on NRPF and present this case to UK Government.

#### *Asylum-seekers and Refugees*

The moratorium on NASS evictions and Move-on housing transfers has saved a great deal of suffering and should continue for the foreseeable future – certainly during the pandemic and recovery period. Welsh Government should work with Home Office to explore providing broadband to asylum housing as an essential utility, particularly as social distance measures are likely to be in place for some time. This would be a direct benefit to the mental and physical health of people living in asylum housing but would also offer a public health benefit as it would reduce the requirements for such tenants to leave their homes in order to gain Wi-Fi access. Moreover, the closure of schools brought the impact of the digital divide on learning into sharp relief, and all children including asylum-seeking pupils have a right to the tools they need to complete homework all year round.

#### *European Citizens*

The estimated 80,000 EU citizens living in Wales make a crucial contribution to the Welsh economy and it is essential that their rights and wellbeing are protected as we recover from the Covid-19 pandemic and as we exit the European Union on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of two key sectors which rely heavily on EU workers: Health and Social Care workers and Food production/ Agriculture. Ensuring Wales remains a safe and welcoming place for EU workers and their families to live and work is fundamental to the smooth running of these sectors which in turn keep Wales fed and cared for. Welsh Government needs to continue to fund targeted support and advice for EU Citizens to enable them to access their rights and entitlements, as well as ensuring that Community Cohesion programmes work to promote inclusion and counter xenophobia.

## **5. BAME People need to be more equitably represented in decision making so that we future-proof against such drastically inequitable outcomes of future pandemics and crises in Wales**

### *Representation in Public and Political Life*

Lack of representation in decision-making is at the heart of many of the issues laid out in this document. Despite growing diversity in the Welsh population, there is a notable lack of diversity in our political and public life. Addressing this is fundamental to creating a healthy strong and sustainable future for Wales. We recommend that the Welsh Government continue to support and expand upon mentoring programmes such as those delivered by EYST Wales and WEN Wales. Political parties should be encouraged to create race equality action plans to increase diversity both in their membership and leadership and set targets for representation of BAME people in selected candidates. We welcome the Reflecting Wales in Running Wales strategy to increase public appointments and urge Welsh Government to take swift action in implementing this policy, particularly as the public appointments unit will reconvene recruitment this September. BAME Young people in particular, need to be supported and encouraged into such positions through accessible and targeted mentoring schemes.

### *Representation in Employment*

Representation in employment also needs addressing and Welsh Government should mandate organisations in Wales to publish ethnicity pay gap data. Positive discrimination measures such as those recommended by the MacGregor-Smith review<sup>1</sup> should be utilised to their full effect. All Public bodies in Wales should follow the example of the Police force and set measurable targets to achieve ethnically representative workforces within a clear timeframe. Our Future Wales should be run by people who look like the people who live in Wales.

## **6. Make Our Future Wales an Anti-Racist Wales**

Despite initial figures which showed a decrease in reported hate crime, there has been an increase in online hate crime during lockdown and many people fear a rise in street-based hate crime as we phase out of lockdown, particularly in a dire economy, where ethnic minority people and migrants are often scapegoated. There is a need to proactively prevent and not only respond to and report racist incidents and hate crime, through a combination of measures including:

- Anti-racism education in schools, for pupils and for teachers
- A more diverse curriculum with Black History and Multicultural History embedded across curriculum areas
- Public awareness campaigns providing counternarratives to prejudicial ideas

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/race-in-the-workplace-the-mcgregor-smith-review>

- More positive representations of BAME people in media and in civic and cultural spaces
- Investment in civic space and opportunities for people of different backgrounds to come together and build relationships.

These actions need to be embedded within Wales' Recovery plan as well as within the forthcoming Welsh Government Race Equality Plan.

## **7. Build a Resilient Economy based on Shared Rights, Risk and Reward**

A resilient economy, one which can weather a storm or a shock, must provide a humane standard of living to all participants and work to reverse climate change. This pandemic has taught a lesson in value; the workers that used to be invisible and deemed low-skilled are now recognised as essential. To build a resilient economy, Welsh Government must use this moment as a possibility to reimagine how risk and reward could be more justly distributed amongst classes of people in society. This moment offers possibility to reframe and expand upon human rights, such as expanding worker (and nonworker) rights to standard of living, rights to basic utilities such as Wi-Fi, right to just remuneration of work, right to safety at work. Looking forward, UK and Welsh Governments should consider the adoption of a universal basic income as a social floor underpinning a resilient economy along with other measures such as progressive taxation and targeted job creation and micro/small business support, all underpinned by practices aimed to reverse climate change. Welsh Government should support innovative, community focussed and cooperative ways of organising business and services: worker owned cooperatives, businesses that share profits with employees, commissioning practices which ensure funds are kept in local communities and open opportunities to micro and small businesses. Some of these forms of working may need support in the beginning, but investment will benefit future generations. Long term plans going forward will need concrete, measurable and SMART actions that can be implemented gradually. Not just something that is spur of the moment, like a photo opportunity or a one-off statement or a superficial show of commitment.

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