# Designing out homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the West Midlands Combined Authority Area

A report of the Homelessness and Black and Minoritised Ethnic Communities in the UK: knowledge and capacity building programme

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**June 2025**

HERIOT WATT UNIVERSITY

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# About the programme

You can find out more about the Homelessness and Black and Minoritised Ethnic Communities in the UK: knowledge and capacity building programme at Homelessness and Black and Minoritised Ethnic Communities in the UK – Knowledge and Capacity Building Programme – I-SPHERE (hw.ac.uk)

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## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to extend our thanks to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and members of the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce and West Midlands Race Equalities Taskforce. Particular thanks to Neelam Sunder and Jean Templeton for all their efforts in helping to develop this research and enable it to happen. We are also grateful to Steve Philpott for his thoughtful comments on an earlier draft of this report.

We are indebted to members of our Programme Advisory Group: Francesca Albanese (Crisis), Shabna Begum (The Runnymede Trust), Harinder Birring (Shelter), Rachel Casey (JRF) Nigel Denoronha (Manchester University), Dorian Leatham (Independent member), Maurice McLeod (Independent member), Louise Montgomery and Brian Robson (Oak Foundation), for their invaluable support and guidance on this deep dive research and all aspects of our programme of work.

Above all, we would like to offer heartfelt thanks to representatives from the housing, homelessness, education, employment, social security, health, social services, criminal justice, and voluntary and community sectors in the West Midlands who took time out of their pressured schedules to help us with this work.

We hope the report will be valuable to all involved and help to improve the situation for the many people from minoritised communities at risk of homelessness in the West Midlands and beyond.

## Disclaimer

# Executive Summary

This knowledge and capacity building programme undertaken by the Institute of Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research (I-SPHERE) at Heriot-Watt University aims to support a fundamental step change in the UK evidence base on homelessness amongst people from minoritised ethnic communities.

This 'deep dive' into homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) was conducted at the invitation of the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce and the West Midlands Race Equalities Taskforce. It sought to explore the scale, pattern, and drivers of homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the WMCA area, and also to examine the contribution of a range of public authorities and voluntary organisations to both ameliorating and exacerbating these homelessness risks. We undertook statistical analysis of official homelessness data and national survey-based datasets, interviewed senior stakeholders from a range of sectors, and conducted focus group discussions with relevant frontline professionals.

We posed four core research questions and here are our answers based on the evidence gathered.

**Do minoritised communities in the WMCA face disproportionate levels of homelessness, and does this vary between ethnic groups and forms of homelessness?**

Yes. People from minoritised communities experience disproportionate levels of most forms of homelessness in the WMCA area, as they do in England as a whole. These excess risks are generally higher for Black and Mixed ethnicity groups. For example, Black-led households in the WMCA area were more than twice as likely to experience statutory homelessness than White British-led households (with a relative risk ratio of 2.11), while Mixed Ethnicity households also had substantially higher risks than White households (risk ratio of 1.42).

There are sharp distinctions within the broad Asian ethnic group, with those who identify as Indian or Chinese generally experiencing homelessness rates below those of White households, while Pakistani/Bangladeshi groups are at much greater risk of homelessness. This is particularly true of more hidden forms of homelessness such as sofa surfing, which Pakistani/Bangladeshi groups report experiencing at over five times the rate of White British households in the WMCA area. Asian households as a whole face strikingly high rates of overcrowding in the WMCA area, much above those in England as a whole.

WMCA also appears to have particularly high homelessness rates for 'Other ethnicities', which includes Middle Eastern and North African groups who feature prominently amongst recent flows of people through the asylum system. These Other ethnic groups were over three times as likely to report experiencing any form of homelessness in the WMCA area than White British households.

Interestingly, though, while the homelessness risk for Black households is very adverse in the West Midlands, it is less bad than is predicted by statistical modelling based on quantitative relationships observed across the whole country. This might be indicative of some aspects of policy response in the West Midlands which are mitigating what would otherwise be an even more adverse situation.

**What are the main drivers of disproportionate levels of homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the WMCA?**

Long-term structural disadvantage, including the enduring effects of historic racism, impact on the present day risks of homelessness for minoritised communities in the West Midlands. Thus, elevated levels of renting (rather than owning) housing amongst Black and Mixed ethnicity groups contributes substantially to their increased homelessness risks, as does their disproportionate exposure to poverty. However, even once these and other factors such as demographics are taken into account, ethnicity-related variables (including ethnic and racial background, having a migration background, and reporting experience of discrimination) still substantially increase the chances of Black households in particular experiencing homelessness.

Consistent with these statistical findings, our qualitative research indicates that overt racism by private landlords is a key barrier to accessing housing across minoritised communities. New migrant communities were reported to be at particular risk of exploitative behaviour by unscrupulous private

landlords. Racism, both conscious and unconscious, was also reported in some health, criminal justice, housing, and voluntary sector services. This was often said to take the form of damaging assumptions about minoritised people, such as that Black women were less 'vulnerable' or 'trustworthy' than White women, or that Black men were especially 'dangerous', making it less likely that there would be an appropriate institutional response to the heightened homelessness risks faced by these groups.

Another key driver of disproportionate minoritised homelessness in the WMCA area is the operation of the asylum system. The number of households entering the statutory homelessness system after a successful asylum claim rose by 170% in the three years to 2023, equating to 2,500 extra households per annum by 2023/24. In 2023, WMCA had a rate of asylum-related statutory homelessness applications of 0.36% of resident household population, significantly above other Metropolitan Areas (0.28%) and far above non-metropolitan England (0.12%), albeit still below the Greater London rate (0.48%). Statutory homeless applicants with experience of the asylum system are most likely to ethnically identify as Black African, Arab or Other.

**What is the current contribution, and potential contribution, of housing, homelessness and wider public and voluntary sector services to preventing and addressing disproportionate homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the WMCA region?**

Both senior stakeholders and frontline workers characterised the statutory homelessness system in the WMCA area as struggling to cope, with a range of statistical indicators also suggesting a system under greater pressure than in other parts of England. An acute shortage of affordable housing was the main structural driver of these pressures, compounded by sharply growing demands associated with the asylum system.

Conditions in temporary accommodation in the WMCA were reported to be very poor, with basic needs like onsite cooking and laundry facilities sometimes unmet. Minoritised families were worst affected as they spent longer in temporary accommodation than White families, and were less likely to obtain a social or private tenancy at the end of the statutory homelessness process. Key informants attributed these ethnic disparities at least in part to the larger family sizes found in some minoritised communities, especially Black African communities, which made sourcing suitable settled housing particularly challenging. Key context for these findings is that families across all ethnic groups in the WMCA area stood a much lower chance of being rehoused through the statutory homelessness system than in England as a whole (32% v 51%), including even than in the generally most pressured region of London (where 46% are rehoused).

Single homeless men in the WMCA area were generally referred to the supported exempt accommodation sector, concentrated in Birmingham. Atrocious standards were said to prevail at the problematic end of this sector, with exploitative practices and criminal involvement rife. Single male refugees and Black men with complex support needs are amongst the groups said to be worst affected.

Inadequate partnership working across public services to prevent homelessness was a recurring theme in the qualitative interviews. For example, it was argued that a much more robust response to domestic abuse was required from the criminal justice system, especially as experienced by women from South Asian communities, for whom this is a key driver of homelessness. If assured of effective interventions by the police and courts to ensure their safety, it may be possible for some of these women to remain living in the family home rather than face all the disruption and trauma of homelessness. Key informants also flagged the potential for better mental health support to prevent anti-social behaviour-triggered evictions associated with undiagnosed or untreated trauma, especially amongst Black men.

A prominent issue cutting across a wide range of public services related to the need for robust ethnicity monitoring on responses to, and outcomes for, minoritised groups. It was argued that without statistical 'proof' of ethnic disparities, it was impossible to identify and 'call out' unequal treatment, which was often unwitting in nature. This could lead to 'ethnicity blind' approaches on the part of public services, leaving adverse outcomes and potentially discriminatory practices

unaddressed. While specialist grassroots services were sometimes viewed as the solution to poor 'diversity competence' on the part of mainstream services they were often very small, under-resourced and did not always have the technical skills to provide a high-quality service to the communities they work with.

More positively, and despite the very challenging financial context for local authorities and other partners in the WMCA area, we identified an array of examples of promising prevention practice and emerging ideas. In particular, we came across ambitious, strengths-based employment-focused initiatives intended to reduce homelessness amongst high-skilled but economically-deprived minoritised communities, and to leverage the local authority position as a major employer to improve access to good jobs for minority groups. There were also range of imaginative, data-driven upstream efforts to reduce homelessness risks amongst vulnerable groups, including targeting benefits and financial support on vulnerable communities.

**What lessons can be extracted for both policy and practice in the WMCA region and elsewhere in England to prevent homelessness amongst minoritised communities at the earliest opportunity?**

The recommendations below require action on the part of a range of actors, including central government, local authorities, combined authorities, other public bodies, and both mainstream and specialist voluntary sector bodies.

***Implement 'universal' structural changes required to reduce population-level risks of homelessness***. These include a substantial expansion in the supply of social and other affordable housing, a sustained increase the Local Housing Allowance maximum rate, and placing local authority finances on a more sustainable footing after the damage wrought by austerity. These overarching interventions are relevant to all groups at risk of homelessness but have particular resonance for minoritised communities given their heightened exposure to homelessness.

***Connect with the cross-government homelessness strategy.*** The UK Government should use the forthcoming cross-departmental homelessness strategy to embed understanding and action at national level on the disproportionate impact of homelessness on minoritised communities.

***Radically re-engineer the link between the asylum and statutory homelessness systems.*** The UK Government should consider devolving the provision of asylum accommodation to local authorities, with appropriate financial support, allowing claimant households with a positive decision to remain living in this as temporary accommodation until settled housing is found. It should follow the lead of Scottish Government and commit to and resource integration efforts from Day 1 of arrival and give serious consideration to the case for allowing asylum seekers to work if their application takes more than 6 months to resolve. Enabling asylum seekers to become more independent of state support should open up 'non-homeless' routes for them to secure housing for themselves and their families.

***Grip the supported exempt accommodation scandal.*** The robust mandatory approach to regulating this sector signaled in The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 and associated consultation exercise is very welcome. However, it is imperative that the Government provide clarity on how both the new licensing regime and support standards will be funded. Local authorities, both within and beyond the WMCA area, accustomed to referring vulnerable single people into Birmingham's supported exempt accommodation, must prepare for the likely contraction of this sector and plan for more appropriate accommodation options in their local area.

***Tackle racism amongst private landlords.*** The UK Government should consider whether discriminatory action by private landlords on grounds of race and ethnicity - already unlawful under the Equalities Act 2010 - can be more tightly regulated and challenged via, for example, the Private Rented Sector Landlord Ombudsman proposed in the current Renters' Rights Bill. Alongside this there should be expanded, and targeted, access to legal advice so that new migrants and other minoritised groups are better able to defend their housing rights.

***Prioritise upstream prevention with minoritised communities.*** Local authorities and other local partners should use evidence-based approaches to target support to minoritised communities known to be at especially high risk of homelessness. This could include, for example, using existing council data to target pro-active, upstream employment, benefits and financial support to communities at high risk of homelessness for poverty-related reasons. A key opportunity for culturally-attuned upstream preventative interventions related to measures designed to ease pressures on multi-generational households, such as the strategic deployment of social care support packages.

***Examine key local partnerships***. The WMCA should institute further, closer exploration of key areas of partnership working that are currently failing to prevent homelessness as effectively as they could amongst minoritised communities. A good starting point would be the relevant examples flagged in this study, particularly in the mental health and criminal justice spheres.

***Reject 'ethnicity-blind' approaches and promote robust ethnic monitoring*.** Mainstream public and voluntary sector services need to be intentional about being fully inclusive of all ethnic groups in their communities. This includes promoting greater cultural awareness and competency in some services, including via service commissioning requirements, and ensuring that community language needs are met. Robust ethnic monitoring across public and voluntary sector services is also required to identify and tackle racist assumptions (often unconscious) and discriminatory practices (often unintentional) that can lead to adverse outcomes for minoritised communities.

***Reconsider the relationship between specialist and mainstream voluntary sector services***. Heavy reliance on small-scale specialist organisations to meet the needs of the large and very diverse ethnic groups at risk of homelessness in the WMCA area is infeasible. Larger voluntary sector organisations should therefore work in partnership with grassroots organisations to maximise their reach within relevant minoritised communities and should take responsibility for overcoming any trust or credibility issues that limit their effectiveness in offering a community-wide service. For their part, specialist ethnic minority-facing organisations should work in partnership with larger voluntary organisations, and public bodies, to upskill their staff and volunteers to provide a quality service to their communities. Grassroots organisations also have a role to play in managing community expectations about the likelihood of accessing social housing via the statutory homelessness system, which in the WMCA area is very low.

Beyond these specific recommendations, and in common with other reports in this programme of work, this study speaks to the need for transformational societal change that tackles structural inequalities and racism in sectors that extend beyond the housing and homelessness systems, to encompass the labour market, social security, criminal justice, health and other systems. Moreover, this needs to be part of a broader effort to tackle the social fractures that drive the kind of racist attitudes and assumptions that make it less likely that there will be an appropriate response to the homelessness risks that minoritised communities face. Core to this is an urgent need to detoxify the prejudicial public and political discourse that has been so degraded by 'hostile' environment policies and rhetoric over the past decade or so.

# Chapter 1 - Introduction

## Background

The West Midlands is the most diverse UK region outside of London, with 1.1 million people living across the metropolitan area that do not identify as being from a White British background. According to the 2021 Census, these minoritised groups comprise 38% of the total population of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), including slightly over half of Birmingham's residents (52%). Across the WMCA area as a whole, 61.5% of the population identifies as White, 8.0% as Black, 22.9% as Asian, 4.2% as Mixed ethnicity, and 3.5% as 'Other' ethnicity.

A wide range of evidence demonstrates that racially and ethnically-minoritised communities are likely to face additional challenges in life in England, ranging from difficulties accessing good employment, housing and transport to having poorer experiences of health, education and the criminal justice system. For example, it is known that Black people are four times more likely than White people to be detained under the Mental Health Act (NHS, 2024). Black women are four times more likely to die during childbirth than White women, and Asian women are almost twice as likely (Maternal, Newborn and Infant Clinical Outcome Review Programme (MBRRACE) UK, 2021).

In regard to the West Midlands specifically, employment rates are particularly low for Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Asian Other and Other Ethnic Group communities (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2021). Black boys have the lowest GCSE attainment in the West Midlands and school exclusion is almost two times higher for Mixed-race pupils (The Equal Group, 2022). Within the housing realm, overcrowding is five times higher among minority ethnic households in the West Midlands, with particularly high rates among Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Arab households (The Equal Group, 2022). These examples serve to evidence pervasive issues of racial and ethnic inequality in the West Midlands and beyond.

In our *State of the Nation* report, Bramley *et al* (2022) highlighted that minoritised ethnic communities experience homelessness to a disproportionate degree across the UK, even when accounting for other contributory factors such as demographics, employment patterns, poverty levels, and housing tenure. There was, however, a notable variance between ethnic groups, with the very highest levels of homelessness risk in England experienced by people from Black and Mixed ethnic backgrounds. These groups appear particularly exposed to 'statutory homelessness', with Black people being three and a half times as likely to experience applying and/or being accepted as homeless by a local authority as White people. Asian communities on the other hand, especially those with Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage, are at highly disproportionate risk of hidden forms of homelessness, such as overcrowding or 'doubling up' with other households.

There are also substantial geographical variations across the UK regarding the ways in which race and ethnicity impact housing and homelessness, and the WMCA has identified that change is needed to deal with the specific disparities in its region. This work is being jointly spearheaded by the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce and the West Midlands Race Equalities Taskforce, which have invited the I-SPHERE team at Heriot-Watt University to conduct an independent deep dive into homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the WMCA area.

The Race Equalities Taskforce is an independent body established by the former Mayor of the West Midlands and the WMCA Board, bringing together a wide range of leaders from different sectors, areas of expertise and communities to find new ways to tackle race inequality, focusing on policy areas where the WMCA and its partners can have the greatest impact. The Race Equalities Taskforce's strategy, *Race Forward*, launched in Spring 2022, established a range of priorities in the housing realm, including developing culturally-sensitive resources to help people to navigate housing choices, identifying opportunities to increase the supply of homes that meet the needs of minoritised communities, and *"investigat[ing] race inequality in homelessness."* (Race Equalities Taskforce, 2022).

The strategic objective of the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce, established in 2017, is to 'design out' homelessness, in all its forms, across the WMCA and promote 'INclusion' of all citizens (WMCA Homelessness Taskforce, undated). The Homelessness Taskforce's aims to support the work of local authorities and other partner organisations that are involved in the prevention and relief of homelessness, and is based on the principle that a shared cross-sectoral approach is needed to tackling structural inequalities, focused on service systems that are inclusive of everyone, and driving prevention efforts as far upstream as possible. A particular priority has been better understanding of racial discrimination impacting on homelessness risks. The Homelessness Task Force has thus committed to:

> *"…joint work with the West Midlands Race Equalities Taskforce to generate a better understanding of the issues related to race equality, potential discrimination in service systems and the underlying reasons behind the disproportionate representation of some groups in homelessness services e.g. TA."* (West Midlands Combined Authority, 2023, p. 5).

Of particular concern to both Taskforces are statistics highlighted in the *Race Forward* strategy that 33% of applicants for temporary accommodation in the West Midlands are Black (as compared with 8% of the population as a whole), and people from minoritised communities are, as noted above, far more likely to live in overcrowded housing in the West Midlands as compared with their White British counterparts. Research undertaken on families with children living in temporary accommodation in the WMCA region found disproportionately high number of Black African lead tenants in Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Coventry (M.E.L Research, 2021). This indicates that interventions to address homelessness which do not directly address race inequality will be limited in their impact. Equally, it is clear that not all minoritised communities face the same overall risk of homelessness, or of particular types of homelessness, so a granular approach is required to drill down into the drivers and impacts for specific groups.

The WMCA area faces specific challenges around poor-quality, non-commissioned 'exempt' accommodation, so-called because the usual caps on Housing Benefit levels do not apply to these schemes on account of the 'support' that they allegedly provide. Birmingham is a national exempt accommodation 'hot spot', with more households in this problematic provision than anywhere else in the country (Wilson, 2022). An acute shortage of social housing in Birmingham, coupled with an industrial legacy that has resulted in large swathes of properties easily converted into houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), has set the scene for a concentration of shared exempt provision in the city (Inside Housing, 2021). To date, local authorities have been unable to prevent providers from opening new schemes, irrespective of whether they meet local need or expected quality standards, hamstrung by the low bar that pertains on what constitutes relevant 'care, support and supervision' for the purposes of accessing enhanced Housing Benefit (The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022). Voluntary charter schemes, such as that established in Birmingham[1], have been of limited effect given the ability of providers to grow their business regardless of whether they meet these non-mandatory quality standards. The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 is intended to tackle these issues by introducing national minimum standards for supported accommodation and requiring local authorities to create local supported accommodation licensing schemes. At the time of writing the Government was consulting on the implementation and drafting of regulations on the Act, including potentially linking the new licensing regime to entitlement to claim Housing Benefit[2].

We know from the *State of the Nation* national report that race and ethnicity play both a direct role (via discrimination) and an indirect role (mediated, for example, via wider structural inequalities in the experience of poverty and housing tenure) in driving up homelessness risks amongst minoritised communities (Bramley *et al*, 2022). This suggests that action to address this disproportionate exposure to homelessness must extend beyond the homelessness and housing sectors within the

[1] https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20006/housing/2333/supported_exempt_accommodation/2

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/supported-housing-regulation-consultation/supported-housing-regulation-consultation

WMCA, to take account of the role of education, employment, social security, health, social services, children's services, criminal justice and other relevant parts of the statutory and voluntary sectors.

## Research questions

The above discussion demonstrates the importance of considering race and ethnicity in understanding and designing out homelessness across the WMCA. The deep dive sought to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do minoritised communities in the WMCA face disproportionate levels of homelessness, and does this vary between ethnic groups and forms of homelessness?

2. What are the main drivers of disproportionate levels of homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the WMCA, and what is the role played by race and ethnicity (both directly and indirectly) in accounting for the patterns identified?

3. What is the current contribution, and potential contribution, of housing, homelessness and wider public and voluntary sector services to preventing and addressing disproportionate homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the WMCA region?

4. What lessons can be extracted for both policy and practice in the WMCA region and elsewhere in England to prevent homelessness amongst minoritised communities at the earliest opportunity? This includes identifying any examples of apparent good practice that might warrant rolling out and/or close examination.

## Methods

This deep dive comprised both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer the above research questions.

First, we conducted a high-level review of relevant research, strategies and policy statements pertaining to homelessness amongst minority ethnic communities in the WMCA area to frame our research deep dive.

Second, we undertook a statistical deep dive into the nature, pattern and drivers of homelessness amongst minoritised people in the WMCA, and their interactions with the statutory homelessness system. This involved reprising selected aspects of the *State of the Nation* report for the West Midlands specifically, including both descriptive statistics and elements of statistical modelling. Additionally, comparisons are made between the WMCA and London, other metropolitan areas, and the rest of England.

Third, we conducted cross-sectoral institutional analysis, based on one-to-one interviews with senior stakeholders across housing, homelessness, education, employment, social security, health, social services, criminal justice, and the voluntary and community sectors. We undertook 12 such key informant interviews in total, involving 15 stakeholders. These one-to-one interviews focused not only on the relevant stakeholder's view of the role played not only by 'their' sector, but also other relevant sectors, in either bolstering or undermining the protective factors that can help to prevent homelessness amongst minority ethnic groups in the West Midlands.

Fourth, we conducted two focus groups involving nine frontline workers drawn from the housing, homelessness, domestic abuse, health and voluntary sectors. These focus groups were designed to 'concretise' and/or challenge the ideas emerging from the senior stakeholder interviews about current gaps and potential strengthening of prevention. As we had hoped, these focus groups were

heterogeneous, i.e. they mixed frontline workers from different backgrounds to bring into sharp relief varying perspectives on ways in which systems work together (or fail to) in preventing homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the West Midlands. In these focus groups we deployed 'vignettes' (hypothetical but realistic cases) of people from specific minority ethnic groups at risk of homelessness to test how systems intervene at present, and how they could intervene more effectively in the future. These vignettes were developed drawing on insights derived from the key informant interviews. The hypothetical yet recognizable nature of the scenarios sketched out in the vignettes offers a 'safe space' to explore sensitive topics, such as homelessness and racism, that can be experienced by participants as less threatening than more 'direct' lines of questioning.

## Report structure

Chapter 2 presents the results of our statistical analysis on the nature, pattern and drivers of homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the WMCA, and on the role played by the homelessness system in mitigating or exacerbating wider structural and systemic inequalities.

Chapters 3 is based on the key informant interviews with senior stakeholders and reviews the relevance of the housing, homelessness and asylum systems in WMCA to addressing disproportionate experience of homelessness amongst minoritised communities.

Chapter 4 is also based on key informant interviews and takes as its focus the wider public and voluntary sector service role in preventing and alleviating homelessness amongst these minority ethnic groups.

Chapter 5 draws on the focus group discussions to present frontline workers' perspectives on how these various systems intervene at present to assist people from minoritised communities in situations of housing precarity, and how they could intervene more effectively in the future.

Chapter 6 highlights promising practice in the area of homelessness prevention.

Chapter 7 pulls together the learning from across all of the chapters, drawing out lessons that can be extracted for both policy and practice in the WMCA region and elsewhere in the UK to prevent homelessness amongst minoritised communities at the earliest opportunity.

# Chapter 2 The Statistical Picture

## Introduction

In this chapter we take a statistical deep dive into the nature, pattern and drivers of homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the WMCA. This involved reprising selected elements of the *State of the Nation* report (Bramley *et al*, 2022) for the West Midlands specifically. Additionally, comparisons are made between the WMCA and London, other metropolitan areas, and the rest of England. Given the interest in exploring the upstream causes of homelessness amongst minority ethnic groups in the WMCA area, efforts have been made to capture indirect as well as direct drivers of any disproportionate risks identified (i.e. modelling the 'causes of the causes'). Nonetheless, identifying downstream outcomes of the homelessness system from an ethnicity perspective remains important. As such, detailed analysis of statutory homelessness (H-CLIC) data is discussed, highlighting the role of the homelessness system in mitigating or exacerbating wider structural and systemic inequalities.

The chapter begins by sketching out an ethnicity profile of the West Midlands, including on matters likely to be relevant to homelessness risks, namely housing tenure, poverty, employment, and experience of the asylum system. It then moves on to describe the ethnic distribution of various forms of homelessness in the WMCA area, focussing on statutory homelessness and certain 'hidden' forms of homelessness, and picking up on the relationship with asylum and migration status too. We then go on to explore the interactions between different ethnic groups and the statutory homelessness system, including the reasons for their statutory homeless application, their reported support needs, and the response that they receive. Finally, we present statistical modelling which captures the factors that contribute to disproportionate experience of homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the West Midlands, and the indirect as well as direct impact of race and ethnicity-related factors to generating excess risks of homelessness.

It should be noted that, of necessity, the ethnic categories used in the following analysis vary, dependent on the categorisations used in the relevant dataset and also technical considerations such as sample size. Also, while the geographical focus for most of the analysis is the WMCA area, in some instances data limitations require that we cover the wider West Midlands region.

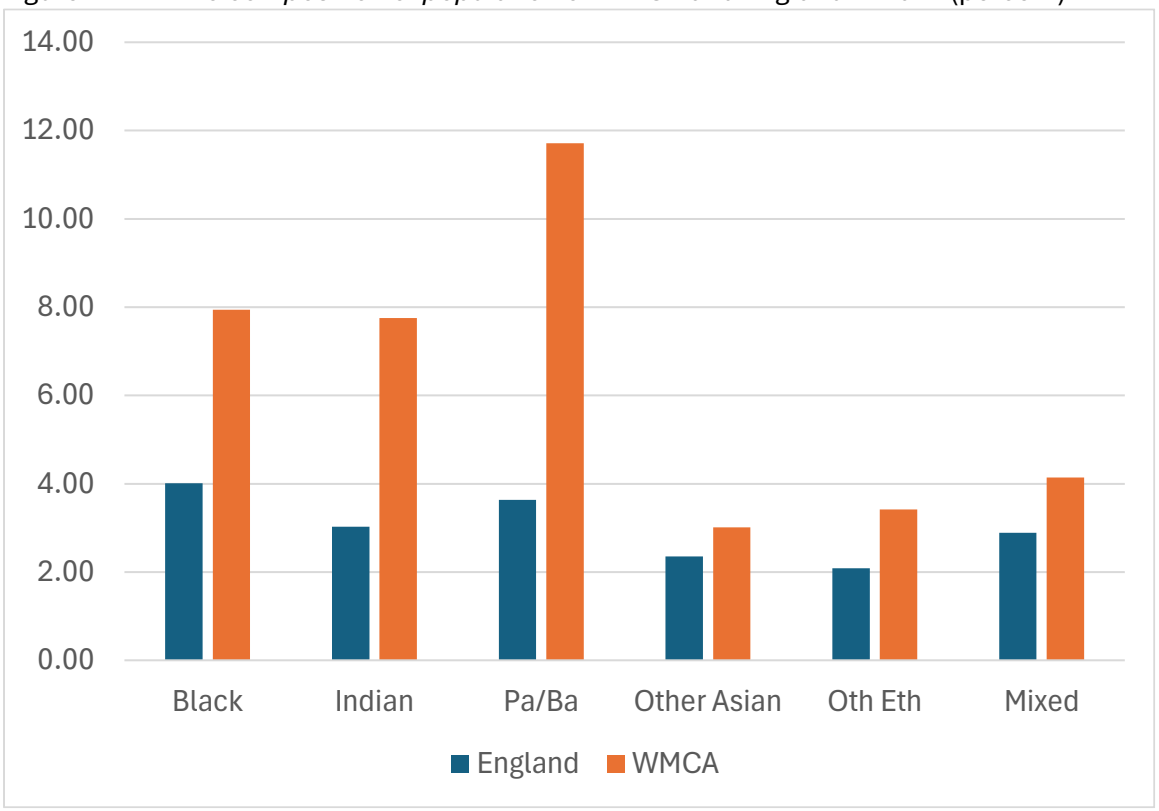
## Ethnicity profile of the West Midlands

This section uses data mainly from the Census 2021 to detail the overall ethnic makeup of the WMCA area, and trends in this, as well as examining key demographic and socio-economic factors by ethnicity. It also considers the impact of asylum seeker dispersal into the WMCA area given the associations with homelessness risks.

***Ethnic profile of population in 2021***

The 2021 Census provides a reasonably up-to-date ethnic profile of the population of the WMCA area[3]. Figure 2.1 shows the profile in terms of the six main minoritised groups, comparing percentage shares with England as a whole. It is clear that the WMCA has a much higher share of almost all of these groups than England as a whole. The 'majority' White population in this sub-region accounts for only 62% of the total, compared with 82% across England as a whole. In proportional and absolute terms, the biggest difference is in the Pakistani/Bangladeshi group, followed by the Indian and Black (African and/or Caribbean) groups. The Other Ethnicity group and the Mixed Ethnicity groups also show quite large differences from the national picture, with 'Other Asian' showing the smallest proportional difference. The 'Other Ethnicity' group includes Middle Eastern and North African groups who feature prominently in recent asylum migration flows (see further below).

*Figure 2.1: Ethnic composition of population of WMCA and England in 2021* (percent)




Source: Census 2021; Note: 'Pa/Ba' is short for Pakistani/Bangladeshi.

Table 2.1 shows that the WMCA has generally much higher shares of all the minoritised groups than the Other Metropolitan Areas, and generally lower or similar levels to those in London (the exception being Pakistani/Bangladeshi, where the WMCA has a markedly higher share than London). The Rest of England outside metropolitan areas has generally lower shares of minoritised populations, with nearly 90% categorised as White in 2021.

[3] This is the area comprised of seven Metropolitan District/City local authorities which is covered by the Mayoral authority.

*Table 2.1: Ethnic composition of population of WMCA, other Metropolitan and London regions and the Rest of England in 2021 (percent)*

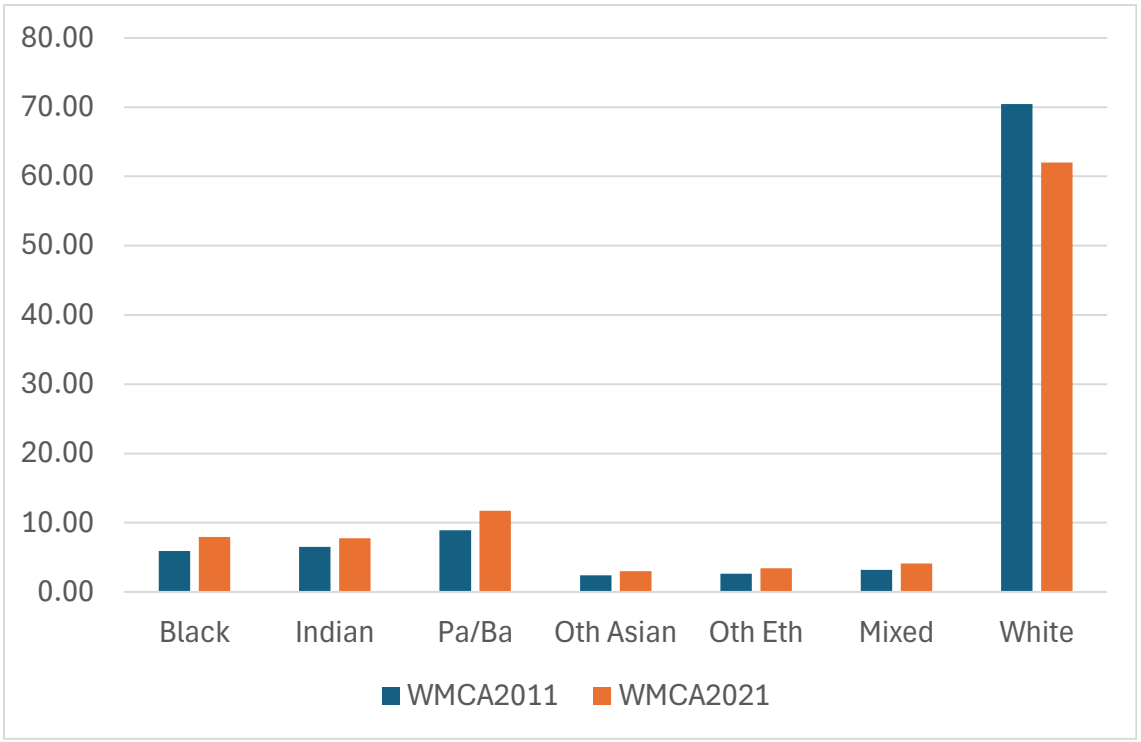
| | Black | Indian | Pa/Ba | Other Asian | OthEth | Mixed | White |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| WMCA | 7.94 | 7.75 | 11.72 | 3.01 | 3.42 | 4.14 | 62.02 |
| Other Met Areas | 2.97 | 1.77 | 6.32 | 1.84 | 1.83 | 2.47 | 82.80 |
| Gtr London | 13.53 | 7.04 | 6.62 | 6.18 | 6.34 | 5.82 | 54.48 |
| Rest of England | 1.81 | 2.08 | 1.65 | 1.56 | 1.09 | 2.24 | 89.57 |
| Total | 4.01 | 3.03 | 3.63 | 2.35 | 2.09 | 2.89 | 82.00 |

Source: Census 2021

***Changing ethnic population shares***

These proportions have been subject to quite dynamic change. Figure 2.2 shows that the share of the White population fell quite significantly between 2011 and 2021, by 8.4% points, while all the minoritised groups saw increases. The larger increases were for the Pakistani/Bangladeshi group (2.8% points), the Black group (2.0%) and the Indian group (1.25%).

*Figure 2.2: Ethnic population shares in the WMCA in 2011 and 2022* (percent)




Sources: Censuses 2011 and 2021.

In the first three cases (Black, Indian and Pakistani-Bangladeshi groups) the increases for the WMCA were larger than in Other Metropolitan Areas, London or the Rest of England; however, London saw bigger increases (in percentage point terms) in the Other Asian, Other Ethnic and Mixed groups.

***Local variation in ethnic populations within West Midlands***

A more detailed profile of recent ethnic populations shares and changes in the WMCA area is presented in Table 2.2 below. In broad terms, it can be seen that Birmingham stands out in 2021 for being (just) in the category of majority-minority, with all minoritised groups (in combination) slightly exceeding the White group in share of population. Three other authorities in WMCA have relatively high shares of minoritised groups, including Sandwell (43%), Wolverhampton (39%) and Coventry (34%). While Walsall occupies an intermediate position (29%), the two authorities with relatively lower minoritised shares are Solihull (18%) and Dudley (15%).

Whereas for Birmingham much the largest minoritised group is Pakistani-Bangladeshi (21%), followed at some distance by Black (11%), in Sandwell, Wolverhampton and Dudley the Indian group is substantially larger (9-16%), although Pakistani-Bangladeshi also have a large presence in Sandwell and Walsall. The Black population share is similar in Coventry, Sandwell, and Wolverhampton, at around one in ten.

*Table 2.2: Ethnic shares of population I 2021 and changes between 2011 and 2021 by local authority in WMCA, percentage and percentage points.*

% share 2021

| L A Name | Black | Indian | Pa-Ba | Oth Asian | Oth Ethnic | Mixed | White |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Birmingham | 11.0 | 5.8 | 21.3 | 4.0 | 4.5 | 4.8 | 48.6 |
| Coventry | 8.9 | 9.3 | 4.9 | 4.3 | 3.7 | 3.4 | 65.5 |
| Dudley | 2.5 | 2.4 | 4.8 | 1.1 | 1.4 | 2.8 | 84.9 |
| Sandwell | 8.7 | 13.0 | 9.7 | 3.0 | 4.0 | 4.3 | 57.2 |
| Solihull | 1.8 | 5.2 | 4.0 | 1.8 | 1.5 | 3.5 | 82.2 |
| Walsall | 4.6 | 8.0 | 9.2 | 1.5 | 2.1 | 3.3 | 71.4 |
| Wolverhampton | 9.3 | 15.9 | 2.7 | 2.5 | 3.6 | 5.3 | 60.6 |
| Total | 7.9 | 7.7 | 12.0 | 3.0 | 3.4 | 4.2 | 61.7 |
| Change 2011-21 (percentage point) | Black | Indian | Pa-Ba | Oth Asian | Oth Ethnic | Mixed | White |
| Birmingham | 2.0 | 0.5 | 4.7 | 0.4 | 0.8 | 0.9 | -9.3 |
| Coventry | 3.3 | 1.7 | 1.0 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 0.8 | -8.3 |
| Dudley | 1.0 | 0.8 | 1.4 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 0.9 | -5.0 |
| Sandwell | 2.8 | 3.0 | 3.1 | 0.7 | 1.5 | 1.6 | -12.7 |
| Solihull | 0.3 | 2.1 | 2.1 | 0.7 | 0.5 | 1.2 | -7.0 |
| Walsall | 2.2 | 1.6 | 2.0 | 0.3 | 0.5 | 0.8 | -7.4 |
| Wolverhampton | 2.4 | 2.5 | 0.8 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 0.7 | -7.4 |
| Total | 2.0 | 1.4 | 2.9 | 0.5 | 0.8 | 1.0 | -8.6 |

Source: author's analysis of 2011 and 2021 Census data.

The lower part of the table shows changes since 2011 in percentage points. The largest increases in minoritised shares were in Sandwell, Birmingham and Coventry. The largest specific increases were of Pakistani-Bangladeshi in Birmingham and Sandwell, of Black ethnicity in Coventry, Sandwell and Wolverhampton, of Indian ethnicity in Sandwell and Wolverhampton, and of both Other Ethnic and Mixed in Sandwell. 'Other Ethnic' tends to include a high share of Arab and other groups from Middle East and North Africa common within recent Asylum and other migrant flows.

The significance of recent migrant flows is also illustrated by Table 2.3, also based on Census data. While many minoritised ethnic group people were born in the UK, a substantial part of these populations comprise people who were born in other countries and have migrated to the UK at some time. Whereas in 2011 16% of all of the population in WMCA had been born overseas, by 2021 this proportion had risen to 21%. Only 2.3% of the WMCA population is comprised of very recent migrants (last two years before April 2021), with 8.6% having arrived within the preceding decade.

*Table 2.3: Populations born overseas in 2011 and 2021 and by time in the UK in 2021, percentage or percentage point change.*

| Percentages<br><br>L A Name | Born overseas<br><br>2011 | Born overseas<br><br>2021 | In UK 2-10 year<br><br>2021 | In UK < 2 year<br><br>2021 | Increase born overseas |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Birmingham | 22.2 | 26.7 | 7.6 | 2.8 | 4.5 |
| Coventry | 21.2 | 27.9 | 9.4 | 4.7 | 6.7 |
| Dudley | 5.3 | 7.9 | 2.2 | 0.7 | 2.6 |
| Sandwell | 15.9 | 23.6 | 7.5 | 2.2 | 7.7 |
| Solihull | 7.4 | 10.3 | 2.5 | 0.8 | 2.8 |
| Walsall | 9.9 | 14.8 | 4.5 | 1.2 | 4.9 |
| Wolverhampton | 16.4 | 22.9 | 7.4 | 2.6 | 6.5 |
| Total | 16.3 | 21.2 | 6.3 | 2.3 | 5.0 |

Source: Author's analysis of 2011 and 2021 Census data.

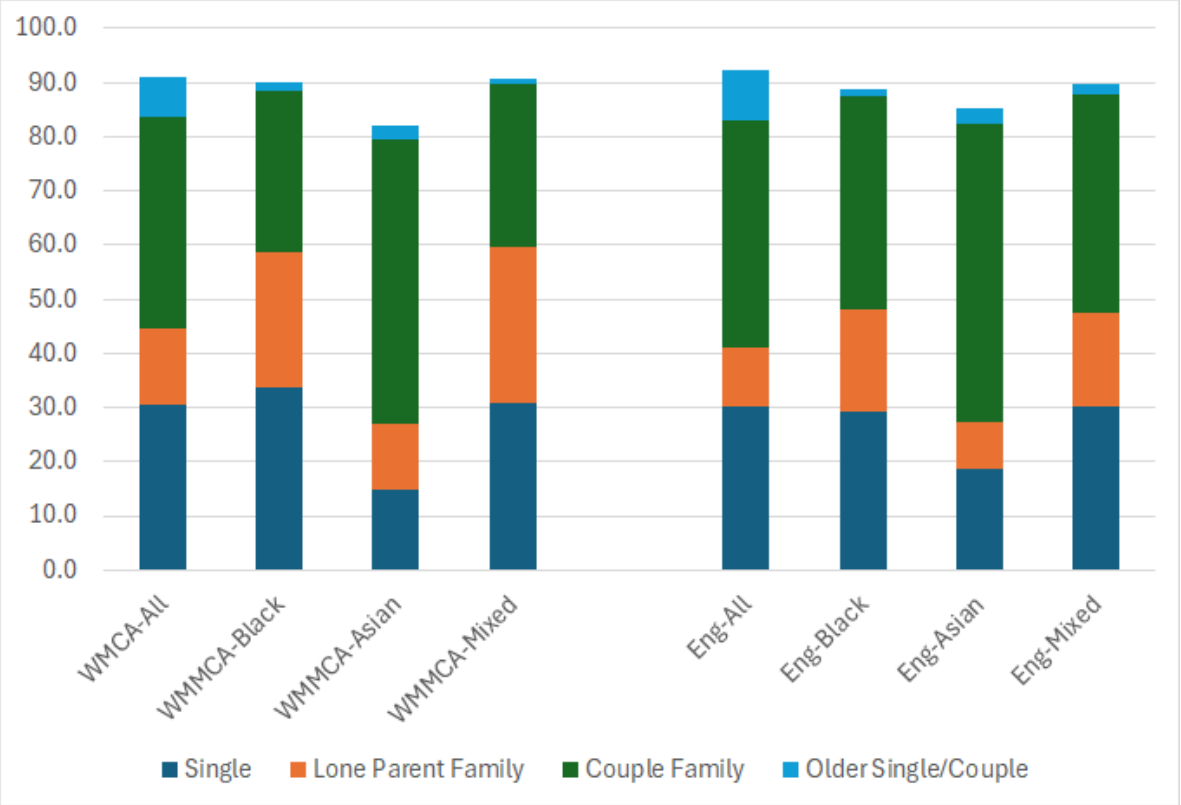
Birmingham has relatively high shares in each column in the table except the last one, indicating that the rate of increase (from a high base) is in line with that across the WMCA as a whole. Coventry stands out as having high shares in all columns of the Table, namely already having a high migrant share and this increasing more in the decade. Wolverhampton comes next in this regard, with relatively above average scores in every column. Sandwell also stands out for its overall migrant share in 2021, and having the highest increase in this share. Again, Dudley and Solihull show more moderate scores on all of these indicators.

It is likely that these numbers will have increased further since the 2021 census, as there has been a national spike in total migration numbers post-Covid and within that in asylum numbers, discussed elsewhere in this Chapter, with the WMCA area taking substantial shares in some of these flows of people.

***Household type profile by broad ethnicity in 2021***

There are significant differences in the make up of ethnic groups within the West Midlands with respect to household type, which parallel to some extent, but in a somewhat exaggerated fashion, differences observable across England as a whole. Figure 2.3 compares the shares of four key household types across three broad ethnic categories plus all ethnicities in the WMCA and in England as a whole.

*Figure 2.3: Household type composition by broad ethnic groups in WMCA Area and England, percent of households, 2021.*



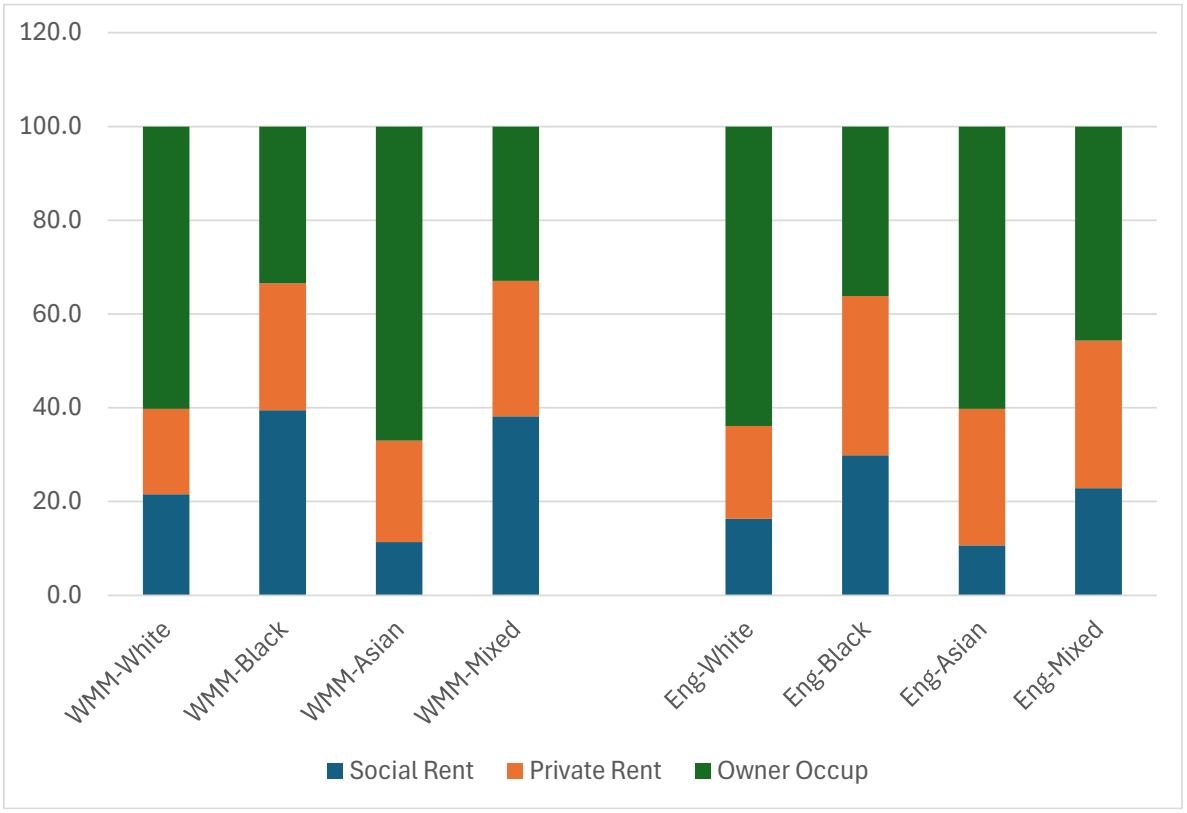

Source: Census 2021.
Note: the difference between the total height of these bars and 100% represents other household types, primarily multi-adult households with or without children.

Broadly speaking, single person and lone parent households tend to face substantially higher risks of homelessness, while couple families and, more especially, older retirement age households, face lower risks (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018). It can be seen from Figure 2.3 in the WMCA Black and Mixed ethnicity households are much more likely to be in these higher risk categories, whereas the Asian households have relatively low shares in these situations. It is also clear from the Figure that, although the same is true across England, the effect is accentuated in the West Midlands.

### *Tenure profile by broad ethnicity in 2021*

Existing housing tenure is also strongly related to homelessness risk, with owner occupation generally marked by low risk while private renting (with its issues of affordability and insecurity) is generally higher risk (see statistical modelling section below). Social renting offers better affordability and security than private renting, but tends to have a high share of low-income households and, given the operation of the statutory homelessness system, is often the tenure people reside in after an episode of statutory homelessness.

*Figure 2.4: Housing tenure shares by broad ethnicity in WMCA Area and England, percent of households, 2021.*



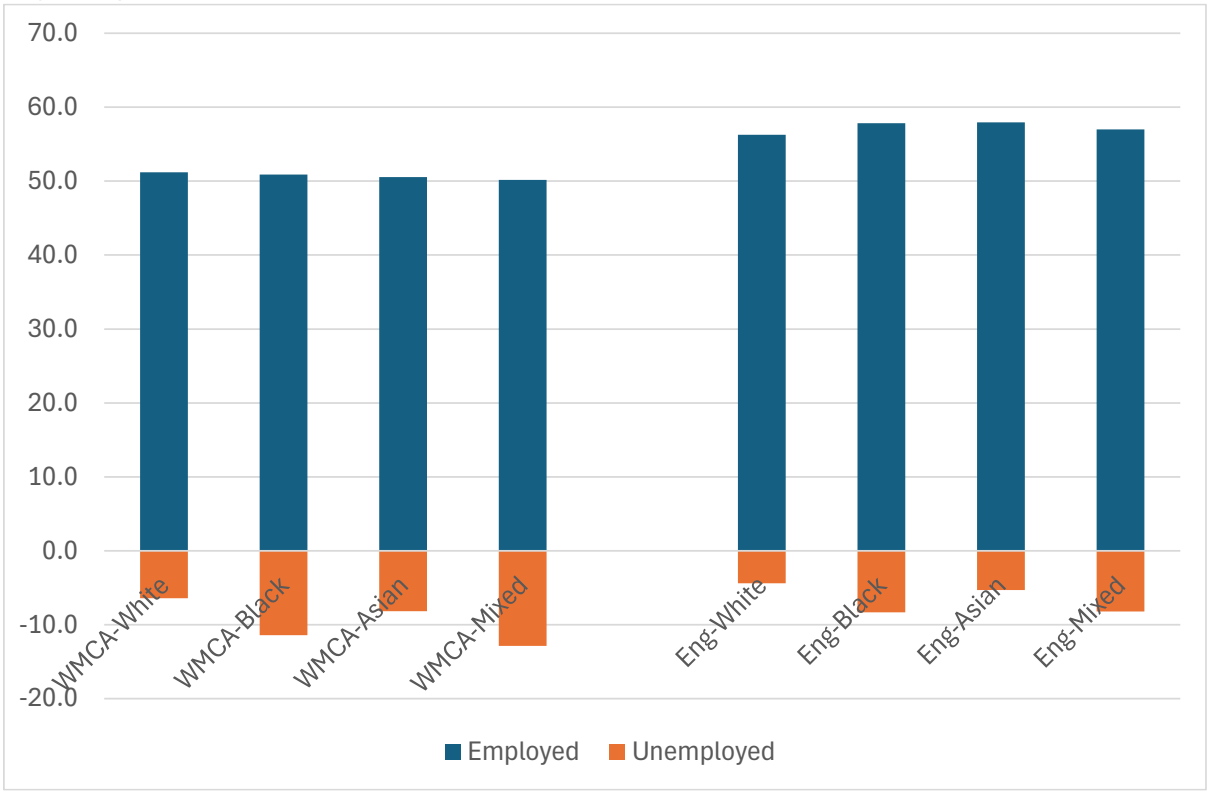

Source: Census 2021.

Figure 2.4 shows that in the WMCA area Black and Mixed ethnicity households are much more likely to be in both of the rental tenures. Again, the Asian group present a different picture, with a relatively high share of owner occupation and a low share of social renting, although the share of private renting is higher than for the White group. These patterns in the WMCA area are similar to those across England as a whole, although Black and Mixed ethnicity households have a somewhat higher share of social rented housing in WMCA than in England as a whole.

***Employment profile by broad ethnicity in 2021***

Figure 2.5, which highlights the percentage of adults employed and the percentage unemployed (the latter shown as a negative factor, below the horizontal axis) in both the WMCA area and England as a whole.

*Figure 2.5: Employment and unemployment rates by broad ethnicity comparing WMCA area with England, percent of adults, 2021.*




Source: Census 2021

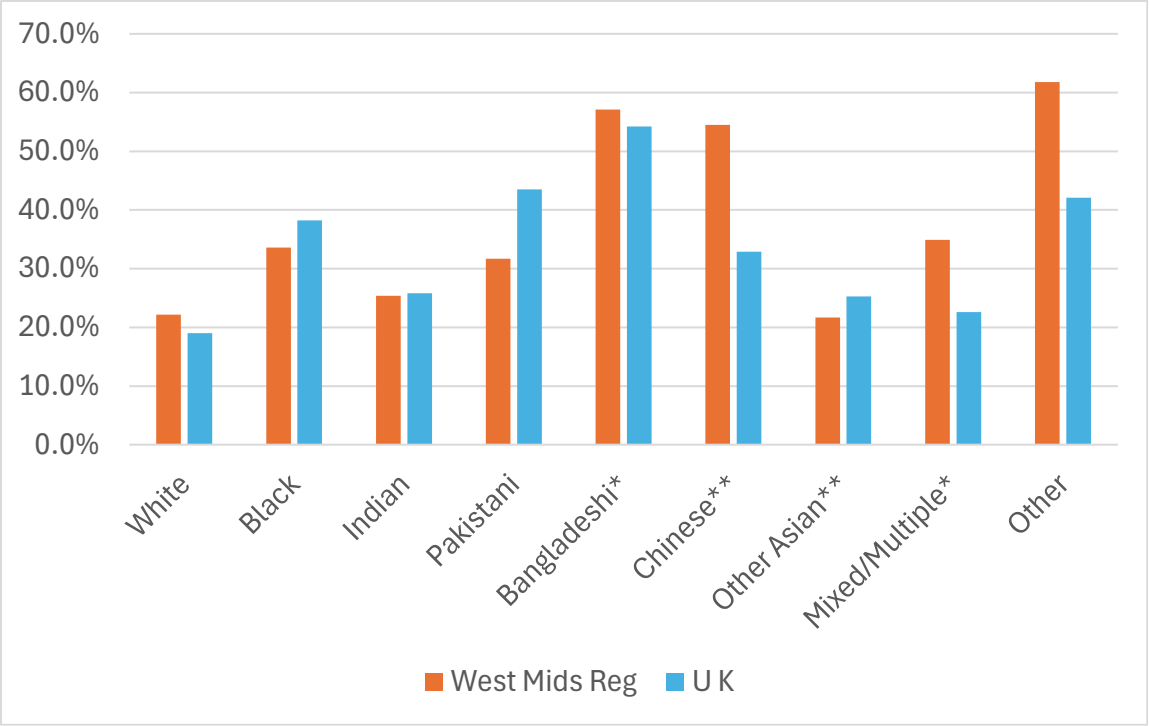
This shows that employment rates are fairly even across the main ethnic groups, in the WMCA, but at a lower level than across England as a whole; at that national level, Black and Asian adults had higher employment rates than White adults (this may be partly a function of age). The unemployment rates, shown below the horizontal axis, were generally greater in the WMCA area than across England as a whole, but markedly higher for Black and Mixed ethnicity adults, and slightly higher also for Asians. This evidence suggests that, insofar as unemployment may be a risk factor for homelessness, this is likely to be somewhat greater in the WMCA, with particularly adverse effects for Black and Mixed ethnicity adults.

***Poverty profile by broad ethnicity in 2021***

The final Figure in this section looks at poverty, using the most widely-used measure of household poverty from the most recently available Family Resources Survey. Given that this is a sample survey, numbers of cases in some ethnic groups at West Midlands regional area[4] are small, as marked in Chart and the accompanying note.

[4] The version of the Family Resources Survey (FRS) generally available only permits geographical analysis down to regional level, and even then some sample numbers are small for some specific groups.

*Figure 2.6: Poverty rates by ethnicity in West Midlands Region and UK,* (relative and after housing costs, 2022-3)




Source: Family Resources Survey 2022-23.
Note: * denotes small sample number (10-20); ** denotes very small sample number (<10)

The chart shows that all of the minoritised groups identified have higher rates of relative household low-income poverty after housing costs, compared with the White group, across the UK, and also in the West Midlands region. It should be noted that poverty is a bit higher for White households in the West Midlands compared with UK. The groups for whom poverty is only slightly greater are the Indian and Other Asian groups. The groups with the highest poverty in the WM region are the Bangladeshi, Chinese and 'Other' group. While for the former group their position across England is similarly bad, for the other two groups mentioned the West Midlands is apparently substantially worse, but the Chinese figure should be severely caveated as the sample is very small in the West Midlands (as it is for Other Asian). Black, Pakistani and Mixed ethnicity households have substantially higher poverty than the White group across the West Midlands region, and in the former two cases across UK as a whole (indeed, the rate for these two groups is somewhat lower than the UK-wide rate).

***Asylum-seeking households in the WMCA area***

It has been suggested (see Chapter 3) that an important factor behind the increased homelessness pressures in the WMCA has been the growth of asylum numbers and placements within the area. We looked to see if there was evidence to support this, particularly within the regularly published Home Office data on numbers of people supported with accommodation or subsistence by the Home Office for each local authority.

Using numbers which we obtained for the years 2015, 2017 2019 and 2022, as part of our *Destitution in the UK* Secondary Indicators analysis (see Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2023), together with the most recent publication from the Home Office, we obtained the following time series of numbers (persons) by selected years for the WMCA authorities.

2015 - 1547; 2017 – 1718; 2019 4645; 2022 – 6043; 2024 - 7528.

Thus these numbers appear to be increasing, and it is believed that the most recent figures are increased by the inclusion of some elements of support for Ukrainian and Afghan refugees, which are separate, specialist schemes. Later in the chapter we explore in detail the presence of households who have claimed asylum in the statutory homelessness system, and the outcomes they experience.

## Ethnic profile of homelessness in the WMCA

This section describes the ethnic profile of different forms of homelessness in the WMCA subregion, with wider comparisons across England as appropriate. We start by using a survey-based source (the English Housing Survey) to captures a broad range of indicators of homelessness, before proceeding to report statutory homelessness levels in more detail, and then considering a number of different situations that could be considered to constitute 'hidden homelessness'.

### *General homelessness indicators*

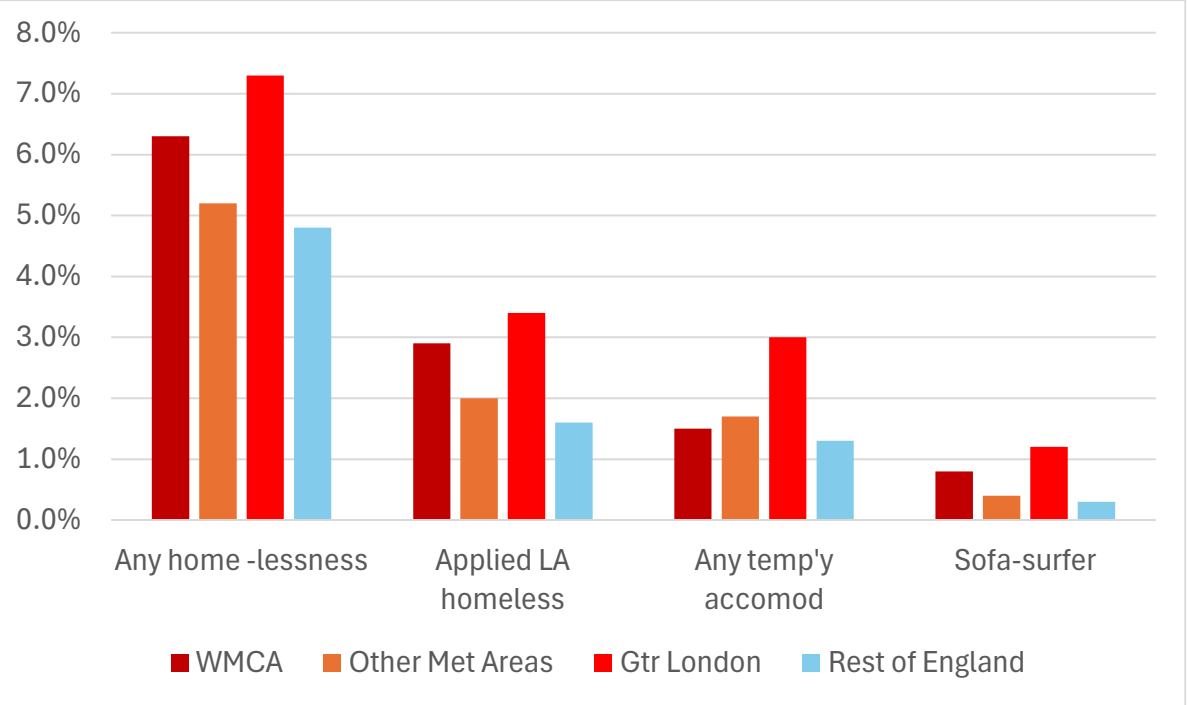
This analysis based on the English Housing Survey using data pooled across the years 2016-19[5]. From the English Housing Survey we have created four indicators, which are in order from the most all-encompassing to the most specific on homelessness:

- Any homelessness experience reported in recent period[6]
- Applied to council as homeless
- Had some spell in, or offer of, temporary accommodation
- Sofa surfed or accommodated sofa surfer

Figure 2.7 summarises the levels of these four indicators for households in the WMCA area, Other Metropolitan Areas, Greater London and the Rest of England (i.e. all non-metropolitan areas) (taking all ethnicities together). This provides an indication of the relative housing market and other factors affecting homelessness levels in these broad geographical areas.

[5] Although we have recently accessed EHS data for 2020/21 through to 2022/3, unfortunately most of this suite of homelessness questions were not asked in these more recent years.
[6] Any of the following indicators: sofa surfer present, or as temporary resident last year; respondent ever homeless; applied to council as homeless recently; previously or currently in temporary accommodation; offered temporary accommodation; rehoused as homeless.

*Figure 2.7: Levels of four measures of homelessness in WMCA area and comparable areas across England, percent of households, 2016-19*

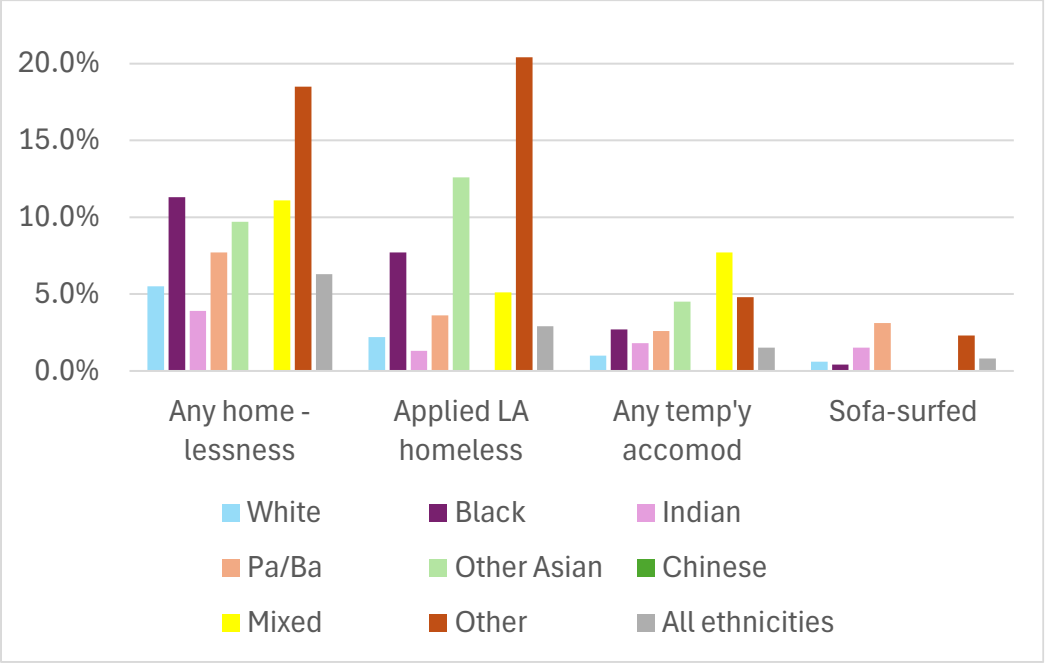



Source: author's analysis of English Housing Survey 2016/17-2019/20.

Greater London has higher incidence of all these homelessness indicators than the WMCA or the other comparator areas. However, it is noteworthy that the WMCA has higher levels on three of these four indicators than the Other Metropolitan Areas, the only exception being any use of temporary accommodation. Furthermore, WMCA (and other metropolitan areas) have higher levels on all of these indicators than the Rest of England.

We are primarily interested in how the different minoritised ethnic groups fare on these indicators, in the WMCA but also for comparison in England as a whole. An analysis of the same data broken down across 10 ethnic categories is shown in Figures 2.8 and 2.9

*Figure 2.8: Levels of four measures of homelessness by ten ethnic categories in WMCA, percent of households, 2016-19.*

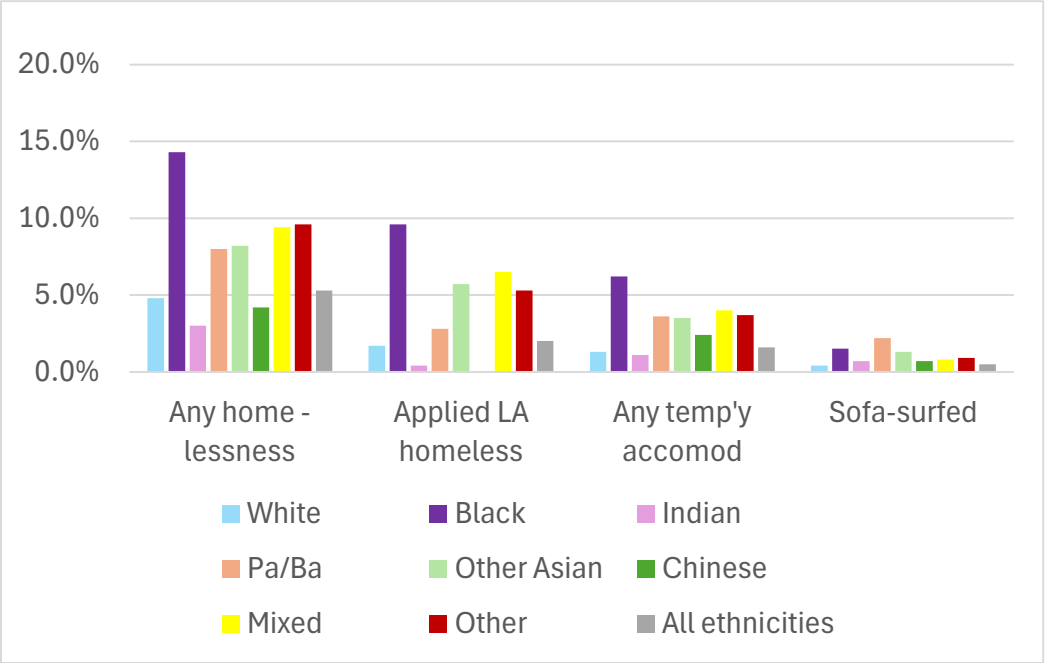



Source: author's analysis of English Housing Survey 2016/17-2019/20:
Note: the sofa surfing rates appear lower than the other measures because they refer primarily to current experience, whereas the other measures refer to an unspecified 'recent' period.

Figure 2.8 shows that there are very large differences in the incidence or risk of experiencing different forms of homelessness between ethnic groups in the WMCA sub-region. There are strikingly high rates associated with 'Other' ethnicity as regards any recent experience of homelessness and applying to the local authority as homeless. This 'Other' ethnicity includes people of Arabic, Middle Eastern and North African origins as well as others not fitting the specified categories, and is quite associated with recent asylum cohorts in UK. There are also quite high rates for Other Asian and Mixed Ethnicities in both of these categories and also on experience of temporary accommodation. Black-led households are also relatively high in the first three categories, though they are not the highest in any of these in WMCA.

Although Pakistani/Bangladeshi-led households show higher incidence of all forms of homelessness than the White-led households, their rates tend to be less than the groups just mentioned, except in the case of sofa surfing. Indian-led households report lower incidence than White households as regards any recent homelessness and applying to a local authority as homeless, with rather higher rates for temporary accommodation usage or sofa surfing. No Chinese-led households reported any of these homelessness experiences in the WMCA English Housing Survey samples in this period.

*Figure 2.9: Levels of four measures of homelessness by ten ethnic categories in England as a whole, percent of households, 2016-19.*




Source: as previous Figure; Notes to previous figure also apply here.

Figure 2.9 covering England as a whole shows a similar, but somewhat less extreme picture, particularly for the 'Other', 'Other Asian' and 'Mixed' groups (noting that the vertical scales are the same). However, it paints a substantially worse relative picture for Black-led households across the rest of England than applies in the WMCA area, with this ethnic group clearly experiencing the highest levels of all of the specified forms of homelessness except sofa surfing. The adverse position of the Pakistani/Bangladeshi and Other Asian groups relative to the Indian and, especially, the Chinese groups is consistent across the country. While Chinese-led households do appear in this all-England chart, only in the case of temporary accommodation is their rate notably higher than the White group.

It is also possible to express these data in the form of 'relative risk ratios', which show how much higher a risk the group in question faces compared with White-led households in the same region or country. Table 2.4 presents the data in this form.

Looking at the upper part of the table, for the WMCA, it can be seen that 'Other' ethnicity shows the worst (highest) risk ratios for the first two indicators and second worst for the other two. Black-led households are second to worst on the first (broadest) indicator, third worst on statutory applications and fourth worst on temporary accommodation, with a low risk of sofa surfing. Mixed ethnicity households are third on any recent homelessness experience but worst on the temporary accommodation experience indicator. The Pakistani/Bangladeshi group stand out with respect to their disproportionate risk of sofa-surfing, where they have the worst risk ratio by some margin. Apart from the Chinese population, the Indian group generally fare best, except on sofa surfing, and they do have a somewhat elevated risk of temporary accommodation as compared with White-led households.

*Table 2.4: Risk ratios for homelessness indicators by ethnicity of head of household, compared with 'White British' heads of household, WMCA and England, 2016-19*

WMCA

| | Any homelessness | Applied LA homeless | Any temp'y accomod | Sofa-surfer |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| White | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Black | 2.1 | 3.5 | 2.7 | 0.7 |
| Indian | 0.7 | 0.6 | 1.8 | 2.5 |
| Pakistani/Bangladeshi | 1.4 | 1.6 | 2.6 | 5.2 |
| Other Asian | 1.8 | 5.7 | 4.5 | 0.0 |
| Chinese | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Mixed | 2.0 | 2.3 | 7.7 | 0.0 |
| Other | 3.4 | 9.3 | 4.8 | 3.8 |
| All | 1.1 | 1.3 | 1.5 | 1.3 |

England

| | Any homelessness | Applied LA homeless | Any temp'y accomod | Sofa-surfed |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| White | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Black | 3.0 | 5.6 | 4.8 | 3.8 |
| Indian | 0.6 | 0.2 | 0.8 | 1.8 |
| Pakistani/Bangladeshi | 1.7 | 1.6 | 2.8 | 5.5 |
| Other Asian | 1.7 | 3.4 | 2.7 | 3.3 |
| Chinese | 0.9 | 0.0 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
| Mixed | 2.0 | 3.8 | 3.1 | 2.0 |
| Other | 2.0 | 3.1 | 2.8 | 2.3 |
| All | 1.1 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 1.3 |

Source: as Figures 2.8-2.9.

It is noteworthy that the WMCA is distinguished by showing a somewhat less adverse set of results for Black-led households, but a worse set for Other Asian and Other Ethnicity groups than in England as a whole (see lower part of Table 2.2). These latter groups are perhaps amongst those who have featured particularly in recent pressures on the homelessness system in the West Midlands, including those associated with the asylum process and other migration-related flows.

***Statutory homelessness, race and ethnicity***

From our special analysis of the statutory homelessness system data for England covering applicants[7] in the financial years 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22[8], we can report on the risks of statutory homelessness across the ethnic groups. Compared with the previous survey-based analysis, this should provide more accurate risk factors based on the actual applicant records, and be less affected by self-reporting of experiences and differential response to surveys. On the other hand, this data is limited to those who are accepted as homeless or threatened with homelessness

[7] Households who apply to the Council and are found to be homeless or threatened with homelessness in the next 2 months, and eligible for assistance (i.e. with UK nationality or Leave to Remain), and hence owed a prevention or relief duty.

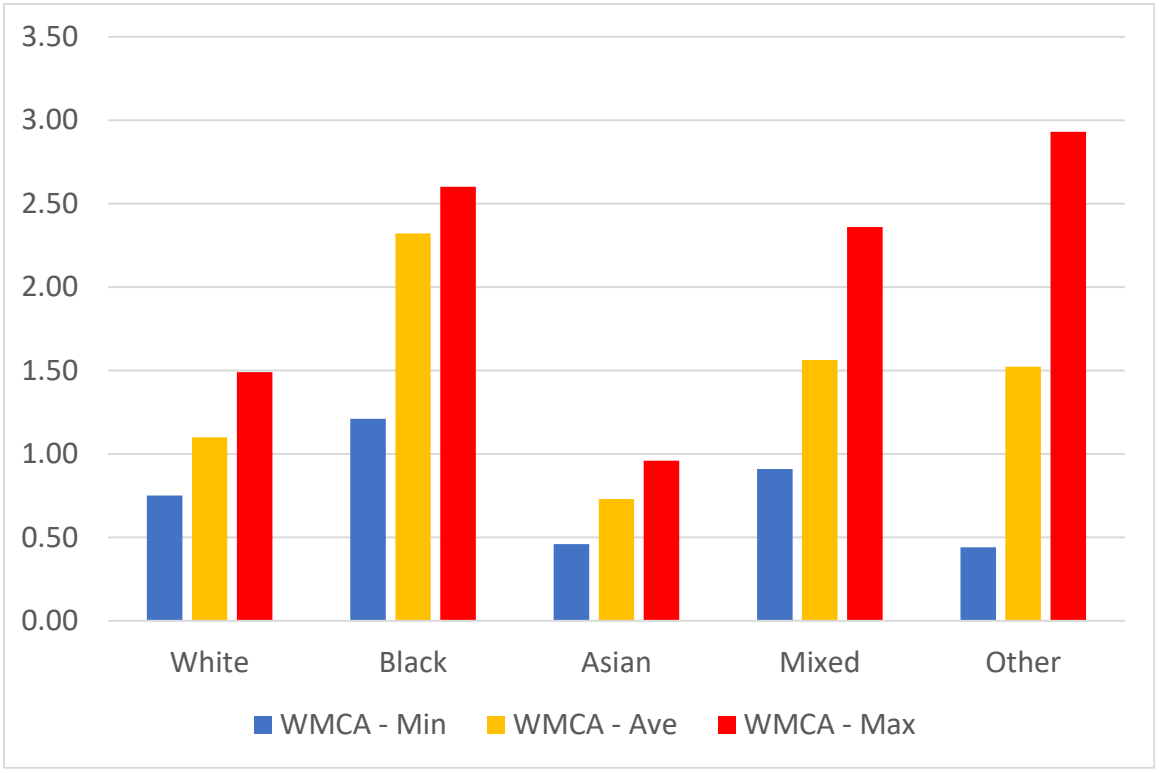
[8] This was carried out in the ONS Secure Research Service with detailed LA-level demographic and socio-economic indicators attached,

to local authorities and are eligible for assistance, and so does not cover more hidden forms of homelessness and those without recourse to public funds (see further below).

Figure 2.10 shows the risk of experiencing statutory homelessness for people in five broad ethnic groups, including the range of variation between local authorities within the WMCA around the average risk. On average across the subregion, Black-led households were worst affected and had a much higher risk than White-led households (2.32% vs 1.10%), while Mixed and Other Ethnicity households also had higher risks (1.56% and 1.52%). However, the broad Asian group as a whole had a lower average risk (0.73%) than the White group.

However, there was considerable variation across the seven local authorities within the WMCA, with the risks in proportional terms more variable in each of the minoritised groups than they were within the White group. This could suggest *either* that the particular sub-groups within these categories had differential underlying risk and were distributed unevenly across the local authorities in the region; *or* that the way the individual authorities responded and managed the situation for these groups varied significantly.

*Figure 2.10: Risk of statutory homelessness by broad ethnicity showing range of local variation around average within WMCA area, 2019-2021*




Source: author's analysis of H-CLIC micro cohort data linked to LA-based demographic and socio-economic data from Census and other sources.

The relative risk ratios based on this analysis for the WMCA averages were 2.11 for Black, 1.42 for Mixed, 1.39 for Other and 0.66 for Asian-led households. The equivalent ratios for England as a whole were 1.84 for Black, 0.79 for Mixed, 1.60 for Other and 0.62 for Asian. This suggests that, for statutory homelessness specifically, the WMCA presents a somewhat worse picture for Black and Mixed ethnicity households, somewhat less adverse for Other ethnicity households, and a rather similar picture for Asian households, compared with England overall.

These data offer opportunities for modelling homeless risks for specific ethnic groups, to shed light on potential differences in causal or associated factors, which we return to later.

***The significance of migration and asylum to statutory homelessness in the WMCA area***

A measure of the number and proportion of statutory homeless applicant households who have come into the statutory homelessness system after a successful asylum claim is the number of Non-UK/-EEA citizens owed a homelessness duty where the eligibility for assistance is based on grant of refugee status, Indefinite or Limited or Exceptional Leave to Remain[9], or other protection (e.g. humanitarian, discretionary)[10]. Table 2.6 presents data from this source comparing WMCA with other Metropolitan Areas, Greater London, and the Rest of England. To provide context, we have also conducted a similar analysis for the whole migrant population within the homelessness cohort (i.e. those where the household head was born overseas).

Table 2.5 shows that there has been a large increase in asylum-based statutory homelessness cases, and that this has mainly happened from 2021 onwards, after a dip in the Covid year (2020).

[9] This category may include some non-asylum migrant groups.
[10] As recorded in Column O of Table A11 in the annual detailed local authority level tables of statutory homelessness published by MHCLG.

However, this increase has not been confined to the WMCA, where the increase of 170% in three years compares with 183% in other Metropolitan areas and 275% in the other non-Metropolitan areas, although London's increase was lower at 118%. However, because the absolute numbers, relative to resident population, were well above average (although below London) in the WMCA, the absolute scale of the increase has clearly been substantial, amounting to 2,500 extra households p.a. by 2023/24. In 2023, WMCA had a rate of asylum applications of 0.36% of resident household population, significantly above other Metropolitan Areas (0.28%) and far above non—metropolitan England (0.12%), albeit still below the Greater London rate (0.48%).

*Table 2.5: Number of Homeless Applicants who are Refugees or Other Leave to Remain households by broad region and financial year, England 2018-23*

| | Year | | | | | | Incr 2020-23 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | % increase |
| W Mids CA Area | 1,456 | 2,055 | 1,477 | 1,965 | 2,652 | 3,982 | 170% |
| Other Met Areas | 4,474 | 6,165 | 3,747 | 5,600 | 7,045 | 10,586 | 183% |
| Gtr London | 7,146 | 7,910 | 6,918 | 7,970 | 10,525 | 15,098 | 118% |
| Rest of England | 4,873 | 5,752 | 5,006 | 6,750 | 11,804 | 18,748 | 275% |
| Total | 17,949 | 21,882 | 17,148 | 22,285 | 32,026 | 48,414 | 182% |
| % of all households | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | |
| W Mids CA Area | 0.13% | 0.19% | 0.13% | 0.18% | 0.24% | 0.36% | |
| Other Met Areas | 0.12% | 0.16% | 0.10% | 0.15% | 0.19% | 0.28% | |
| Gtr London | 0.23% | 0.25% | 0.22% | 0.25% | 0.34% | 0.48% | |
| Rest of England | 0.03% | 0.04% | 0.03% | 0.04% | 0.08% | 0.12% | |
| Total | 0.08% | 0.09% | 0.07% | 0.10% | 0.14% | 0.21% | |

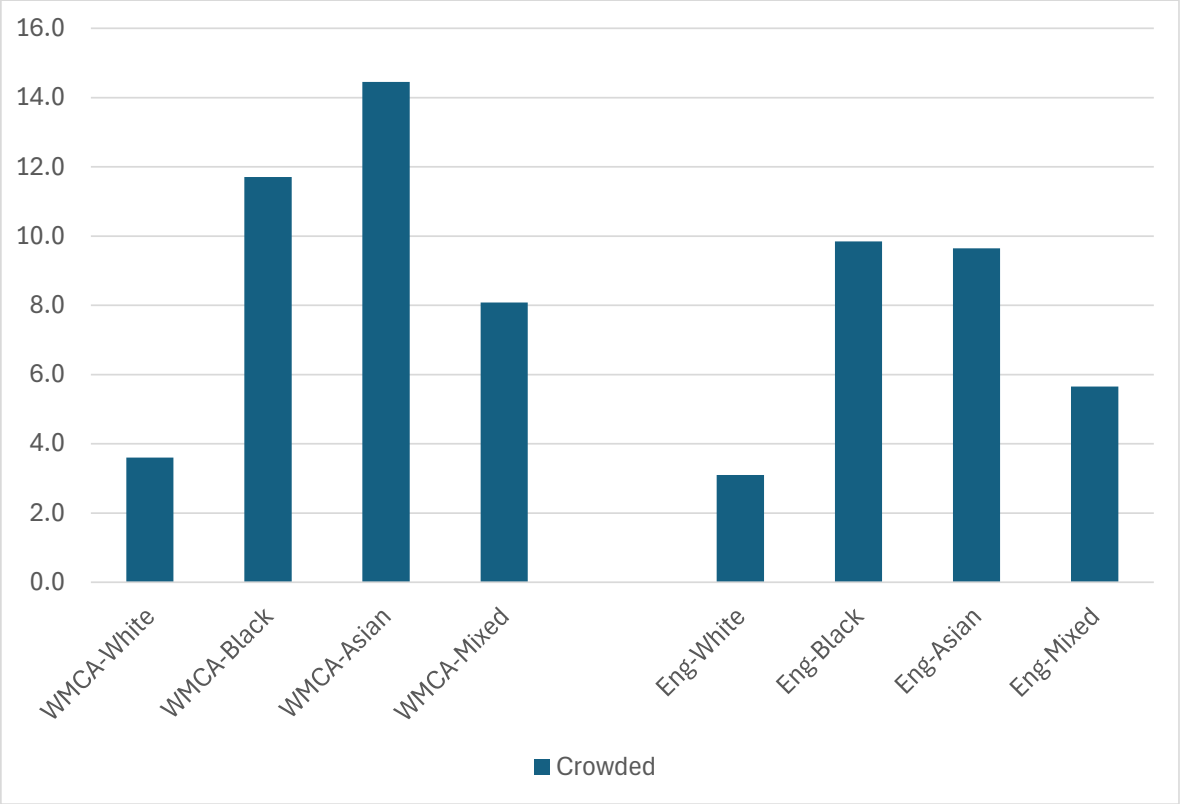
Source: MHCLG Local Authority level Detailed Annual Homelessness Returns, Table A11, Eligibility for homelessness assistance, Column O

H-CLIC data for 2019-2021 obtained via special access arrangements (see further below) indicates that, for England as a whole, the asylum group have a very different ethnic profile from all applicants, with only 7% White, 32% Black, 19% Indian/other Asian, 7% Pakistani/Bangladeshi, 2% Mixed/Multiple, but 33% 'Other'. Breaking this profile of asylum applicants down further, Black applicants within the asylum group are overwhelmingly Black African/other (30%), not Black Caribbean, the Indian/Other Asian group are overwhelmingly Other Asian (not Indian) at 18%, while the Other group comprise 14% Arab and 19% 'Other'.

### *Hidden forms of homelessness*

Certain other housing need categories may also be taken to be indicative of either hidden homelessness or higher risk of homelessness. One of these is overcrowding, which is well measured in the Census. Figure 2.11 shows the incidence of crowding across the broad ethnic groups in WMCA and across England as a whole.

*Figure 2.11: Overcrowded households by ethnicity in WMCA and England overall, percent of households, 2021*.



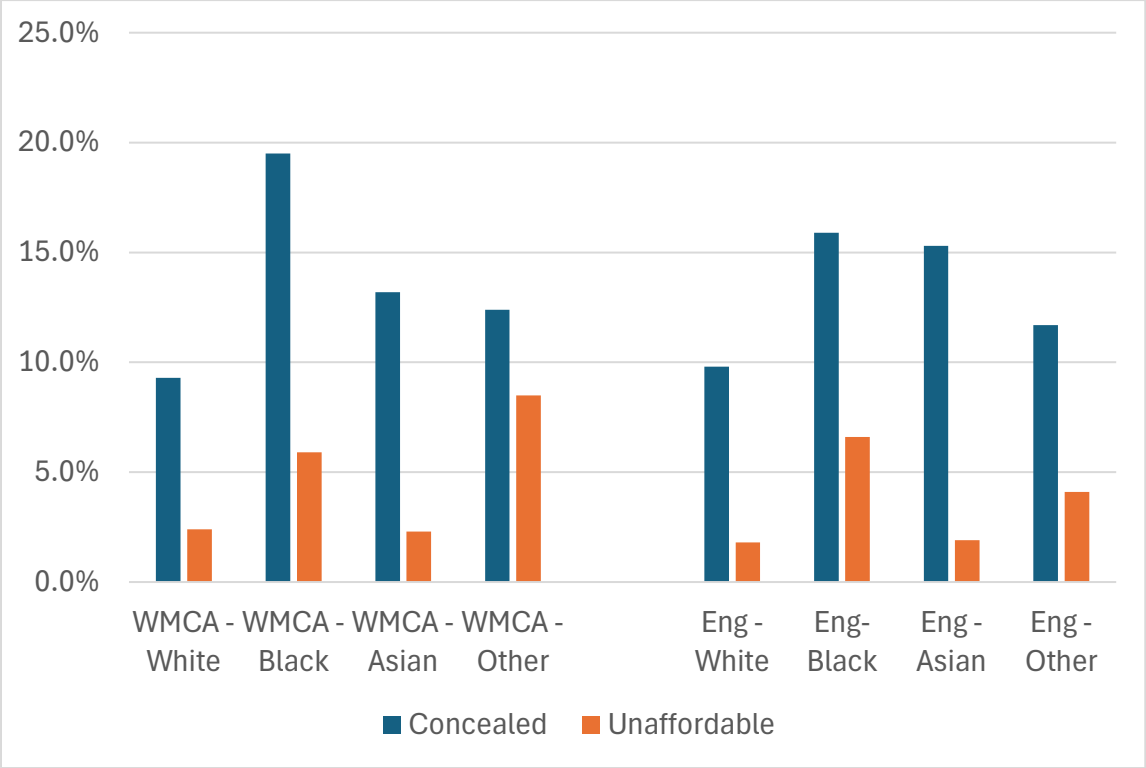

Source: Census 2021

This indicator shows a very striking disparity between all of the minoritised ethnic groups and White households in the WMCA area, with this time Asian households being particularly prominent. While disproportionate experience of overcrowding amongst Black and Asian-led households can be seen to apply across the country, it is even more marked in the WMCA, particularly for the Asian group. We should add here, of course, that London has particularly high rates of overcrowding across all ethnic groups, reflecting its especially pressured housing market, but WMCA has higher rates for each ethnic group than the Other Metropolitan Areas or the Rest of England.

Concealed households, and households with affordability problems, are also other potential markers of hidden homelessness. Figure 2.12 shows measures of both derived from the English Housing Survey. The definition of concealed households make allowance for whether single concealed households wish or intend to move, as well as counting all concealed family groups[11], while households with affordability problems takes account of both income: housing cost ratio indicators and subjective reports of payment or debt problems.

[11] Concealed households are single adults or family units (couples or lone parents) living with the main householder and any partner. In this instance we count all concealed family units and those concealed singles indicating an intention to move.

*Figure 2.12: Concealed households and households with unaffordable accommodation by ethnicity in WMCA and England, percent, 2016-19*




Source: author's analysis of English Housing Survey 2016-19.

In the WMCA, Black, Asian and Other ethnicity households all contain more concealed households than White households do, with Black households showing the highest incidence. The picture is similar for England as a whole, although at national level the Black group show a somewhat lower prevalence than in the WMCA area, while the Asian group have a rather higher prevalence, similar in fact to that for Black households.

Affordability problems) are clearly higher for Black and Other households than for White households, both in the WMCA area and across England. With this indicator, Asian households as a whole have a similar or marginally lower rates than White households, in both WMCA and England as a whole.

## Interactions with the statutory homelessness system

We have conducted detailed analysis of homeless applicant's interaction with the statutory homelessness system using special access arrangements to official (H-CLIC) household level data files from 3 years' intakes, around 750,000 households for England as a whole. These are households who applied to local authorities in the period April 2019 to March 2022 and were found to be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days, under the terms of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and who completed a journey to some recorded outcome over a period of 2-3 years. This excludes households that did not apply as homeless, were ineligible because of their immigration status, were found to be not homeless or threatened with homelessness, and those with no recorded outcome at the cutoff date (approximately 10-15% of cases).

The advantage of this new analysis is that it enables demographic characteristics, including ethnicity and migrant status, to be cross-tabulated at individual/household level with other attributes recorded by H-CLIC, as well as with the outcomes of the statutory process. Below we use these data to explore variations by ethnicity in the causes of statutory homeless applications, applicants' reported support needs, and the responses that they receive by way of temporary and settled housing, both in the WMCA area and in England as a whole.

### *Ethnic disparities in the causes of homelessness amongst homeless applicants*

We were able to use the H-CLIC data to look at the relationship between ethnicity and the reasons given by statutory homeless applicants for their loss of previous accommodation. Table 2.6 presents the picture for the WMCA area, with yellow highlights marking cases where a particular ethnic group has a relatively high prevalence of a particular reason or group of reasons[12].

[12] Some reason categories had relatively few responses and these have had to be combined with other similar reasons to protect the anonymity of the outputs from the Secure Research Service (SRS).

Table 2.6: Reasons for loss of last settled accommodation by ethnicity of statutorily homeless household heads, WMCA area, percent of each ethnic group 2019-2021

| Reason loss last settled accom | White | Black | Pakistani /Bangla-deshi | Indian/ other Asian | Mixed/ multiple | Other ethnicity | All Ethnicities |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| End Priv Rent Tenancy | 16.0% | 19.9% | 17.7% | 16.1% | 13.8% | 20.5% | 16.9% |
| Fam/friends not willing to accommodate | 31.9% | 29.6% | 37.3% | 27.8% | 37.1% | 22.6% | 31.7% |
| Rel b/down non-viol | 9.0% | 4.4% | 4.1% | 4.4% | 6.7% | 3.4% | 7.2% |
| Domestic abuse, violence, harassment | 15.9% | 12.5% | 24.3% | 22.0% | 16.9% | 11.6% | 16.4% |
| End social or supported tenancy | 8.3% | 7.7% | 2.0% | 3.8% | 8.3% | 4.0% | 7.2% |
| Left institutional or Home Office acc | 2.6% | 7.5% | 3.0% | 9.3% | 2.6% | 18.0% | 4.5% |
| Other/NK | 16.3% | 18.4% | 11.6% | 16.6% | 14.7% | 19.9% | 16.2% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Source: authors' analysis of HCLIC micro outcomes data through ONS Secure Research Service.

The most common reason for loss of accommodation in WMCA is that family or friends are no longer willing or able to accommodate the household, accounting for 32% of cases overall. This reason is more commonly reported by Pakistani/ Bangladeshi households or those with Mixed/multiple ethnicities (37% in each case), while being least common (23%) among 'Other' ethnicity households (who are more likely to be recent migrants). The next most common reason is the loss or ending of a private tenancy (17%), and this was reported more commonly by Black or Other ethnicity households (20%), and somewhat less often by Mixed ethnicity households (14%).

Domestic abuse, violence or harassment are almost as common a reason (16%), and here there is quite a high prevalence in both the Pakistani/Bangladeshi and Indian/other Asian groups (22-24%), with lower rates for Black and 'Other' ethnicities (c.12%). Non-violent relationship breakdown is less common (7%) and tends to be associated more often with White households (9%). Loss of social rented of supported housing has a similar prevalence, and again is more associated with White or Mixed ethnicity households. Leaving institutional (including Home Office) accommodation is less common overall (4.5%) but quite common for Other Ethnicity households (18%) and to some extent Indian/other Asian and Black households.

The WMCA area is not substantially different from the picture across England with respect to the reasons given for loss of accommodation. Family and friends no longer willing to accommodate and the domestic abuse reasons are slightly less prevalent at national level, while end of a private rental tenancy is slightly more prevalent nationally. The ethnic disparities are similar, with the only noticeable differences being that the Indian/other Asian group report more loss of private tenancies nationally, while Black households report more friends and families no longer willing to accommodate.

Given that the household profile differs between ethnic groups, this might explain some of these disparities. In fact, we found that, even when we divided the caseload into family and non-family households (the most important distinction given the 'Priority Need' criterion in the English Statutory homeless system) and looked at the patterns separately, there was not much difference in terms of the patterns of relative prevalence by ethnicity (although the general levels were different in some cases between family and non-family).

Some further insights into causal or background factors and how these vary by ethnicity are brought out in later sections covering modelling findings.

### *Ethnic disparities in the support needs of homelessness applicants*

Using H-CLIC raw data files, we were also able to analyse ethnic disparities in statutory homeless households' self-reported support needs[13]. These data are summarised in Table 2.7 below.

As can be seen, more complex self-reported support needs were more associated with White or Mixed ethnicity households, while being much less common for Black or Other Ethnicity headed households, in both England as a whole and in the WMCA area. Conversely, having no self-reported support needs was strongly associated with Black and Other ethnicity in the WMCA area, and also in England as a whole in the case of Black households. These findings are very broadly in line with earlier research on multiple exclusion homelessness in the UK, which indicates that complex needs such as substance use were much less common amongst migrant than UK-born people who were homeless (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2013), which will likely impact on the ethnic profile of these needs in the WMCA.

*Table 2.7: Level of support needs recorded by ethnicity of statutorily homeless household heads, comparing WMCA with England*, (percent of each ethnic group, 2019-2021)

| *Area and level of support needs* | White | Black | Pakistani /Bangla-deshi | Indian/ other Asian | Mixed/ multiple | Other ethnicity | All Ethnicities |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Whole WMCA* | | | | | | | |
| No Support needs | 48.1% | 65.2% | 50.4% | 51.6% | 49.4% | 61.3% | 51.4% |
| Moderate Support needs | 28.2% | 20.1% | 28.3% | 30.1% | 27.8% | 25.8% | 27.0% |
| More complex needs | 23.7% | 14.7% | 21.3% | 18.3% | 22.8% | 12.9% | 21.5% |
| *England* | | | | | | | |
| No Support needs | 45.2% | 62.8% | 57.0% | 57.0% | 49.9% | 57.4% | 48.1% |
| Moderate Support needs | 25.0% | 22.1% | 26.1% | 26.4% | 24.7% | 26.2% | 24.8% |
| More complex needs | 29.8% | 15.0% | 16.9% | 16.6% | 25.4% | 16.4% | 27.1% |

Source: authors' analysis of HCLIC micro outcomes data through ONS Secure Research Service.

### *Response of the statutory homelessness system*

Using H-CLIC individual outcomes data files, we were also able to analyse disparities in households' experience of the statutory homelessness system by ethnicity. We examined the relative rates of accessing temporary accommodation, length of stay in temporary accommodation, and finally access social housing and other forms of settled accommodation.

#### Access to temporary accommodation

Households entering the statutory homeless system may be entitled to temporary accommodation, typically when they are already homeless and there is reason to believe that they may be in priority need and therefore owed a 'main homelessness duty'. For families with dependent children, who have automatic priority need status and are therefore entitled to settled rehousing, one might hope that they avoid the need to access temporary accommodation altogether, by either having their homelessness prevented or being enabled to move directly into settled housing. For single and other

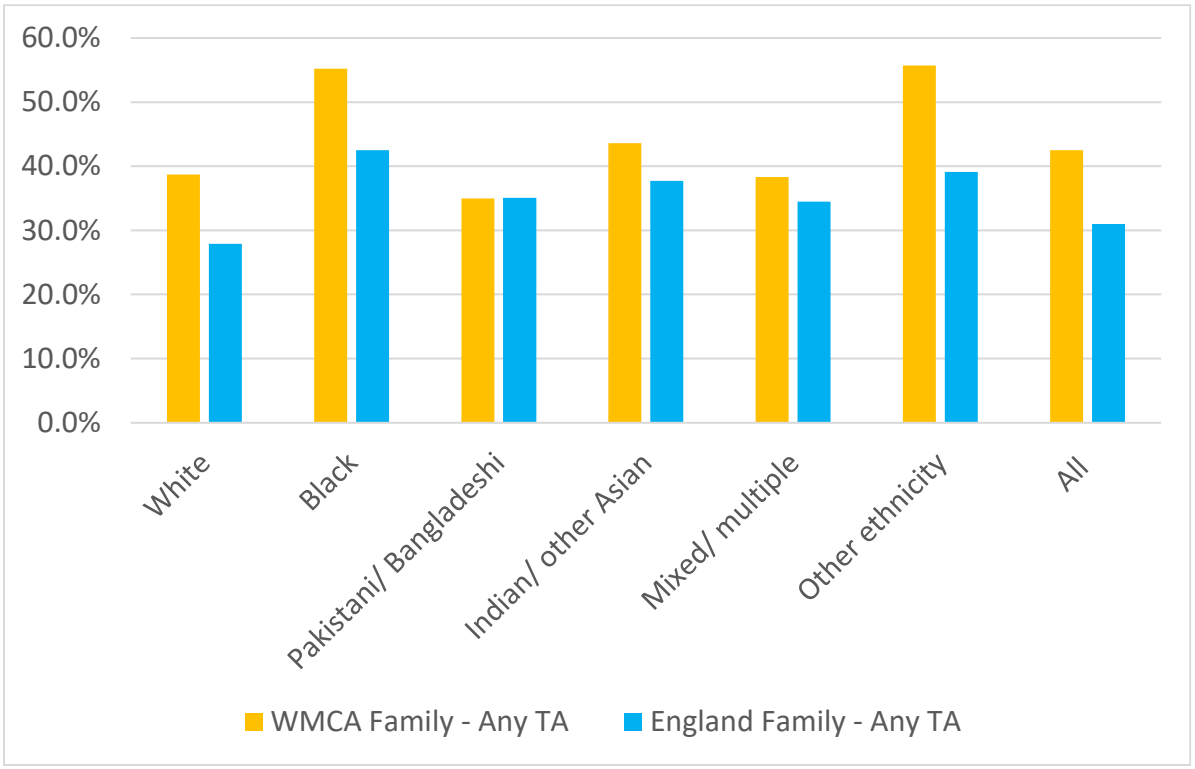
[13] HCLIC records support needs in 24 categories, of which the more common are mental and physical health, domestic and other abuse, young persons' independent living, learning disability, offending, drug/alcohol dependence, repeat homelessness or rough sleeping, budgeting difficulties, access to education/work/training, and former asylum seeker.

childless households on the other hand, who typically will not be found to be in priority need, accessing temporary accommodation may be viewed as a positive outcome, in as much as the alternative may be no or very little material assistance from local authorities at all. However, this interpretation is complicated by the presence of commissioned supported accommodation pathways for single homeless people in many of the WMCA local authorities, as well as by the use of very poor quality non-commissioned exempt accommodation for single people (see Chapter 3), neither of which are captured in temporary accommodation statistics. This makes it extremely difficult to put a reasonable construction on any ethnic patterns in temporary accommodation outcomes for single people so here we focus mainly on family households.

We found that several categories of minority ethnic family households were much more likely to experience temporary accommodation than White family households in the WMCA area, in particular Black and Other ethnicity family households but also Indian/Other Asian[14] (see Figure 2.13). Mixed ethnicity families had an average chance of spending time in temporary accommodation, while for Pakistani/Bangladeshi families it was somewhat below average. For families in England as a whole, all minoritised groups had a higher chance of time spent in temporary accommodation than the White group. In general, and for most groups other than Pakistani/Bangladeshi, the chances of families having time spent in temporary accommodation were higher in WMCA than across England as a whole.

[14] In the light of earlier evidence about the adverse situation of 'Other Asian' group versus the Indian group, in this analysis it was necessary to group these together to maintain adequate sample numbers to meet disclosure rules within the Secure Research Service. It is not quite clear which particular national origins would constitute 'Other Asian' but this might include Sri Lankan, Afghani or Vietnamese or example.

*Fig 2.13: Family statutory homeless cases experiencing temporary accommodation by ethnicity in WMCA area and England overall, percent of 2019-2021 cohorts*




Source: author's analysis of HCLIC micro cohort data for 2019/20 to 2021/2 applications

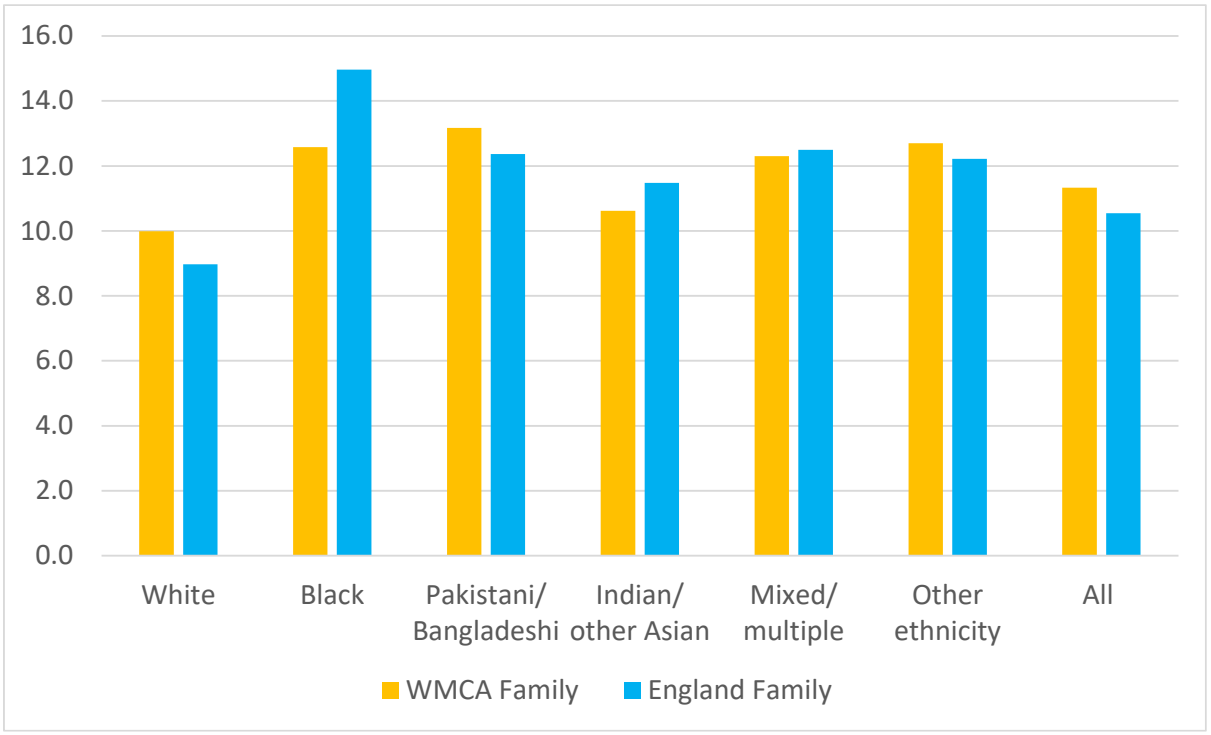
In both England as a whole and in WMCA, households entering the statutory system via the asylum-route are markedly more likely to have a spell in temporary accommodation than other statutorily homeless households, and this holds across all ethnic groups. This is unsurprising given people who have claimed asylum are less likely to have a family nearby with space to accommodate them temporarily as 'homeless at home', and the short time lag between granting of refugee or leave to remain status and being obliged to leave Home Office accommodation also militates against finding other ways around this. Although the differences were not quite as strong, it was also found that migrants as a whole were more likely to experience temporary accommodation than non-migrants, across most ethnic groups. The potential reasons for this are discussed in Chapter 3.

Time spent in temporary accommodation

In this analysis of HCLIC cohort data we were also able to calculate lengths of time spent in temporary accommodation, an outcome which would generally be seen as more adverse the longer the time involved, whether for family or non-family groups.

Figure 2.14 presents an analysis for average length of time in months for family homeless households by ethnicity in WMCA area and in England overall for comparison. It is clear that all minoritised ethnic groups within the family homeless cohorts have had to spend longer in temporary accommodation than the White group, with the highest lengths of time affecting Pakistani/Bangladeshi, Other ethnicity and Black groups. A similar pattern prevails across England as a whole, except that in England the disparity between White and Black is markedly greater than in WMCA, given that the former is lower while the latter is higher than in the WMCA.

*Fig 2.14: Average length of stay in temporary accommodation by family homeless households by ethnicity in WMCA area and England,* 2019-21 cohorts, months.




Source: author's analysis of HCLIC micro cohort data for 2019/20 to 2021/2 applications

Settled housing outcomes

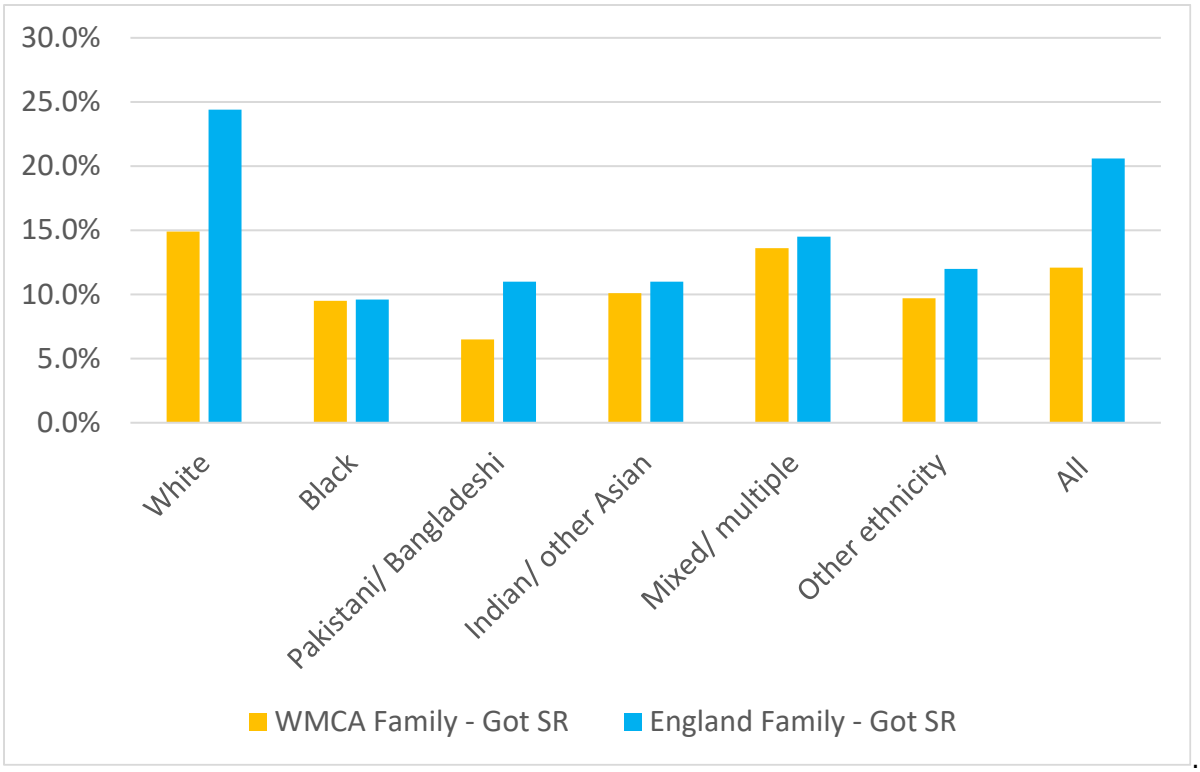
Figure 2.15 looks at the proportion of homeless applicants from different ethnicities who obtained social rented housing at the end of the statutory process across the WMCA area and for England as a whole. We particularly focus on this outcome on the basis that this is the optimal endpoint desired by most applicants.

The first point to note is that across the WMCA area the proportion of homeless applicants attaining social rented housing was generally very low, averaging just 12% of homeless families accepted as owed a prevention or relief duty[15] (for England this rate was a still dismal 20%). Secondly, all the minoritised ethnic groups in the WMCA area had a lower chance of obtaining social rented housing than the White group, with a particularly low rate for Pakistani/Bangladeshi and quite low rates for Black, Indian/other Asian and Other ethnicities.

The disparity between White and minoritised families' rates of access to social housing was much larger across England as a whole. This was because White family households had substantially greater access to social housing nationally than in the WMCA, while access rates for most minoritised groups in England were similar to the WMCA rates. The exception was the Pakistani/Bangladeshi group where the WMCA rate was particularly low.

*Figure 2.15: Final outcome of homeless process for family households of 'got social rented housing' by ethnicity in WMCA and England overall, 2019-21 cohorts, percent*.

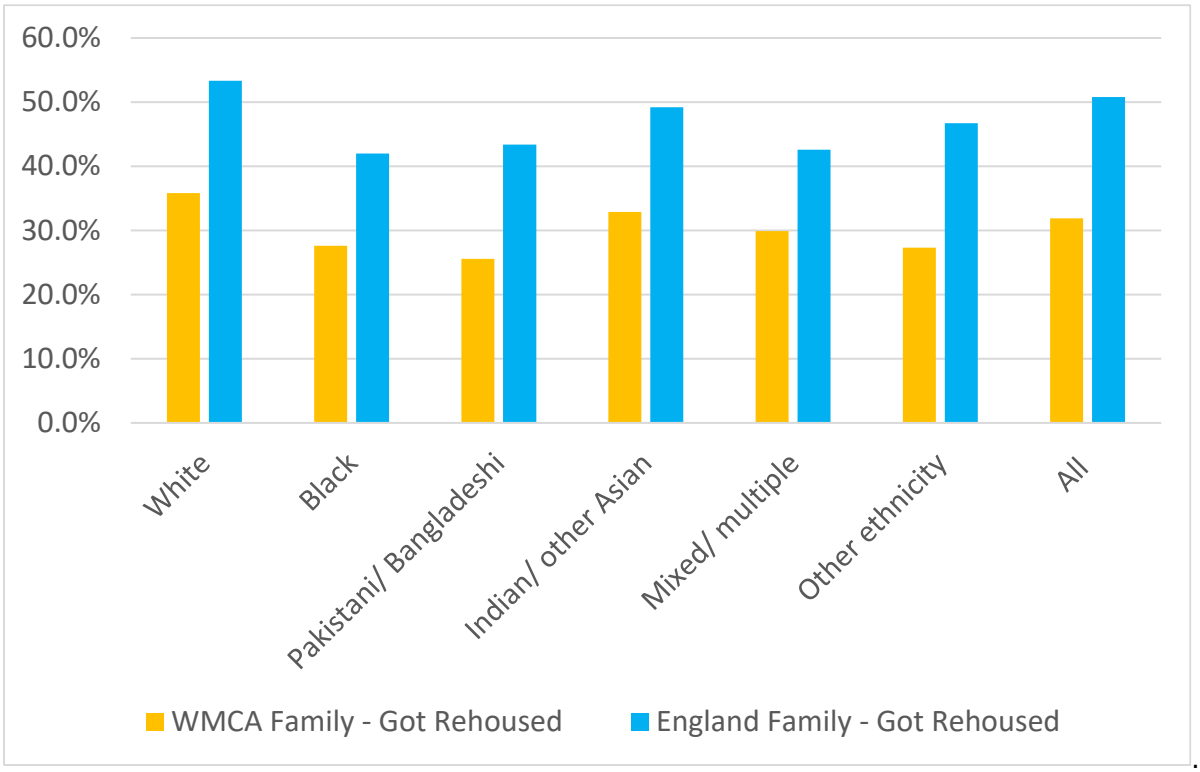
[15] Note that this includes those households that are rehoused under the main homelessness duty, all of whom will be initially accepted as being owed either a prevention or relief duty.




Source: author's analysis of HCLIC micro cohort data for 2019/20 to 2021/2 applications

If we focus on the broader measure of getting rehoused (including within the private rented sector), we still find for families that all the minoritised groups, but particularly Pakistani/Bangladeshi, Black and Other, have markedly poorer chances of getting rehoused (see Figure 2.16). Part of the background to this is that the overall chances of getting rehoused were much lower in the WMCA area than in England as a whole, including in the generally most pressured region of London. So while across England 51% of families got rehousing in social or private renting, this was lower at 46% in London, but much lower still in WMCA at 32%. So while there were ethnic disparities in these rates in WMCA, for every broad ethnic group their chances of getting housed were markedly lower in the West Midlands than for the equivalent groups in London.

*Figure 2.16: Final outcome of homeless process for family households of 'got rehoused in social or private renting' by ethnicity in WMCA and England overall, 2019-21 cohorts, percent.*




Source: author's analysis of HCLIC micro cohort data for 2019/20 to 2021/2 applications

Further analysis indicated across both England and the WMCA area, the asylum group were less likely than other statutory homeless households to get a rehousing outcome of a social or private tenancy. This pattern held across all ethnic groups, though with Black asylum applicants generally doing worse of all.

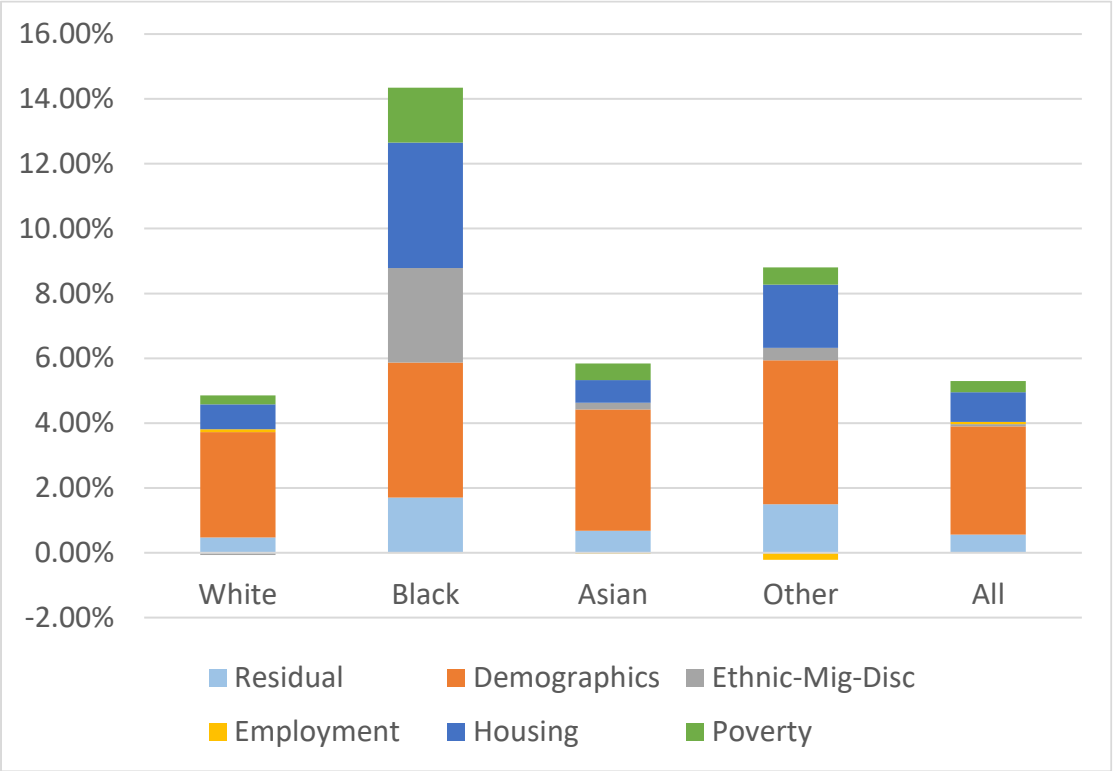
## Factors that contribute to disproportionate experience of homelessness in the West Midlands

Logistic regression analysis enables you to test whether, holding other relevant factors constant, ethnicity-related variables increased the risk of experiencing homelessness substantially for minoritised households.

Figure 2.17 shows the summary of the analysis for England as a whole, while Figure 2.18 below shows the equivalent analysis for the West Midlands region[16]. The vertical axis represents the percentage of households experiencing homelessness in each broad ethnic group, broken down into the parts that can be attributed, statistically, to particular groups of explanatory factors.

[16] For this analysis we are currently using the whole of the West Midlands region, rather than the WMCA area, for reasons to do with the size of the sample. It may be possible to focus more closely on the WMCA area once we have boosted EHS sample coverage to the years 2020/21 through 2022/23.

*Figure 2.17: Incremental contribution of different groups of factors to generation of 'any homelessness' rate, based on English Housing Survey household sample 2017-19 for whole of England, based on logistic regression model (percent of households)*




Source: Author's model predictions from English Housing Survey 2017-19.

This shows that the higher homelessness incidence for Black, Mixed/Other and (to a lesser extent) Asian groups can be attributed to a range of factors. These factors include demographic profile (i.e. age and household type), that vary the risks to some extent around a common baseline homelessness (i.e. the average level of homelessness combining all ethnicities together)[17]. This means that the concentration of minoritised ethnic communities in certain age brackets (younger households) and household types (single, lone parent, large families) goes some way to accounting for their elevated risk of homelessness. Employment factors (occupation, unemployment, economic inactivity) make only small differences, generally favourable for Black and minoritised ethnic groups. In other words, in some cases, patterns of employment amongst Black and minoritised ethnic communities people actually reduce their risks of homelessness.

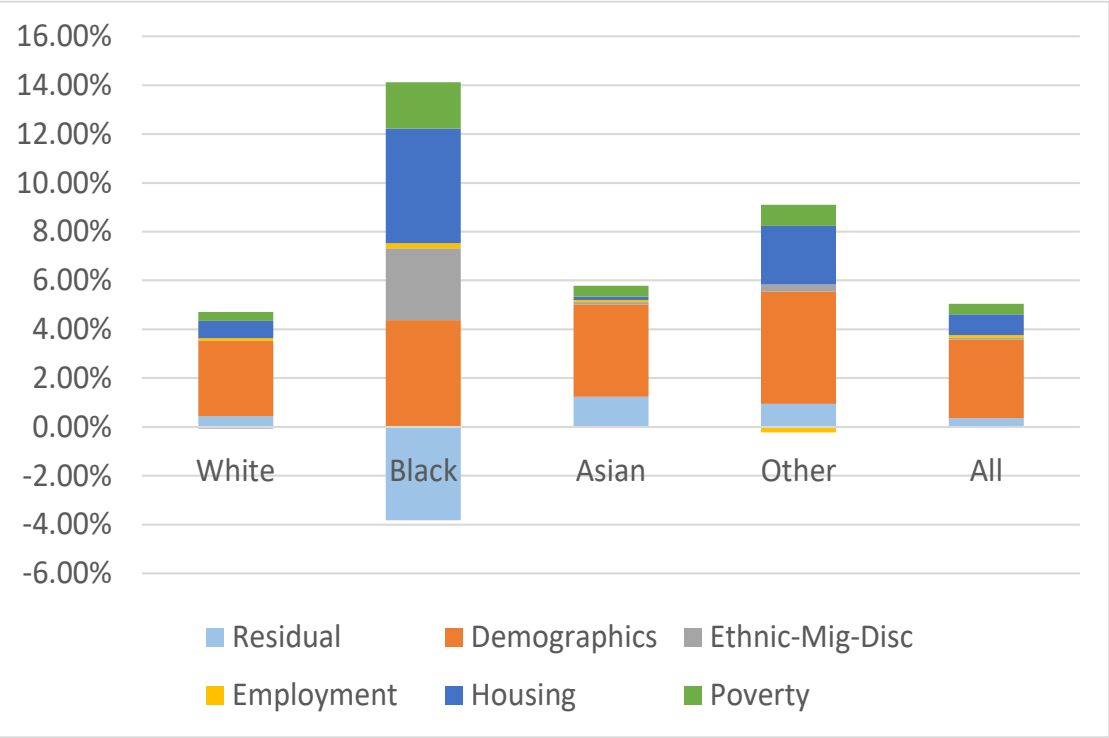
However, much more significant are the housing factors considered, particularly renting rather than owning your home, loss of tenancy, living in a flat, or living in an area with high house prices and rents. These factors increase risks for all groups, but especially for Black and Other ethnicities. Poverty (low income, on benefits, living in a deprived neighbourhood, affordability difficulties) further increases risk for all groups to a modest extent but significantly more, again, for Black households.

[17] In this particular analysis the 'demographic' block also includes a baseline common level of homelessness across all groups.

It can be seen that the group of factors captured under the ‘Ethnic-Migration-Discrimination’ category (which includes ethnic and racial background, having a migration background, reporting experience of discrimination as result of ethnicity) increases risks substantially for Black households, even after all of these other factors are taken into account, but only rather marginally for other minoritised communities.

It should be noted that this graph captures only the direct effect of these ethnic and related factors, after taking account of the other variables in the model. Indirect effects – that is where the effects of race and ethnicity operate via their impact on other predictors of increased homelessness risks – are considered further below.

*Figure 2.18: Incremental contribution of different groups of factors to generation of 'any homelessness' rate, based on English Housing Survey household sample 2017-19 for West Midlands region, based on common logistic regression model (percent of households)*




Source: Author's model predictions from English Housing Survey 2017-19

The two Figures 2.17 and 2.18 look broadly similar, including with respect to the substantial contribution that the 'Ethnic-Migration-Discrimination' category makes to increased homelessness risks for Black households, even after all of these other factors are taken into account. Housing and poverty factors are also prominent in elevating the homelessness risks of Black, and to a lesser extent Other ethnicity, households in the WMCA area, as they are in England as a whole, with employment factors far less impactful.

However, one difference which stands out is that, in the West Midlands for Black-led households, there is a large negative residual (-4% points). This means that the actual observed homelessness for this group is substantially lower than what the model predicts, based on relationships observed across the whole country. So, although the homelessness risk of Black households is indeed very adverse in the West Midlands, as it is in England, it is less bad in practice than the model predicts. This might be indicative of some aspects of policy response or prevention activity in the region, which is successful to a degree in reducing what could otherwise be an even worse situation. However, for the other ethnic groups, the residuals are small positive amounts, meaning that their actual homelessness risks are somewhat worse that the model would predict.

The finding that Black homelessness in the West Midlands is less than it might have been, based on all the predictive factors, is possibly in line with some of the findings from the statutory homelessness data analysis reported above, where the disparities for Black households were less than in other regions on some measures.

**Indirect drivers of disproportionate experience of homelessness**

We found in our national State of the Nation report (Bramley *et al*, 2022) that, race, ethnicity and discrimination-related factors affect homelessness risks indirectly as well directly by, for example, heightening levels of poverty, or the chances of being a renter rather than an owner, which in turn increases exposure to homelessness. Once these indirect effects are accounted for, the relative risk of homelessness for households headed by a person from a Black and minoritised ethnic community was generally found to be substantially larger in England as a whole than when only direct effects are considered.

At the same time, it is important to understand that there is not a single common 'measure' of the effect of ethnicity (or migration or discrimination) on homelessness; it all depends on the household circumstances and context. For this reason, as well as to make things more concrete, we presented a series of vignettes (i.e. hypothetical households with particular characteristics) to reveal the variation in these excess risks of homelessness, and also the extent to which indirect effects increase the impact of the composite 'Ethnic-Migration-Discrimination' variable on homelessness.

We have done a similar exercise for the West Midlands[18] and, as can be seen below, each of these vignettes of minoritised ethnicity-led households is predicted to experience a markedly higher incidence of homelessness as compared with White households in similar circumstances. In each case the overall impact on homelessness is greater once we allow for the indirect effects of ethnicity, with the ratio of indirect effects to the total effects varying across these cases.

As can be seen from Table 2.8 below, for a Black/Mixed-led single renter household reporting discrimination, with characteristics which are otherwise typical of the West Midlands single renter population as a whole, the risk of homelessness is nearly 2.15 times that of a comparable White household, with one-third of that effect being indirect via poverty and housing tenure/conditions.

For the second illustrative case included in Table 2.8, we take a middle-aged Black/Mixed-led couple family who are renting in the West Midlands, in a low socio-economic group and/or with health or disability issues, and compare them with an otherwise similar White family. In this case the former (minoritised) family would face a risk of homelessness 1.52 times that of the comparator households, taking into account indirect as well as direct effects. In this case the indirect effects via poverty and/or housing tenure/conditions would account for the majority (58%) of the heightened risk.

[18] Again, in this instance, we have to use the wider West Midlands region in order to have a large enough sample in the data.

*Table 2.8: Vignettes comparing households headed by someone from the West Midlands region from a minoritised ethnic community with otherwise comparable White-headed UK households, showing effects of poverty and housing factors as mediators or interactors in contributing to predicted homelessness*

| Case description | Overall Risk Ratio vs White | Risk Ratio excluding indirect | % share of total effect indirect |
|---|---|---|---|
| White, younger, single, renter V Black/Mixed, younger, single, renter | 2.15 | 1.78 | 32% |
| White, middle-aged, couple family, renting, low socio-ec/health/disabiity V Black/mixed, middle-aged, couple family, renting, low socio-ec /health/disability | 1.52 | 1.22 | 58% |
| White working age, renter, eviction/flat/ crowding V Asian working age, renter, eviction/flat/ crowding | 1.19 | 1.13 | 30% |

Source: Based on English Housing Survey count regression models involving mediation. similar to that reported in Bramley et al (2022) pp.26-29

The third illustrative case compares an Asian working-age household in the West Midlands which is renting and has experienced eviction or crowding or lives in a flat, with an equivalent White household in the West Midlands. In this case the overall increase in homelessness risk is smaller, at just under 20%, consistent with quite a lot of the descriptive evidence that Asian populations face lower homeless risks than Black or Mixed ethnicity people. Of that enhanced risk, about 30% could be attributed to indirect effects via poverty or housing tenure/conditions.

## Conclusions

WMCA area has relatively high, and growing, share of minoritised ethnic populations compared with most areas of England other than London, with particularly high share of people identifying as Pakistani or Bangladeshi. There is evidence that the impact of asylum/refugee populations has also grown substantially in WMCA (as in other Metropolitan areas), which in turn impacts on the ethnic makeup of the region, and in particular the proportion of Middle Eastern and African groups who feature prominently in recent asylum migration flows.

The WMCA has generally higher levels of most indicators of homelessness (except temporary accommodation use) than Other Metropolitan Areas or the Rest of England, but lower than London, with significant variation in statutory homelessness rates between constituent local authorities within WMCA. People from minoritised communities experience disproportionate levels of most forms of homelessness in the WMCA area, as they do in England as a whole, but these excess risks are generally higher for Black and Mixed ethnicity groups. There are sharp distinctions within the broad Asian ethnic group, with those who identify as Indian or Chinese generally experiencing homelessness rates below those of White households, while Pakistani/Bangladeshi groups are at much greater risk of homelessness, particularly more hidden forms such as sofa surfing or living in

overcrowded circumstances. WMCA also appears to have particularly high homelessness rates for 'Other ethnicities', a group likely to contain many people with experience of the asylum system. There has been a large recent increase in households entering the statutory homelessness system via the asylum route across England, with WMCA having a rate of asylum applications of 0.36% of resident household population by 2023, significantly above other Metropolitan Areas, albeit still below the Greater London rate.

Ethnic differences in the reported causes of loss of previous home are generally marginal in the WMCA area and broadly similar to the national (England) picture. However, there is greater prominence of family or friend exclusions as a cause of homelessness amongst Pakistani/ Bangladeshi households, and those with Mixed/multiple ethnicities, and a high prevalence of domestic abuse-related homelessness applications in both the Pakistani/Bangladeshi and Indian/other Asian groups. Statutory homelessness applicants reporting more complex support needs are most often from White or Mixed ethnicity households, with Black and Other ethnicity households least likely to have any recorded support needs.

There was evidence of minoritised communities experiencing disadvantage in the statutory homelessness system in the WMCA area. For example, minority ethnic families spent longer in temporary accommodation than White families. Applicants from all minoritised groups were less likely than White applicants to access social or private tenancy at the end of the statutory homelessness process, within a context where the chances of accessing social housing are very low for homeless applicants across all ethnic groups in the WMCA. On some measures the relative disadvantage faced by Black applicants in accessing housing through the statutory homelessness system was less in the WMCA area than elsewhere in England. The asylum group were markedly more likely to have a spell in temporary accommodation, and less likely to get rehoused in a social or private tenancy, than other statutory homeless applicants, with this pattern holding across all ethnicities, in WMCA as across England. Although the differences were not quite as strong, it was also found that migrants as a whole were less likely to access rehousing than non-migrant applicants.

The household type and age composition of ethnic groups varies widely in the WMCA area, and this accounts to some extent for some disparities in homelessness risks. Elevated levels of renting (rather than owning) housing amongst Black and Mixed ethnicity groups contributes substantially to their increased homelessness risks, as does disproportionate exposure to poverty, but employment factors seem to play less of a role. Even once all of these are other factors are taken into account, however, our statistical regression analysis indicates that ethnicity-related factors have an independent, direct effect in increasing the risk of homelessness that Black households in particular face in the West Midlands.

Once the indirect effects of ethnicity-related factors via other predictors of increased homelessness are taken into account, the heightened risks faced by Black, and to a lesser extent Asian, households in the West Midlands appear even starker. Vignette cases for the West Midlands confirming that these indirect effects accounted for between a third and over half of all excess risks for the selected ethnic groups and specified characteristics.

Interestingly, the actual observed homelessness rates for Black-led households in the West Midlands is substantially lower than what our statistical model would predict, based on relationships observed across the whole country. So, although the homelessness risk of Black households is very adverse in the West Midlands, as it is in England, it is less bad in practice than one might expect. This might be indicative of some aspects of policy response or prevention activity in the region, which is successful to a degree in mitigating what could otherwise be an even more adverse situation. This finding seems in line with the results of the statutory homelessness statistical analysis where some disparities in outcomes for Black households were less than in other regions.

# Chapter 3 - Key Informant Perspectives on the Housing, Homelessness and Asylum Systems

## Introduction

This chapter examines key informant evidence on the impact of core systems impacting on the levels, profile and experience of homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the WMCA area. We start by reviewing stakeholder perspectives on the operation of the statutory homelessness system, using these qualitative insights to better understand some of the quantitative patterns discussed in the last chapter. We then move on to consider the role played by the housing system as a whole in driving minoritised homelessness in the WMCA, before considering the local impacts of the national asylum system which emerged as a major theme during fieldwork. Finally, the particular challenges associated with the exempt supported accommodation sector in the WMCA are discussed, as these strongly interconnect with the pressures within the homelessness, housing and asylum systems, as described by senior stakeholders.

## Statutory homelessness system

In keeping with some of the statistical patterns captured in Chapter 2, which imply a more difficult position in the WMCA area than across England as a whole, there was general acknowledgement that experiences of the statutory homelessness system in the region were often very poor. While this impacted across all ethnicities, it was noted that minoritised communities, especially Black groups and those with experience of the asylum system, are disproportionately affected, given their heightened exposure to statutory homelessness:

> *"But because refugees are more likely to be homeless, because Black men are more likely to be homeless, they will be adversely impacted by what is a broken system..." (Homelessness/housing sector)*

Several other key informants flagged the vulnerability of Black men to homelessness in the WMCA, and data supplied by Birmingham City Council indicates that Black African groups face higher risks of statutory homelessness than Black Caribbean people in the city, and that Bangladeshi households are at greater risk than Pakistani households[19]. Our modelling analysis demonstrated that the general structural disadvantage faced by Black, Mixed and some Asian ethnic groups, especially within the housing market and as regards exposure to poverty, likely rooted in historic racism, as well as demographic factors and ethnicity-related variables (that imply ongoing discrimination), frame these ethnic disparities on statutory and other forms of homelessness.

Some of these structural points were picked up by our key informants, one of whom wondered whether this disproportionality in homelessness may in part reflect tenure profiles, with Black people concentrated in the PRS sector, which is generally more insecure than other tenures, with no-fault evictions continuing to be a major trigger to accommodation loss[20]. There were also persistent suggestions that Black people and other minoritised groups face racism and prejudice from private landlords:

> *"…is [it] that more of our black households live in the private rented sector [or that] more of them are being evicted?" (Housing/homelessness sector)*

[19] However, recorded rough sleeping remains predominantly a White male experience in Birmingham, a finding that is keeping with evidence of the higher preponderance of complex support needs amongst this population than minoritised communities, as discussed in Chapter 2.
[20] The Government has committed to abolishing 'no fault' evictions in England via the Renters' Rights Bill.

The importance of community transmission of knowledge about housing and homelessness rights was picked up in an earlier report in this programme (see Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2024), and was a theme flagged by several local authority key informants. One expressed the view that some minoritised groups - particularly refugees and other migrants - are strongly encouraged to use the statutory homelessness system by other members of their ethnic communities, as well as by grassroots and specialist advice organisations. In her experience, these local factors went some considerable way to explaining the concentration of some minoritised communities in the statutory homelessness system:

> *"It's disproportionately high in terms of minoritised communities thinking that their only route into a roof over their heads is to come through the homelessness system…people that have come through the asylum resettlement route - that the narrative to those communities from their own communities is it's like a rite of passage. You have to come into [temporary accommodation]. You have to sit there for so many years, and then you'll get this…It's not just word of mouth. A number of these agencies that are set up to support new communities, that's the advice that you get given." (Local authority sector)*

She went on to say:

> *"We've got a body of work to do with the migration team to say, 'How do we skill up the officers within the migrant support sector to say, "That is not the narrative you should be putting out there"?' You should not be a referral agency into the council. We need to look at how we work together in terms of skilling people up to say, 'Okay, there's a connection between your housing aspirations and having a good property and getting a good job.' How do we get people onto the ladder around good jobs and recognising that? What's the work that those organisations could do directly themselves with private landlords as one option as well?" (Local authority sector)*

However, given the relative abruptness of people's ejection from the asylum system (see below), their lack of financial resources (the vast majority are unable to work while their asylum claim is processed), it is understandable that local advisors would direct refugees to exercise their statutory entitlement to seek homelessness assistance.

At the same time, local authority stakeholders pointed to expectations on the part of certain settled communities – White as well as some ethnic minority groups –that they should be able to use the homeless system to get on the 'housing ladder'. This could reflect family histories, wherein previous generations have accessed social housing via homelessness routes, but also it was said in some cases to connect to strategies to access low-cost home ownership, such that there was a strong preference for council over housing association properties so that the Right-to-Buy could be exercised. As Chapter 2 has indicated, the reality is that very few of those accepted in the WMCA area as being owed a homelessness prevention or relief duty will be able to access social housing through that route. But some local authority representatives nonetheless felt these (outdated) expectations could drive behaviours, and do so in ways that varied across ethnic groups.

> *"There may be some cultural stuff in terms of people's expectation of housing… Almost in the community there is a narrative of, 'This is what you do. You go to the council. You want to get a council property – not a housing association, a council property – because they're cheaper and you have the Right to Buy.' …There will be communities, White British…Their parents, their grandparents had a council property. That is the only thing that they know, and so therefore that is what they will hold out for because they feel it's their right almost…There are other communities that feel that way, but it would stand out probably with the Black African community. Certainly I've heard staff talk about Somalian community being a particular example of that. (Housing and homelessness sector)*

> *"There's an overreliance there in terms of council property being the first rung on the ladder in terms of getting a roof over your head…What I did pick up, particularly when I used to do the homeless applications, was a desire for that not to be the end of it. There was always an*

*aspiration of, 'Can I get a property that one day I'll be able to buy?' Hence why you really struggle to say to people, 'Actually, you're more eligible for a flat,' or 'If you want that area, you've got to wait X number of years,' etc. It's interesting that, even through that homelessness route, there's a desire for home ownership." (Local authority sector)*

A number of ethnic disparities were also noted in Chapter 2 as regards the experiences and outcomes of the statutory homelessness system. Explanations for some of these differences were surfaced in discussions with senior stakeholders. For example, the greater likelihood of ethnic minority families accepted as homeless spending time in local authority-arranged temporary accommodation, as compared with White families accepted as homeless, was attributed at least in part to the strong presence of migrants to the UK in some of these minoritised groups. This means that they may have fewer options to live "homeless at home"[21] than their White counterparts with local support networks:

*"Then what we see through the system is that the likelihood of needing temporary accommodation after a homeless application is greater if you're a black African household, and then if we also correlate it to immigration status, if people have come through a refugee route then they are more likely to need temporary accommodation." (Housing/homelessness sector)*

*"…what we'd imagine is that White families are a lot more likely to be able to do homeless at home...They've probably got family, some sort of status in the country, some sort of housing background and therefore strength. Somebody's got a home that can stay in." (Housing/homelessness sector)*

The statistical analysis also demonstrated that homeless families from minoritised communities spent substantially longer on average living in temporary accommodation than White families. This pattern was said by key informants to relate mainly to household size, given difficulties in sourcing suitable properties for the larger families found most commonly in certain minoritised communities:

*"Some Black households will end up being in temporary accommodation for longer because they're larger households as well, again Black African being the most obvious of that, because they're bidding on properties which are four, five, six-bedroom properties. They just never become available, so therefore they end up in overcrowded temporary accommodation for longer as well." (Housing/homelessness sector)*

## Housing system

There was a strong consensus amongst key informants that an acute shortage of affordable housing in Birmingham and other parts of the West Midlands was substantially responsible for these pressures within the statutory homeless system, driving up homelessness presentations, and at the same time making it much harder to rehouse those accepted into suitable settled or even temporary accommodation.

This shortfall in the availability of social housing affected all ethnic groups. However, as just noted, an issue with particular implications for some minoritised communities was the inadequate supply of larger family housing in the social rented sector.

*"We've lost an awful lot to Right-to-Buy, and so when people come through the homeless route, we certainly find it much more difficult for us to be able to accommodate large families, their stay in temporary accommodation is longer, that has a greater impact in terms of the financial burden that they're placed into during that period of time..." (Housing/homelessness*

[21] "Homeless at home" is used to describe the situation where a household has been accepted as statutorily homeless by a local authority but is able to arrange their own temporary accommodation while they await rehousing rather than have to use temporary accommodation arranged by the local authority.

*sector)*

At the same time, access to affordable private renting is also very challenging as a result of welfare restrictions, and in particular the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) limits on the amount of Housing Benefit that private tenants can receive:

> *"…it was good to see LHA rates go up somewhat[22]. They are still way below the 30th centile as far as the real market is concerned in Birmingham and they are still a driver of homelessness and a barrier to us getting people into the private rented sector because the rates are so much lower than what landlords can get, either in the market or going into the supported exempt sector. For us particularly, we'd love to see the legislation changed on supported exempt so we can manage it and get some of those family homes back into family accommodation." (Housing/homelessness sector)*

Other key informants we interviewed also linked the dire shortage of affordable, family-sized accommodation in the WMCA area to the proliferation of supported exempt accommodation schemes in the region. The plethora of troubling issues surrounding the exempt accommodation sector are discussed in more detail below, but for now it is worth noting its deleterious impacts on the wider housing system in the West Midlands. Key informants described larger family homes being routinely converted into "rabbit hutches" for single people in response to the financial incentives for (often dubious) landlords to move into this lucrative sector:

> *"… [private landlords], the ones that take singles, because actually they can get twelve people into what is a six-bedroomed house or something, five-bedroomed house. I know there was a house that recently came for sale near us that had been a multi-occupied, and they've got fifteen rooms in a six-bedroomed house. They've broken everything up completely." (Domestic violence sector)*

A link was also made with the asylum system, with the Home Office-commissioned accommodation provider Serco said to be competing with local authorities and poorer households in the private rented sector. This again generated particular challenges around accommodating larger families:

> *"Serco, of course, will pay much more than the Local Housing Allowance rate…So the reality is that for that cohort of individuals that we're looking to provide access to accommodation, there isn't enough, whether that's in the private rented sector or in the social sector, that's affordable. So we have got families that are essentially stuck in temporary accommodation, particularly large families. Of course, that will also link to [ethnic] disproportionality, because a lot of the families that we're dealing with through the asylum route, but also locally, are the larger families." (Housing/homelessness sector)*

As noted earlier, another key issue repeatedly raised by both senior stakeholders and frontline workers, was a strong sense that minoritised communities face prejudice and racism from private landlords (see also Bramley *et al*, 2022). This was said to especially affect newly arrived migrant households, whose unfamiliarity with UK systems and law can be exploited by unscrupulous landlords, such that they find themselves concentrated in the very worst housing conditions.

> *"Maybe one of the things that does need more support is how the state regulates and supports private sector…that's probably where the biggest issues lie around homelessness and so on, and exploitation…given the diverse communities in Birmingham and the exploitation of some of our poorest communities. Certainly, in terms of newly arrived communities, people who maybe have had refugee status granted, we know that they live in some of the - those people live in some of the worst housing conditions in the private sector, both in Birmingham and the rest of the country. So yes, and I would think, yes, the racism that accompanies that, not treating people with dignity and respect is probably, yes. It's predictable, isn't it, yes. It's foreseeable." (Advice sector)*

[22] LHA was re-linked to the 30th percentile of local private rents in April 2024 but subsequently re-frozen.

There was far less reference to overt racism or discrimination within the social rented sector, though one research participant wondered whether the allocation of new build properties in particular was always fairly distributed between ethnic groups. In fact, data supplied by Birmingham City Council demonstrates a dramatic shift in the ethnic profile of those allocated social housing in the city over the past two decades. The proportion of new social allocations made to White British households in Birmingham dropped from 55 % to 19% between 2001 and 2024, while the proportion made to Asian households rose from 4% to 23%, and to Black households from 12% to 29%. This means that White households are now underrepresented in new allocations in Birmingham relative to their population share, although they continue to dominate the existing tenant population, whereas Black Africans are the most overrepresented group in new allocations.

There tended to be more emphasis on some of the positive steps taken by social landlords to prevent homelessness, most notably by helping tenants manage rent arrears and by minimizing eviction levels, albeit that the practice of some social landlords was said to be better than others in this respect. Nonetheless, housing stakeholders acknowledged significant Black overrepresentation with respect to both rent arrears and eviction, particularly amongst Black men. In some cases this was linked to insufficient mental health support for vulnerable Black male tenants with experience of trauma who may behave in ways that put their tenancy at risk (see also Chapters 4 and 5).

> *"…Black individuals are disproportionately affected by rent arrears and experienced higher rates of eviction, and then black individuals are overrepresented in homelessness figures..." (Homelessness/housing sector)*

A key concern as regards housing outcomes for minority homeless households, whether rehoused via homelessness or mainstream social housing allocation routes, is to ensure that they are not placed in unsafe areas where they would face significant racist threat (see also Fitzpatrick et al, 2024). Some local authorities and housing providers were clearly very alive to this issue and explicitly took it into consideration when making tenancy offers:

> *"I mean there definitely is racism in [local authority area*], and there certainly are pockets of accommodation stock where I wouldn't consider placing families of particular backgrounds, to be honest…particular areas that have got a large poorer population of white individuals, and when you introduce additional competition for housing and addition of things, it creates a real tension…clearly you don't want to come from somewhere that's a warzone to somewhere that's not welcoming of you. There are other areas of [local authority area] that are extremely welcoming and extremely supportive of new communities that come in, but not in all of them, and it's something we really have to be very mindful of." (Homelessness/housing sector)*

Other social housing providers, while acknowledging the potential risks or racist harassment and abuse, left the choice with the prospective tenant, in a hint of the 'ethnicity-blind' approach that we found to be quite prevalent amongst some non-local authority stakeholders in the WMCA area (see Chapter 4).

> *"There's a certain area…that does have a bit of a reputation. I think, for example, if we were to have a direct match come up in that particular area, I think certainly from a staffing perspective we'd have some concerns in relation to placing somebody in a particular area, but if we had that offer available then obviously we'd offer it to that individual and it would be their choice, their decision." (Housing sector)*

While being sensitive to the safety of minoritised communities is clearly an important issue for public authorities to take seriously, it was also flagged that local authorities with less currently diverse populations can use this as a reason not to assist with the resettlement of refugees. This echoes concerns about 'balanced communities' policies sometimes acting to the detriment of efforts to rehouse homeless and other vulnerable households:

*"…local authorities might then use that [lack of diversity] as a reason for not wanting to – 'we're not able to offer the numbers because the areas that we've got are not diverse enough.' So we have had that. I'm pretty sure Serco see it all the time where they place asylum seekers and there is evidence of racism and things..." (Migrant sector)*

## Impact of the asylum system

As will be evident from Chapter 2 and the sections above, the growing number of asylum placements made in the WMCA area in recent years was seen by key informants as a major factor shaping the level and ethnic profile of homelessness in the region, albeit that EU migration and Brexit had also played a role.

*"So in [local authority] we've got three times the number of asylum seekers placed into [area] than we had previously. So that in itself is driving homeless approaches, particularly given that the Home Office obviously are now fast-tracking applications. So we're seeing quite a lot of those people…have an accommodation need, an immediate one, and coming through the homeless routes, so that is skewing our homeless figures. It's also skewing our temporary accommodation figures." (Housing/homelessness sector)*

*"…about a third of our homeless presentations are people who have come into the UK as migrants. Now, that might be refugee, that might be EEA, but they've come into the country and so when we check their status, their status to get recourse to public funds has come as a migrant route, so about a third. Then, about a half of people we have in temporary accommodation have come through a migrant route, and so there's a very disproportionately large number there. Then, if you do a racial background on that, then obviously there's a disproportionately high number who are Black." (Housing/homelessness sector)*

These pressures had been exacerbated by the fast tracking of some asylum decision making[23], meaning that local authorities in the WMCA area had found themselves having to handle large surges in applications from those exiting the asylum system with positive decisions and statutory homelessness entitlements. It was argued that the Home Office had to get better at forewarning local authorities of these likely surges so that they could prepare, and also that it would be beneficial if the notice periods for leaving Home Office accommodation (28 days at the time of fieldwork) could be extended to reflect the prevention duty that local authorities have under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (to act within 56 days of likely homelessness):

*"So like the streamlined asylum processing system, we [should be] able to say in the next six months, these are the number of decisions that are going to be made in your areas…These are the people that are going to be approaching your homelessness teams, so that they've got the heads up of that…One of the things I think that would be really helpful is matching the amount of days that you get once you're post-decision… to what local authorities get, which I think is 56 days… So bringing that in line would be really helpful because then that gives local authorities a little bit longer to safely accommodate people." (Voluntary sector)*

Since fieldwork (in December 2024), the Home Office announced that the move on period has been extended from 28 to 56 days on a trial basis till June 2025.

Two key groups with positive asylum decisions were said to be present in significant numbers in the statutory homelessness system in the WMCA area. The first was single men, who were unlikely to

[23] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/streamlined-asylum-processing/streamlined-asylum-processing-accessible

be found to be in priority need under the homelessness legislation[24], and were most likely to be referred under prevention or relief duties to problematic supported exempt accommodation (see section below), or become hidden homeless. In some local authority areas they were said to generally go straight from the asylum system into exempt accommodation without applying to the local authority:

> *"…single man, you're not going to get on a housing list, are you? So it's where do those people go? There's no tracking that we or others do to know what happens to people after that point. So that's the first thing. I imagine, like as I said before, it's likely to be living – we know a lot of people live with friends." (Voluntary sector)*

It was argued that the suddenness of their ejection from the asylum system (see above) coupled with the institutionalising effects of spending long periods in hotel-based asylum accommodation, and their unfamiliarity of the mainstream UK benefits and other bureaucratic systems, meant that some single male refugees were unprepared for the challenge of independent living.

> *"…most of them are single males, so when they come out of that accommodation, after having been there a long time, having been given asylum, their priority need isn't very great in terms of homelessness. So that in itself creates issues. So we're very much trying to support people to understand what the system looks like, because obviously if you're in a hotel, you get your breakfast, you get your meals, you get everything paid for, and then all of a sudden you're granted asylum and all of that lifeline disappears. So it's trying to get people ready for that, supporting people to understand how to apply for benefits, what to do, but also giving them those other things." (Housing/homelessness sector)*

The second main group were refugee families with children. These families must be accommodated by local authorities, as they have priority need status under the homelessness legislation. It was reported that 'family reunion' was a primary source of these statutory homelessness applications, with single male refugees often ejected from exempt accommodation once their wives and children arrived from overseas. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, the temporary accommodation that they experience may well be very poor quality, cramped and lacking in basic facilities (despite legal requirements that it be 'suitable'). They could find themselves in this accommodation for a very extended period of time, especially if they are a larger family, as noted above. In addition, especially given the emergency nature of their housing need, associated with the very short period in which they (until recently) had to leave Home Office accommodation, they are likely to be offered an 'out-of-area' placement:

> *"…if you've been waiting for a decision on your claim for a number of years and then suddenly get a decision, the local authority - so, for example, Birmingham might not have any accommodation, so they then place out of area. So that mother - so say for example, it's a single mum with three kids, you're then going to be placed in another hotel out of area where you can't cook your own food." (Voluntary sector)*

It is yet to be seen whether the extension to 56 days will meaningfully move the dial on these challenges.

Home Office support was said to be insufficient in terms of community integration of those leaving the asylum system. This means that some WMCA local authorities had themselves invested in language, education and other initiatives to aid integration and to help manage community tensions. Birmingham City Council, for example, commissions the Refugee and Migrant Centre to provide 'move-on' support to facilitate successful integration and economic independence. A representative from another WMCA local authority explained that:

[24] This is despite the fact that the homelessness legislation provides that those who are vulnerable as a result of being a refugee should be assessed as in priority need. Notably, none of our key informants or the frontline workers who participated in focus groups made reference to this.

*"…we choose, as a local authority, to fund additional support for those cohorts, because the migrant help support, which is provided as part of the statutory offer through the government, doesn't work - the Home Office - isn't to the required standard… we choose to fund that directly in order to help with the cohesion issues, because otherwise we would have large groups of individuals and youths potentially with nothing to do, and that would impact upon our challenges. So we support with ESOL, which is funded directly by the local authority, but we also support with meaningful activities, etc…we offer free Wi-Fi, offer access to computers, etc." (Housing/homelessness sector)*

It was also reported that well-intentioned initiatives can sometimes stoke community tensions around housing placements. A particular example was given of a scheme of reserved housing for those accepted via the Afghan and Ukrainian refugee resettlement scheme. The interaction with the local authority's choice-based letting allocations system raised concerns about the safety of those rehoused.

*"…no thought whatsoever has been given by government in relation to we have to advertise everything via our choice-based lettings system. If we advertise the property, we put the address on there or release the road and then somebody can see that it's for Afghans only or Ukraine, it's going to create huge unrest within the community, particularly if you're somebody that has lived in that area for a long time, is homeless because of domestic abuse. You've been in temporary accommodation for four years…I think sometimes whilst well-intentioned, some of these schemes don't think about the practical realities because if we'd just gone with what government said and weren't creative, we would have created massive problems for those families where they would have not been wanted by their communities from the off." (Housing sector)*

Negative asylum decisions can also of course lead to homelessness, especially for those that become appeals rights exhausted. This group are at extremely high risk of rough sleeping, destitution and exploitation, and have no entitlements to homelessness assistance (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2023; Watts-Cobbe *et al*, 2024).

*"…you might become appeals right exhausted…Very few enforced removals out of the country…Quite often, from my understanding…enforcement officers might turn up, but they're not going to be there. So there's a whole group of people that are underground in the country that have no status, probably working cash-in-hand, and we don't know where they are. So then they probably fall foul to all sorts of different things." (Voluntary sector)*

It was also noted that the circumstances in which asylum seekers and refugees arrived in the UK could fundamentally determine their chances of becoming homeless and making a statutory application. A contrast was drawn between Black African refugees, who are a severely disadvantaged group heavily concentrated within the statutory homelessness system; Ukrainian refugees, who were said to most often move from hosting schemes into the PRS, with their being White Europeans easing their access to housing; and migrants from Hong Kong, who were reported to generally have at least some assets when they arrived in the UK, enabling them to obtain their own housing, and be far less likely than other groups to have to call upon statutory homelessness assistance.

## Challenges associated with the supported exempt accommodation sector

These pressures arising from the housing, homelessness and asylum systems in the WMCA area were all felt to be feeding into the current supported 'exempt' accommodation scandal, which has Birmingham and the wider West Midlands as its national epicentre. As noted in Chapter 1, voluntary

charter schemes on supported exempt accommodation, such as that established in Birmingham[25], have been of limited effect given the ability of providers to grow their business regardless of whether they meet they meet these non-mandatory quality standards, allowing this problematic sector to mushroom.

It was reported by both senior stakeholders and frontline workers (see Chapter 5) that if you are single and homeless in the West Midlands, including a disproportionate number of Black and other ethnic minority men, including refugees, the main 'offer' at prevention and relief stage will be shared exempt accommodation.

> *"…across the West Midlands, what the majority of people get is dumped into the supported exempt accommodation sector in Birmingham, and there's some really quality supported exempt accommodation in Birmingham, but unfortunately, there's also some not-so-great stuff…if you're single and you walk through the door… [that's] the prevention or relief option… you can be matched within 24 hours" (Housing/homelessness sector)*

The diabolical conditions in much of this exempt accommodation were emphasised by key informants across the housing, homeless, criminal justice and other sectors, sometimes in quite lurid terms:

> *"We've had landlords raping tenants under threat of eviction, we've done home visits and there's no front door - there's a space for one but anyone can walk in. We've had fire doors welded shut, we've had excrement smeared on the walls…we went out to one once, and the lead support worker when we were doing a home visit said, 'You can come back with an f'ing warrant if you want to do a home visit.' We then go back to the [local area outside of West Midlands] and say we can't possibly approve the address, and they say, well there's nothing in [local area outside of West Midlands]. …riddled with organised crime links, because why risk selling heroin and go to jail when you can just run organised housing instead." (Criminal justice sector)*

The high costs to the public purse associated with this often profoundly harmful of accommodation was noted by a range of interviewees. One key informant put these costs in the context of the management challenges faced by exempt accommodation providers, but in terms which offered no more reassurance as regards the conditions endured by the people living in it:

> *"…the landlords have a real challenge in terms of, they're housing vulnerable single men, usually, in shared houses. The houses get trashed, and the amount of ASB [antisocial behaviour] and everything else is high, but the amount of money that landlords get for each individual room is also high and it offsets it." (Housing/homelessness sector)*

It was noted that problematic exempt accommodation was an issue not just in Birmingham but in other WMCA local authorities too. Nonetheless some of these other local authorities, and others elsewhere across the country, routinely refer single homeless people, including prison leavers, into Birmingham to use the exempt accommodation there, reflecting a lack of provision in their own area. Unlike temporary accommodation out-of-area placements, there is no obligation on referring local authorities to notify 'receiving' local authorities of supported exempt accommodation placements, and in any case some of these providers advertise to potential users directly, cutting out local authorities altogether. As many of those placed in this poor-quality exempt accommodation have complex support needs, this was said to be placing an enormous additional strain on Birmingham's social infrastructure:

> *"…quite a lot of the local authorities in the West Midlands, their first option in dealing with someone who's homeless is to send them to Birmingham, to the supported housing estate…that creates some really skewed figures…you could go to [local authority] and they could say, we don't have a homelessness problem, everyone that walks into our door gets*

[25] https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20006/housing/2333/supported_exempt_accommodation/2

*housed on the first night. The fact is that they get housed in a criminally-run, not fit-for-purpose organisation in Birmingham." (Criminal justice sector)*

The new supported exempt accommodation legislation[26] is for that reason warmly welcomed in Birmingham in particular, where it was reported that the local authority would use the new licensing powers to close down large swathes of the most problematic provision, albeit that important questions remain on how both the licensing scheme and the new support standards will be funded.

> *"…our analysis tells us that there are twice as many units of [exempt] accommodation than the city needs… [legislation gives] Birmingham also the control about not having floods of single people from all over the country – and certainly over the West Midlands – into Birmingham, so it's cutting off that pipeline…So a better-managed, commissioned in some way, or at least licensed provision would mean we'd actually be able to shrink that sector down over time to being the right size, rather than one that is probably getting on for three times the size that we actually need as an area. (Housing/homelessness sector)*

However, this may come as a shock to some of the other West Midlands local authorities, and other local authorities across the country referring into the West Midlands, which were said to remain unprepared in terms of developing appropriate single homelessness provision in their own area.

> *"So Birmingham are chomping at the bit waiting for this legislation to kick in, because the minute it does they will run with it and they will get rid of all these awful providers. The problem then is that all the other local authorities are nowhere near far enough forward to have their own provision, and what do you do with 16,000 homeless people who have no links in Birmingham [but who are currently in exempt accommodation there]. It's really brewing." (Criminal justice sector)*

The frontline worker perspective on the realities of exempt accommodation for their clients is presented in Chapter 5.

## Conclusion

The statutory homelessness system in the WMCA area was viewed as 'broken' by many key informants, with minoritised communities – especially Black families - worst affected by long waits in poor quality temporary accommodation. For single homeless people, including a disproportionate number of Black and other minority ethnic men, the main homelessness prevention or relief 'offer' was reported to be referral to shared supported exempt accommodation, mainly in Birmingham, much of which was said to be in appalling condition, and with exploitative practices and criminal involvement rife. New legislation will require local authorities to license exempt accommodation schemes, and was expected to lead to much of the worst of this provision being closed down in Birmingham, although it remains unclear how both the new licensing regime and support standards will be funded. The potential for a mass exodus of providers from the sector was anticipated to cause significant problems for some other local authorities, both within and beyond the WMCA area, accustomed to referring refugees, ex-prisoners, people with complex support needs, and other vulnerable single homeless people into Birmingham's exempt accommodation.

There was widespread agreement that an acute shortage of affordable housing in the WMCA area, in both the social and private rented sectors, was the fundamental driver of the pressures in the statutory homelessness system that led to these very poor outcomes. The shortfall in new social lets relative to demand, coupled with LHA limits that restrict access to the private rented sector, made finding settled housing for homeless households extremely difficult. The effects were felt particularly

[26] The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 introduces national minimum standards for supported accommodation, and requires local authorities to create local supported accommodation licensing schemes. The Act came into force in August 2023, and the Government is currently consulting on its implementation.

by larger families with children, most of whom were from minoritised communities.

Private landlords moving into the more lucrative exempt accommodation sector was also said to also have reduced the availability of family accommodation in the WMCA, while racism and discrimination by private landlords was reported to be a key barrier to accessing housing across minoritised communities more generally. Social landlords were seldom reported by key informants as engaging in overt racism. But a particular area of weakness flagged was support for tenants with mental health problems who may be at risk of eviction as a result of anti-social behaviour. A disproportionate number of those affected were said to be Black men. There seemed to some variation in the extent to which social landlords took account of the risk of racial harassment in assessing the suitability of the housing offers they made to minoritised households.

Alongside a dysfunctional housing system, another key factor said to be placing pressure on the statutory homelessness system in the WMCA area was the local effects of the national asylum system, with local authorities having to cope with surges in homelessness applications associated with the fast-tracking of asylum decision-making, with 'family reunion' cases a primary source of these statutory applications. Some key informants felt that more could be done by community organisations and others to diversify the routes taken by refugee and other migrant groups to resolve their housing needs. However, given the still relatively abrupt withdrawal of Home Office accommodation after a positive asylum decision is reached, and the very limited resources of asylum seekers who are unable to work while their claim is assessed, new approaches are clearly required if the asylum system isn't to continue to be a predictable generator of exceptionally high homelessness demand.

It was argued by some local authority key informants that some settled communities, both White and certain ethnic minorities, applied as homeless in the hope of accessing council housing, with a view to exercising the Right-to-Buy and getting on the homeownership ladder. However, official statistics indicate that only a very small minority of households accepted as being owed a homelessness duty currently gain access to social housing in the West Midlands.

# Chapter 4 - Key Informant Perspectives on Wider Systems Issues

## Introduction

Widening out from the housing and homelessness sectors specifically, key informants flagged a range of concerns about other aspects of the systemic response to people from minoritised communities at risk of homelessness in the WMCA. The issues most evident in these discussions pertained to poor treatment within health services, inadequacy and disadvantage in the criminal justice sector, missed opportunities for prevention in the education and youth services sectors, and weaknesses in the voluntary and community sector responses.

In addition, there were a number of system-wide themes that spoke to current challenges in reducing disproportionate experience of homelessness amongst minoritised communities. These related to issues of data inadequacy and 'ethnicity-blind' approaches, alongside matters of diversity competence, language and trust issues.

## Poor treatment within health services

Good mental health services are absolutely critical for many people experiencing homelessness but it is well established that these services are under extreme pressure in all parts of the country (Pathway & Crisis, 2024). This leads to very high thresholds for access, and strict resource management policies (such as 'fail to attend' penalties), that can impact particularly harshly on those people experiencing homelessness who have complex support needs (Bramley *et al*, 2019). Further, it is well evidenced that minoritised communities, especially Black people, fare particularly badly in the mental health service (NHS, 2020). Common mental disorders are particularly prevalent among Black women, and psychotic disorders among Black men, yet Black adults receive the lowest rates of treatment across broad ethnicities, and have a substantially higher likelihood of being detained under the Mental Health Act (Wessely, 2019; NHS, 2024). It has been argued that the experiences of Black minorities in particular have been characterised by high levels of mistrust of mental health services against an existing backdrop of social and economic disempowerment (Lawrence, 2021), with heightened reluctance to approach GPs regarding mental health concerns culminating in reduced or delayed treatment engagement (Cooper *et al,* 2013).

The combined effects of homelessness, mental ill health and race-related disadvantage can have devastating impacts on those directly affected. These themes emerged in the West Midlands fieldwork with several key informants and also focus group interviewees (see Chapter 5) referencing the apparently disproportionate rate at which Black men are evicted from social housing as a result of anti-social behaviour. It was suggested that this in many cases may relate to trauma-induced but undiagnosed mental health issues. One key informant in particular was adamant that this was a major route into homelessness that amounts to institutional racism:

> *"…people that probably already had really horrific experiences, and obviously the right thing there would have been that we'd have been able to get them engaged with social services and get the right mental health support. It's not in any way am I saying that [housing association] or my team targeted people, but it was that real reflection on how the system had just completely failed those individuals, and one trauma to the next." (Homelessness/housing sector)*

Echoing a theme also to emerge from the focus group discussions (see Chapter 5), advice sector key informants stressed the vital importance of timely assistance to people at risk of homelessness with mental health problems before matters escalate, but also the particular challenges this posed meant these were often the cases where efforts to prevent homelessness were least successful.

*"I think people with mental health conditions…who maybe don't seek advice because of that, then don't seek advice when they should do and things become too far developed, I think is a big barrier to getting a successful outcome for some people because they just haven't grasped getting advice at an early stage…people get up today and decide whether or not they're going to seek advice. If you've got to wait hours in a queue or on the phone and you didn't get through or didn't get an answer, you probably won't do it for a few more days, few more weeks and things can spiral downwards in that time." (Voluntary sector)*

A related point made by another interviewee, this time from the community sector, was the 'impatience' of statutory services more generally with people with mental ill-health and other complex support needs, and the need for psychologically-informed approaches that are more tolerant of some of the ways in which this trauma manifests:

*"We have clients who have severe mental health issues and are known to statutory services like adult social care, but we will listen to them, even though that it might seem as if they're yelling at us and they're shouting at us and they're screaming on the phone at us. Sometimes they use inappropriate language, but we listen and we allow them the opportunity to vent it off, and once they are done, we're able to have this conversation that they need to have. Whereas services will turn around and say, 'Do not speak to me like that,' and will put the phone down, and that aggravates somebody's condition…they seem to be very impatient. They want everything to be perfect, they want the clients to be perfect." (Community sector)*

Aside from mental health services, the other main health-related theme to emerge related to difficulties accessing primary care and especially GP surgeries, leading to inappropriate use of emergency services such as A&E. Despite GPs having obligations to service local populations, it was reported that surgeries can be resistant to registering people living in temporary accommodation and, especially, those within the asylum system. Resource constraints were thought to play an important role, particularly given the additional pressures placed on health and other services in areas where there is a concentration of asylum accommodation.

*"what [GPs] were basically saying is it's not sustainable for us to do it [take patients who are asylum seekers] because we haven't been given the funding proportionate to enable us to expand, to take this huge cohort of individuals that's been placed here, and basically we'll only do it when there's further money that comes, that follows down through the health system, through the health service into it. So there was an element of holding people to ransom. The consequence of that was that we ended up with very large numbers of individuals accessing A&E for basic primary care services. There was an outbreak, in one of the hotels, of a particular disease, and... they all had to access [care] through that route." (Housing/homelessness sector)*

However, it was also posited that a degree of both racist and anti-homeless bias can also be at play.

*"It is actually very difficult sometimes to get homeless families and individuals into services...we are seeing more and more, I guess, rogue GPs not opening the doors for particular groups of individuals…It's difficult for grassroot professionals to know how to challenge them constructively, because clearly you don't want a very vulnerable person to have a very bad experience going into a local GP. " (Housing/homelessness sector)*

In one particularly shocking example a key informant told the story of being challenged by a GP receptionist about use of the surgery by people living in local homeless accommodation:

*"There have been instances where people have gone in and been turned away by the receptionists. In fact, in the last couple of years, I once got a phone call from a very irate receptionist, 'Why do you keep sending me all these people like this?' 'Well, that's because they live in your area and that's where our temporary accommodation is, and that's why you*

*need to register them.' There are definitely biases that play in at a local level." (Housing/homelessness sector)*

## Inadequacies of the criminal justice system

There were two very different issues raised pertaining to the criminal justice system: the first, and most prominent, related to the poor service that women survivors of domestic violence received from the criminal justice system that undermined attempts to prevent their homelessness; the second pertained to recent changes in sentencing and associated practice for those convicted of crimes that may disadvantage perpetrators from minoritised communities, leaving them at particular risk of homelessness.

**Failing domestic abuse survivors**

As Chapter 2 has evidenced, there are a disproportionate number of statutory homelessness cases within the WMCA area precipitated by domestic violence from within the South Asian community. The overall systemic response to domestic abuse said to be wholly inadequate in ways which put women survivors from all ethnicities at continued risk. In particular, it was argued that both the family courts and the police had to take domestic abuse much more seriously, and offer speedier and more effective protection to all women escaping abuse.

> *"…think we need a criminal justice system that makes us safe, and we haven't got that, and perpetrators know that, and so do women. They know that if they call the police, nothing's going to happen and so does the perpetrator, so it makes him more powerful, in fact. " (Voluntary sector)*

> *"…we really need to tackle and challenge the judiciary in terms of how they deal with perpetrators…we need effective perpetrator management with all of the checks and balances around those individuals so that women and their children can genuinely keep a safe roof over their heads, and not feel that the only route they've got is they're the ones that need to present as homeless.' (Local authority sector)*

It was emphasised that the effectiveness of the criminal justice system is crucial to homelessness prevention, as women have to be made safe so that community-based options such as 'sanctuary schemes' (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), 2010) become viable, avoiding women having to their leave their homes and move into temporary accommodation (see also discussion in Chapter 5).

> *"Put him in prison when he has done something that's a crime, and stop women from being terrified and having to leave their homes. Deal with it through the root. It's a crime…criminal justice system prevents women from needing somewhere else to live. It doesn't need refuge. It doesn't need the council. They don't need to move. Just deal with him, so that criminal justice, that messaging to women that you're not alone and to perpetrators that they can't do what they like, so stop doing that." (Voluntary sector)*

Women survivors of domestic violence from some minoritised communities were said to face additional challenges when faced with risks of homelessness. For example, they may lack information about the relevant support services, particularly if their first language is not English, and in some instances they may face the prospect of losing the support of their entire family and the wider community:

> *"…they don't understand the system. I think it's really hard, and then if you've got no family you can turn to, because you've left, that makes it really difficult to get into housing, really hard. That is in some communities more than others, because most women that come through have something else, have people, but I think for some black and minority ethnic communities, that's not the case. They have nobody when they come…they've lost all the*

*people that they had around them, because family is so significant in the way they've been living their lives." (Voluntary sector)*

Speaking from direct professional experience of dealing with horrifying examples of wider family and even community complicity in serious domestic violence, it was cautioned that for women from some South Asian minoritised communities, these broader social dynamics mean that sanctuary scheme-type interventions may not be appropriate**:**

> *"Sometimes part of the keeping safe is you're not just leaving the perpetrator. You need to slightly distance yourself from the community as well in order to be safe, because of the emotional pressure…I guess in terms of some South Asian communities the sanctuary scheme is probably not [appropriate]. That's not to say it wouldn't work for other minoritised groups." (Local authority sector)*

The diverse economic circumstances of women from different minoritised communities, including distinct South Asian groups, was also flagged as relevant to assessing the viability of different options to protect the women and avoid or resolve their homelessness. The extreme financial vulnerability typically seen amongst Bangladeshi women, for example, as compared with the generally more positive economic prospects of women from the Indian community, were proffered as contrasting case studies to illustrate this point.

> *"I think that the Bangladeshi community has been particularly marginalised…you can see that the independence for those people is different to the Sikh community, for example, because of economic status, and therefore education, access to jobs, and access to purchasing properties, which is commonly carried out in those communities. The Bangladeshi community…when women do leave and do need housing, they often come with what they've got, what they're standing up with. There isn't the autonomy, and the economic basis for actually restarting your life doesn't exist, so they…can go on for the rest of their lives where they have challenges around sustaining expensive [housing], probably in the private sector accommodation." (Voluntary sector)*

As well as recognizing the implications of these divergent economic circumstances, it was posited that greater diversity competency was required on the part of a range of public services if they are to properly protect women from minoritised communities who face domestic abuse and associated homelessness risks. Family court judges were singled out for particular criticism in making unwarranted and damaging assumptions:

> *"They [judges] all require some cultural competence training. They really do, because there's just huge, huge, stereotypes, judgements, particularly where women don't speak English. You know, assumptions being made, assumptions being made on behalf of victims…It's not a good experience for women…You can see why they go back to perpetrators. You see why they go back into extended families. They kind of go, 'Oh, I just put up with it." (Local authority sector)*

Key informants discussed other systemic issues, beyond the criminal justice system, affecting domestic abuse survivors, as discussed further below.

**Disadvantage within the justice system**

It is well evidenced that some ethnic minority groups, and especially Black men, are overrepresented within the criminal justice system in general, and the prison system in particular (Ministry of Justice, 2022). This meant that a number of policy shifts within criminal justice in recent years were felt likely to have particular, and in some cases deleterious, effects on minority groups.

One example flagged was incentives placed on courts to increase rates of sentencing on the day of conviction, and a reduced emphasis on detailed pre-sentencing background reports, which could

undermine the efforts of the probation service to help avoid homelessness for those convicted of imprisonable offences:

> *"There's been a big push to sentence on the day without a very detailed analysis of people, or to sentence without reports at all. So all of the opportunity that you would have in a report to argue about the potential harms of…an imprisonment sentence and how that's going to in fact impact on future accommodation, is lost, because you don't get the opportunity to explore that in a report and argue for some other alternative that minimises that. There are some cases where clearly people are going to be locked up because of the seriousness of what they've done and the harm that they've caused. But you've got a group at the margins that it could tip either way, and one of the things you might argue vociferously is the destabilisation caused by making this person homeless because they're going to lose their accommodation when you lock them up." (Criminal justice system)*

It was felt that this may have had a disproportionate effect on some minoritised groups, not least because it removed the possibility of flagging the disadvantage faced by minoritised people within the criminal justice system, and more broadly at societal level, in order to encourage judges to be mindful of that when determining appropriate punishment:

> *"I'm not saying it's causation, but it'll be a correlation between the fact that when we stopped writing those really lengthy reports, and there was specific practice at the time to make the point of ethnic minorities' disproportionate treatment. You had an opportunity to put that in the report, make it really explicit. There has been a direct relationship between the decline of pre-sentence reports, the decline of community sentences, and the increase in prison sentences. I'm not suggesting that's cause and effect, but it's a notable fact." (Criminal justice system)*

The recent prison early release scheme (Brader, 2024) has had a major, though short-term impact, making it more challenging to prevent homelessness and/or temporarily accommodate these cohorts. Again, given the ethnic profile of the prison population (Ministry of Justice, 2022), this was said to be likely to impact especially on some minoritised groups, particularly Black men:

> *"…when they changed it and said everyone will be out a month early, we got hit by this huge wave of a month's worth of cases coming out. In the long [term] it doesn't make any difference because the same number of people are coming out anyway, but every time they change that time scale we get hit with another wave." (Criminal justice system)*

Despite the acknowledgment of ethnic disparities in experience of the criminal justice system, there seemed to be an 'ethnicity blind' approach taken to supporting ex-prisoners, including those at risk of homelessness, as is explored further below.

## Missed opportunities in education and youth services

Educational services – and especially schools – were viewed by some interviewees as a key conduit to supporting minoritised families and young people at risk of homelessness; a point reinforced by parents with direct experience homelessness in focus group discussions we have held elsewhere in England (Fitzpatrick *et al*, forthcoming):

> *"One thing our ethnic minorities do is they value education. Well, most people do. Most people value education, and that is seen a lot. The schools here also have a big role to play, and they offer breakfast clubs and feed children, as do community centres." (Community sector)*

However, it was flagged that local authorities in England have limited influence over schools with academy status. This can hamper efforts to minimise school exclusions, which disproportionately affect some minoritised groups (Equal Group, 2022), and heightens risks of homelessness in young adulthood (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2013).

*"..some of the challenges is the number of academies that have come in. We have limited influence. We can try to encourage and we can kind of use statistics to help us to show where people are, which schools are anomalies in that regard, I suppose, in terms of making too many exclusions, and we're able to advocate on behalf of young people, if that is an issue…" (Housing/homelessness sector)*

Youth crime, gangs and violence were said to be a major problem precipitating both youth and family homelessness in parts of the WMCA area, and disproportionately affected some minoritised communities.

*"Youth violence, absolutely, 100 per cent affects our ethnic minority groups more, 100 per cent…we can see it used to be African Caribbean specifically, but we've now got a cohort of Asian men coming through as well...So the [homelessness] applications will come through for a young person or the perpetrator or the aggressor or whatever, and then you've got the family as well that are also impacted that then need to move, and sometimes you've got multiple siblings that sort of comes through." (Homelessness/housing sector)*

Austerity-related cuts to youth services were highlighted as an impediment to reducing these youth homelessness risks, as hitherto these services would have supported young people on the margins of involvement in youth crime and gangs that can put their housing and that of their families at risk.

*"…we're having some of those discussions around what preventative work we can do from a youth justice perspective in the areas. I suppose what I would say is we've had a real underinvestment in those preventative services, particularly around youth, …all of that provision was cut, to be honest. So for us to reinstate some of that stuff or to do it differently, is very difficult, and obviously our budget situation is very challenging." (Housing/homelessness sector)*

Referring back to the criminal justice system, policing strategies were also seen as part of the problem, with a more centralised approach in recent years meaning that community presence and understanding had sometimes been very weak. This had made managing gang-related problems and resultant homelessness much more difficult than when there was a more localised approach.

*"…we used to have a lot more police officers locally based who knew their community, who were involved and understood the individuals, and County Lines is a big challenge for us…It is getting better because they are reversing some of that [centralised] model, but because they moved to a very centralised model…when an incident happened, they would send them across, but they'd be part of a great big response team that didn't know us, didn't know the community, didn't know the individuals…It became very difficult for us…So they're obviously trying to reverse some of that now, and local policing is perhaps coming back on the agenda, but we've got a lot of work to do to try and address the challenges that have happened in those periods where we haven't had any of that support at a community level." (Homelessness/housing sector)*

## Weaknesses in the voluntary sector response

As discussed in greater detail below, a point repeatedly made was that some mainstream voluntary sector organisations, as well as some public sector bodies, were failing to reach certain minoritised communities for trust, diversity competency and associated reasons. While our focus group discussions with people with direct experience of homelessness elsewhere in England suggest that these issues may sometimes be overplayed, with structural rather than cultural issues to the fore in systemic exclusion (Fitzpatrick *et al*, forthcoming), community-sector representatives emphasised an apparent disconnect between grassroots community organisations and the mainstream, professionalised voluntary sector.

*"Because we work within grassroots organisations, so we will know who is within that neighbourhood that might be a very good contact…Sometimes I think that the larger [voluntary] organisations are quite far from what's actually happening at grassroots." (Community sector)*

At the same time, we heard accounts that grassroots community organisations who were viewed by some key informants as having the credibility and contacts to the reach deep within minoritised groups were not always highly skilled or well resourced enough to provide a quality service to their communities. This was hinted at by one mainstream advice service, who emphasised the advantages of partnership working to maximise the value that both larger voluntary sector and smaller community-focused organisations can bring:

*"…grassroots groups…perhaps don't have at their disposal the sorts of resources that we do…You'll get smaller community groups who do do advice, perhaps with less resource at their disposal…So whilst I don't know what advice those groups are necessarily giving…as a big player in the city, we're trying to cascade down support to them where we can…I guess it gives credibility to us, for communities who might not always trust us, if the recommendation or the referral comes via one of those community groups." (Voluntary sector)*

A local authority representative with extensive experience of service commissioning was blunter on the matter:

*"…a number of those (grassroots) organisations required capacity support. Women didn't get the best deal from those services. We did say, 'You need to go on a journey to improve the offer that…You might be culturally sensitive, but your offer's pants! ' (Local authority sector)*

It should be noted that in the course of our fieldwork we had first-hand experience of this issue, with misunderstanding of the statutory homelessness and benefits systems becoming apparent in an interview with a grassroots community organisation As statutory services come under more pressure, these weaknesses in the voluntary sector response will become more of an issue:

*"...local government and some of the vital services, particularly around supporting people with mental health issues and so on…the impact of those services being minimised or even withdrawn is people turn up at our door and other voluntary sector, third sector agencies, and we just don't have the wherewithal to pick up the additional pressures…I think it is something we've all got to acknowledge is just going to become harder." (Voluntary sector)*

## Diversity competence, language and trust issues

A recurring theme across the key informant interviews was the idea that poor diversity competency across a wide range of public and some voluntary sector services was impeding efforts to address homelessness amongst minoritised communities. Examples given included a lack of attention being paid to meeting the faith or food preparation needs of people from particular religious backgrounds in shared accommodation contexts, or, as noted above, dubious assumptions being made about family relationships in South Asian communities.

Most commonly, reference was made to the language needs of some minoritised groups not being adequately met, including in emergency situations with potentially dire consequences. One particularly distressing case shared with us related to a very vulnerable woman fleeing domestic violence who was sent away from a refuge in one town to a refuge in another, with no support or forward planning, because the first-approached service couldn't meet her language needs:

*"We had two large women's refuge charities…There was no communication and they said they couldn't get an interpreter. Well, she's Bengali…it's one of our community languages that's widely spoken. If they'd have tried, they could have done it…and there was just no communication." (Community sector)*

This was an area where local authorities sometimes reported pushing voluntary sector partners and other public services to do more to adequately meet the needs of people at risk of homelessness who struggled to communicate in English:

> *"We, as the council, have had to really push on some pretty basic things, like you need to translate letters and you need to – yes, you might sit and talk to somebody about it with a translator, but it's complex. You're telling somebody a lot of things. You need to follow up the letter with – just use Google Translate, but at least do that …" (Housing/homelessness sector)*

Some voluntary sector and other stakeholders acknowledged that there was scope for improvement in their diversity practice in this respect, though resource constraints were also stressed.

> *"We're obviously trying to provide advice in community languages when we can. We can use translation services and so on. We haven't been doing that for our debt service, but we've taken a decision recently that we must, we should and must. So whether that will start to make a difference to people. We're always looking at how we can improve our services and how to make ourselves more accessible, but it is still working within those constraints..." (Voluntary sector)*

For some local authority representatives, however, progress within many support services had simply been too slow in meeting the increasingly diverse cultural needs of the West Midlands population. This was argued to unacceptably limit the options available to some groups at risk of homelessness, with an over-reliance on a small number of (sometimes poor quality) specialist services, and mainstream services abdicating their responsibility to be inclusive of the whole population they were intended to serve.

> *"…it was curtailing choice. I was saying, 'Well, why can't this woman go into [crisis accommodation service]? What do you mean you can't speak her language?...' 'What do you mean you haven't got the appropriate facilities? Why haven't you got those facilities?'…We built in a diversity competence into the commissioning activities…We want choice for all minority communities across all of our homelessness provision, through the domestic abuse refuge sector, and it needs to look like this.'." (Local authority representative)*

Another issue flagged by several key informants, linked to some extent to issues of cultural competency, was that of trust. Representatives of certain statutory and voluntary sector services posited that there was a 'trust deficit' on the part of certain minoritised groups as regards support services that were, or were perceived to be, part of the state. This lack of trust was felt by some service representatives to impede their ability to reach those communities, with the impression given by some of these interviewees that the onus lay with those communities to overcome their trust issues rather than necessitating a changed approach on the part of the service.

> *"We're reliant on people walking into [service]. We can't help you if you don't, so that's a big step to start off with…I would imagine there are communities out there that there is a trust deficit and don't come through the front door…There's a bit of an assumption there that…communities look after themselves to a degree...So, perhaps family is a big part in all of that." (Employment sector)*

> *"…16 per cent of our clients are from Asian background, compared to 31 per cent of the population…So we've acknowledged here that we don't seem to be reaching Asian communities, but I think there's probably cultural reasons why, people tend to seek advice within their own communities and perhaps less organisations like ourselves...I think some people perceive us to be part of the state, and may be reluctant to seek advice from". (Voluntary sector)*

Both of these quotations allude to availability of community or familial support as an alternative to more formal sources of assistance from public and voluntary services. However, one stakeholder

commented that assumptions can be made on the part of professionals that people from particular ethnicities can draw on informal support that aren't necessarily available to them, or have been eroded by the financial and other pressures that can place people at risk of homelessness (Ayed & Clarke, 2024). This was argued to lead to gaps in service and discriminatory practice:

> *"There is a denial that ethnic minorities don't experience homelessness because they've got such a great network of friends and family…Even though I might be a female, I might be vulnerable, I might be at risk, because there's an assumption that I have a network of friends and families because I come from that background." (Community sector)*

Interestingly, a lack of diversity within relevant workforces did not come up much in our key informant interviews as a (partial) explanation for this perceived lack of trust, or inadequate cultural competency, on the part of mainstream public and voluntary sector services. That said, this issue was acknowledged in the reverse, in that some interviewees flagged instances of services that were reflective of the ethnic profile of the populations they served as positive examples of being better able to inspire trust or meet the cultural requirements of particular minoritised communities. This in turn was said to open up greater scope for addressing and preventing homelessness:

> *"…especially places like Birmingham, you've got high numbers of GPs that look like their communities. I'm sure it's similar in Wolverhampton etc. If there's a high trust in a health professional, you've got health professionals that are more likely to understand you culturally, then there's a massive [homelessness prevention] opportunity there." (Local authority sector)*

> *"What we've seen is we developed our workforce to try and meet the needs of the different communities in Birmingham…so we recruit based on language, which brings so much into the organisation. It's not just about language, about community, religion, all the faith stuff, understanding communities, culture, all of that. I think we need to be more proactive about who we engage in our services..." (Domestic violence sector)*

Our focus group discussions with people with direct experience of homelessness elsewhere in England suggest that these issues may be nuanced and complex, with perceived racist attitudes sometimes reported on the part of frontline workers who are themselves from minoritised communities (Fitzpatrick *et al*, forthcoming).

## Data inadequacy and ethnicity-blind approaches

One of the strongest themes to emerge from across the key informant interviews related to data inadequacy. It was said that data on ethnicity was often so poor in the WMCA area that it was difficult to grasp equalities issues at any level of granularity. This was linked to the unconscious and unintentional nature of much the institutional racism that key informants felt underpinned disproportionate minoritised community homelessness (Treloar & Begum, 2021), making it very difficult to confront without requisite data and evidence to 'prove' its existence:

> *"I think once you've got your data and then you can start to dig in and try and understand what your issue is and then how do you work with…What work can we do with estate agents? Because I'm fairly certain that if we went to [them] with the data and said, 'Did you realise that you evict three times more Black people than White people?' They would be horrified…but you need to have the evidence, don't you." (Housing/homelessness sector)*

It was also flagged that a lack of robust evidence can lead to misdiagnosis of the challenges lying at the root of these disproportionate experiences of homelessness. It can exacerbate a tendency towards focusing on crisis responses (Mackie *et al*, 2024), and a dependency on the provision of

specialist, downstream housing services, rather than engaging wider mainstream public services in upstream prevention.

> *"…until we properly understand it, we can't then diagnose in terms of, actually what we might want to have is a very specific supported housing scheme for Black men that's very focused on meeting their needs in an inclusive way, delivered by a community organisation that can build that trust…I think we just don't know enough about it, because actually the answer is we need to throw our resources at stopping the evictions, and that needs to be about a collaboration with mental health?" (Housing/homelessness sector)*

Alongside data inadequacy, there were multiple examples given of under-utilisation of existing data to identify ethnicity patterns across housing, homelessness and a range of other public services. Where this had started to be addressed, sometimes prompted by engagement with the Homelessness Taskforce, interesting insights emerged. For example, one housing association has recently identified an important race disparity in the reasons for tenancy failure:

> *"We've got masses of data…and we don't really look at it…We're challenging ourselves to say, 'We need to look at this termination data and overlay things like ethnic origin, where people are moving to…The third-most-common reason for ending a tenancy is moving in with family…looking at that by ethnic origin, we see that the biggest group who have that reason for their tenancy ending are people from Asian, Asian British backgrounds…Now, could that be a cultural thing? We need to dig a bit deeper and do some case studies on those tenancies failing…Is it to do with affordability? Are they perhaps not accessing services? There's more work we need to do to follow on from that." (Housing sector)*

In broad terms there seemed to be a greater urgency given to the need for ethnicity-based analysis by local authority representatives than by other stakeholders, some of whom seemed to take an ethnicity 'blind' approach. Particular sectors where race and ethnicity did not seem to factor strongly in planning current responses, despite acknowledgment of ethnic disparity in experiences and levels of adversity, included criminal justice and employment:

> *"…the only time we ever really consider ethnicity [in post-prison accommodation programme] is if it's a shared property. So we'll be really clear that if someone's got a history of racially aggravated offenses and so forth, we'll look for that… [Ethnicity] is not a factor really." (Criminal justice system)*

> *"We don't do anything based on a [ethnic] demographic…All of the projects or things that we're involved in [are] open to anybody." (Employment sector)*

Some local authority representatives felt that specific policy measures had to be taken to force other stakeholders to engage more pro-actively in understanding and addressing ethnic disadvantage:

> *"I think the Mayor should make some quite clear demands of registered providers in the West Midlands around the data that they've got. I think that actually if your data is not up to speed, then maybe you shouldn't be eligible for funding or you should be bumped down the list, which is how you'll get the big boys like [major Housing Association] to take it seriously." (Housing/homelessness sector)*

## Conclusion

Key informants articulated a wide range of concerns about current systemic responses failing to adequately prevent or address disproportionate levels of homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the WMCA area.

A number of examples given related to specific public services and interventions. One such case included the austerity-linked loss of youth services, which would hitherto have supported young people on the margins of involvement in youth crime and gangs that can put their housing and that

of their families at risk. Likewise, a lack of local authority control over academy schools was reported to make it difficult to intervene in school exclusions, which can be linked to homelessness in young adulthood. Black-Caribbean and increasingly some Asian groups of young people were said to be affected most by both issues.

The need for improved preventative practice was also flagged in relation to what was reported to be highly disproportionate levels of evictions in the WMCA area affecting Black men with mental health problems. It was argued that a more effective response by mental health services – working in partnership with housing providers - may enable more of them to stay in their home and avoid homelessness. Another strong preventative theme to emerge was the need for a much more robust response by the criminal justice system to domestic abuse, especially as experienced by women from South Asian and other minoritised communities. If assured of effective interventions by the police and courts to ensure their safety, it may be possible for some of these women to remain living in the family home rather than face all the disruption and trauma of homelessness and prolonged stays in temporary accommodation.

There were also instances shared where racism, anti-immigrant and anti-homeless bias could intersect to devastating effect, impacting on the quality of life and well-being of vulnerable minoritised groups. The clearest example given in this chapter related to the poor and exclusionary treatment that people living in asylum and/or homeless temporary accommodation were reported to sometimes experience at the hands of GP surgeries. sometimes leading to reliance on more expensive and acutely burdened emergency healthcare provision.

Aside from these failures on the part of specific public services to prevent homelessness and/or appropriately support people in homeless situations, a number of cross-cutting themes emerged that spoke to wider systems issues across public and some voluntary sector services that impeded efforts to prevent and address disproportionate homelessness amongst minoritised groups.

One clutch of issues related to what was described as poor ‘diversity competence’ across a wide range of public services in the WMCA area, manifested most obviously in a failure to appropriately meet language needs on the part of some services. However, this term often conflated two distinct issues: failures by services to accommodate genuine culture differences and requirements; and assumptions of difference which were unfounded and sometimes racist, leading to discriminatory treatment and adverse outcomes. Linked with this, there was perceived to be a trust ‘deficit’ on the part of some minoritised groups, discouraging them from seeking help from public sector and more mainstream voluntary sector agencies, but sometimes with the implication that the onus lay on the minoritised communities rather than the services to overcome these trust issues. It was suggested by some interviewees that these minoritised communities drew instead on informal sources of support from within their social networks, but other key informants cautioned against assumptions that all minoritised people would have access to this kind of help.

While specialist grassroots services were sometimes viewed as the solution to these perceived issues of trust and diversity competence, it was flagged that they are often very small, under-resourced and somewhat disconnected from the more mainstream professionalised voluntary sector services. This means that they do not always have the technical skills, knowledge, expertise or capacity to provide a high-quality advice, accommodation or other relevant service to the communities they serve.

Another key cluster of issues related to inadequate data and monitoring on responses to, and outcomes for, minoritised groups at risk of homelessness. This was argued to be especially important given the unconscious and often subtle nature of much of the discrimination that places minorities at particular risk of homelessness. Even where relevant data did exist, it was often under-utilised to identify and tackle ethnic disparities. This could lead to ethnicity ‘blind’ approaches on the part of public services, leaving adverse outcomes and potentially discriminatory practices unaddressed. Local authority representatives often seemed more exercised about the need for robust data and action to target ethnic inequalities than other stakeholders.

# Chapter 5 - Frontline Worker Perspectives

## Introduction

As noted in Chapter 1, the research involved two focus groups with frontline practitioners examining four vignettes (that is, hypothetical but realistic cases) representing people from minoritised communities in situations of potential or actual homelessness in the WMCA area. This included professionals from the housing, homelessness, domestic abuse, health and voluntary sectors.

The purpose of this exercise was to test how, in practice, systems work together (or fail to) in preventing homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the West Midlands at present, and to garner frontline worker views on how they could intervene more effectively in the future.

The vignettes were developed based on insights derived from the key informant interviews. The hypothetical yet recognizable nature of the scenarios sketched out in the vignettes offer a 'safe space' within which to explore sensitive topics, such as homelessness and racism, that can be experienced by participants as less threatening than more 'direct' lines of questioning. Vignettes are thus intended to offer a 'stepping off point' to open up broader conversations on these challenging topics that extend beyond the particular scenarios sketched out.

After examining the response to each vignette[27] in detail, the chapter concludes by drawing together themes from across the vignette discussions.

## Vignette 1 – Maya

**Maya is of Black heritage and a lone mother with two children, aged 4 and 7.**
**After leaving her abusive partner she moved into a private rented flat with her children two years ago.**
**Her ex-partner still has contact with his children and Maya remains afraid of him.**
**She works part time in the service sector but on a low income and is in receipt of Universal Credit. She has been struggling financially for a while, especially as her rent is above the Local Housing Allowance level.**
**Her landlord has recently served her with a 'no fault' eviction notice because he wants to relet to 'professionals' who can afford to pay a substantially higher rent.**

Both focus groups discussed Vignette 1 'Maya', and participants agreed that her circumstances represented a set of circumstances very familiar to them. For most frontline workers the priority was to keep Maya in her current home if at all possible, and thus prevent her homelessness.

> *"[if]she wants to remain in her property…She shouldn't be the one running away."*

However, three potential obstacles to her staying put were identified. First and foremost there were safety concerns. While a professional risk assessment was imperative, it was also posited that the woman herself is best placed to know what is safest for her and her children.

> *"We never know the woman's safety more than she does, so although we can give her these options, we would never impose them on her, and always give her all her options."*

[27] Note that, given the need for extended discussion of each vignette in order to generate the richness of data required, focus groups discussed only two or three out of the four vignettes.

Participants discussed working with the landlord to implement enhanced physical safety features in her current home, while also attempting to secure legal orders to exclude the perpetrator, where he remains living in the home, and arrange police monitoring. However, some of these measures, such as non-molestation orders or occupation orders, were said to have high thresholds that Maya may not meet. In addition, it was reported that physical measures to enhance safety features were often more difficult to arrange for people living in private rented accommodation, where the landlord may be reluctant to allow adaptations, whereas social landlords were usually more cooperative.

> *"..the threshold for [non-molestation orders] is quite high, depending on the most recent incident… [and] doesn't mean he's going to be removed immediately. I think it may be different if she's a [social tenant] as [social landlord] can jump in [and]…remove that person from the tenancy..."*

> *"[Adaptations] usually happens mostly with housing association properties, more than it would happen with private landlords."*

The second challenge pertained to the current powerlessness of private tenants issued with a no-fault eviction notice[28].

> *"…the legal system…has given the landlords a lot of leeway, that they can use this section 21 if they're not happy. If they get £50 or £100 more somewhere else, they will use this section 21 as a no-fault basis, trying to evict this lady with her two kids."*

Third, the affordability of the private rented sector was of major concern to participants, albeit it was noted that short-term forms of financial support may be available from the local authority.

> *"As well as the Homeless Prevention Fund, there's [the] Discretionary Housing Payment too, so that could make up [to]…the landlord is charging [above]… the Local Housing Allowance. Obviously, it's not forever, but it can be something that can help."*

Nonetheless, the consensus amongst the frontline workers was that, in their experience, these three challenges in combination meant that Maya would in all likelihood have to leave her home. Thereafter her housing options were likely to be unattractive.

> *"…when a women flees domestic abuse, her first option, unfortunately, isn't going to be an amazing accommodation…It's going to be emergency housing, and that can look like a refuge, that can look like temporary accommodation."*

Stakeholders flagged a range of negative impacts of moving into temporary accommodation, including potentially undermining the woman's ability to work, the family's financial security, the children's ability to stay at their own school or nursery, and their access to support networks. Even basic facilities were often not available in temporary accommodation, which the family may be forced to stay for some considerable time, given the shortfalls in social housing supply in much of the WMCA area.

> *"A lot of them want to stay where they are, because they don't want to uproot the children, and furthermore a lot of them do work…With temporary accommodation, we can't guarantee where they'll be placed. A lot of the time I do advise them there's no washing or cooking facilities on site, unless you go into a hostel. Basically, you're living on takeaways until you get suitable accommodation elsewhere, and that could be a number of years…I think the estimated time is 13 weeks, but I've known somebody that's been in temporary accommodation for five-and-a-half years."*

> *"We've got a real lack of social housing, there's no growth in the social housing, and therefore*

[28] The Government has committed to abolishing 'no fault' evictions in England via the Renters' Rights Bill.

*women and children are stuck in temporary accommodation."*

In terms of how Maya's homelessness risk could have been prevented at an earlier stage, a key factor flagged was improved advice on housing options and affordability, so that a more sustainable option than her current private tenancy may have been secured. But it was noted that budget cuts were leading to reductions in early prevention as well as resettlement services. Alongside specialist domestic abuse organisations, there was mention of other voluntary sector partners who may assist in Maya's case, some with a particular focus on children. But the picture across the West Midlands seemed patchy rather than representing a systematic approach to supporting women in her position.

> *"There are other voluntary organisations, who work with people with domestic abuse, and they mainly focus on children rather than the mother, because the effect of domestic abuse within the family, it can affect the children more than - nobody asks about the children, how they feel, what is the impact on the children, how that impacts their mental health."*

It was argued by participants that women such as Maya were often discriminated against in the housing system, particularly by private landlords, on account not only of her race but also other aspects of her circumstances.

> *"I have seen it to be honest in a lot of cases, where they prefer others to have this property rather than someone from a Black and minority community."*

> *"…a lot of landlords are very picky on who they accept, and they often don't accept women who are on benefits, they ask for guarantors."*

Maya's race was also viewed as likely to contribute to poorer treatment by wider public services. One frontline worker provided real life examples of where, despite strong professional-level partnerships, women from minoritised communities could be treated badly by colleagues in other services, based on assumptions about cultural norms and family dynamics that were damaging to them.

> *"Black women, Asian minority ethnic women are discriminated for the colour of their skin…attending local authorities, contacting the police. Our relationship with the police is good…but we have a lot of [poor] feedback from women…The cultural aspect. If this for example was an Asian woman, would they say 'Oh, it happens in these families', that kind of feeling. Is it a cultural issue? 'Is it something more around the Asian families, Indian families, or Pakistani families, that they control their family a bit more?'."*

As with key informants (see Chapter 4), focus group participants reported that it was often hard to evidence racial discrimination because a lot of it is rooted in 'unconscious biases', and subtle but racialised assumptions about people's levels of need, their resilience, and how 'vulnerable' they are perceived to be (see also Davis, 2022). That said, some of what was described by focus group participants pertained to pretty overtly racist attitudes and positions, such as that Black people are intrinsically dangerous or untrustworthy:

> *"…the thing that we've often come across is the response Black women have when it comes to the police, and how believed they are, and when they're talking about their experience of abuse, and it's the unconscious bias that we all have, but it's [present], really, in the mental health services, in the healthcare services, within police services, within the housing services."*

> *"I think it boils down to our unconscious biases, and we all have them…how receptive [are] we…to a White woman…appearing upset and talking about her mental health, in comparison to a Black woman? It is very, very nuanced…Black people, the perception…is that they're unsafe, they're dangerous, they're aggressive, don't go near them. Whereas, for White people, it's like, 'Oh, something really awful must have happened to her, because why else is she on the streets?'."*

## Vignette 2 – Axmed

**Axmed is a single man aged 28. He is refugee from Somalia.**
**Axmed is highly qualified, acquiring a university degree in his home country, but was forced to flee because of local unrest.**
**He arrived in the UK 5 years ago and has recently been granted leave to remain.**
**He has no family in the UK but has built up a network of friends via volunteering work in the local Mosque.**
**Axmed is highly motivated but his mental health has been affected by the violence he witnessed in Somalia.**
**He has been told that he has to leave his Serco accommodation within 28 days.**[29]

One of the focus groups discussed Vignette 2, 'Axmed', agreeing that his profile represented a common scenario. Until December 2024, asylum seekers who received a positive decision generally had only 28 days to leave their Home Office provided accommodation and make other arrangements. This has now been extended to 56 days on a trial basis till June 2025. This frequently precipitates a homelessness crisis, as those seeking asylum are not permitted to work while their claim is processed, and they are highly unlikely to have the financial resources required to secure their own accommodation, at least until their claim for mainstream UK benefits is processed:

> *"Yes, we do see these cases on a weekly and daily basis…Once the refugees are granted a status in the UK, they have to leave the Serco accommodation because they no longer qualify for [that] support."*

It was said that, ideally, Serco should refer Axmed to organisations able to support him with his mental health difficulties prior to him leaving their accommodation.

> *"…the focus should be on his mental health first and then referral to an organisation that can support him to placing in a suitable, safe accommodation within that city, where he is not isolated, not sent to another city miles and miles away."*

In reality, however, many people like Axmed suffering from trauma left Serco accommodation with no mental health support in place. Most commonly, people in his position would seek homelessness assistance from the local authority within which his Serco accommodation is located, as they are advised to do both by voluntary sector support organisations (see Chapter 3) and in official communications.

> *"When they're given their notice with Serco, it does state on the letter that they have to contact the local authority for housing."*

As a single homeless man, the local authority would most likely find him not to be in priority need, and offer him supported exempt accommodation in fulfilment of their homelessness prevention and/or relief duties. As with the key informants interviewed (see Chapter 3), significant concern was expressed by frontline workers about the very poor, even dangerous, standards pertaining to some (not all) of this exempt accommodation, despite its being provided at very high cost to the public purse.

> *"There is a lot of good exempt accommodation that is suitable. A lot of the accommodation that we offer people is shocking, absolutely shocking… its unclean for one. Number two, a lot of the time they come back to us and said there's rats, mice, or cockroaches. You wouldn't put an animal to live in some of these places, but I don't understand how they get past, through inspection."*

[29] Since our fieldwork it has been changed to 56 days.

*"Their rent for one room is like living in The Ritz, basically, you're talking about £400-to-£500 a week at some points…I have been to places that they're blatantly smoking crack in their rooms and there's nobody to ask why. They say we have 24-hour support worker and none of them can be seen on site. All they have got is a few outdated CCTV on site – the place is like a drug den, people going in and out, in and out, drug dealing going on there, prostitution. So many things that I have witnessed myself in the exempt accommodation - It is not what they make it out to be."*

In the case of Axmed, with (often highly unsuitable) exempt accommodation likely to be his only housing option, participants articulated concern for his long-term health and life chances. Much of the discussion focused on the risk of someone in his situation developing additional support needs such as substance misuse, as well as experiencing victimisation, as a result of the harmful environment they may experience in exempt accommodation.

*"…you refer them to an exempt accommodation and say, 'Okay, you're homeless, go there and see how you build up your life.'…When he goes there, he goes with mental health, he comes back with a drug addiction. He goes in with a drug addiction, he comes back with severe mental health, in some cases suicide, and a lot of issues. There needs to be a lot of focus on inspecting these exempt accommodation to make it more safe for this kind of client group."*

Focus group participants also expressed the view that Axmed would likely suffer discrimination because he was an ethnically and religiously-marginalised migrant to the UK, compounded by irresponsible political rhetoric and extremely poor housing options. Some of the challenges he would face were traced back to the so-called "hostile environment" policies propounded by successive UK Governments (Lukes *et al*, 2019).

*"…making it a hostile environment. They've achieved that. Exempt supported accommodation, HMO, may not be suitable for this service user because of his mental health, but there's very limited suitable accommodation out there…Then adding the fact that he's Muslim on top of everything, like we're talking about these protests, and how Muslims are represented within society, I think that's an added barrier."*

The Far Right protests and riots in England in summer 2024 regularly came up in focus group discussions, with participants sharing the damaging impact that these incidents had had on their organisations, staff and volunteers, as well as the fear invoked for many refugees like Axmed and minoritised communities more generally.

*"We had to close, we had to get extra security for our two schemes…We were asked do we feel safe to stay at work or do we want to go home early because there will be a march around about two o'clock or three o'clock. We had to get extra security staff just to make sure that our properties, our schemes are not attacked just because we have got homeless families or refugees living with us."*

## Vignette 3 – Suravi

**Suravi is of Bangladeshi heritage.**
**She lives in a run down, over-crowded four-bedroom private rented home with her husband Kamal and their five children (aged 5, 8, 11, 13 and 15) along with Kamal's brother's family.**
**Kamal works informally in a friend's business. Suravi is not working.**
**Living circumstances are becoming more difficult, particularly as their 11-year-old has a disability and is a wheelchair user.**
**She would like to find a home for herself, Kamal and her children where they would have some space of their own.**

One focus group discussed Vignette 3 ‘Suravi’. Whilst participants agreed that Suravi’s circumstances could mean that she was statutorily homeless, the consensus view was that, if she presented to a local authority in the WMCA area, Suravi would most likely be turned away:

> *“…she would be turned down. Because she is housed, she has a roof, she’s not on the street.”*

Participants did not take the view that Suravi’s situation was acceptable, far from it. But were reflecting on the grim reality of the current housing situation in much of the West Midlands, which they viewed with frustration:

> *“Its not about us saying, ‘Oh, [Suravi’s housing is] safe,’ it’s because we have the resources that we have… we complain about all the time and go on about in meetings, is the overcrowding. We wouldn’t want to [leave people in] it, our managers wouldn’t want to… but they’re having to have those real conversations, because that’s all there is.”*

It was suggested that the council may use its Homelessness Prevention Grant or other potential funding sources to support Suravi to stay in her accommodation. This may involve, for example, implementing adaptations to make it more suitable for her disabled child:

> *“This family, they have a roof over their head at this point in time, so the council will be looking to see if there’s any intervention...if it was adaptions, or going in and I think trying to see if there’s something they can do. For prevention, they will try and work with the family there to see what they can do to keep the family there, or again, maybe try and see if the landlord has a bigger property, or something, rather than putting them in TA [temporary accommodation], where it’s going to be smaller and more cramped.”*

The point was reinforced that temporary accommodation, even if offered, would be unlikely to be an improvement on the family’s current living circumstances:

> *“There are so many families in TA, in hotels, and it’s not four-bedroomed homes. They’re cramped up into small rooms, and this is something that our managers tell us all the time, is to make sure when you have families sat in front of you, that you’re being honest with them and you’re telling the reality of what they’re going into.”*

Nor would the fact of Suravi having a disabled child apparently help her chances of being assisted into longer-term housing by the local authority. This reflected severe shortfalls in both social housing suitable for larger families, and social housing suitable for households which contain a wheelchair user.

> *“I do think with the housing crisis she’s going to find it significantly difficult to find anywhere with five children and two adults that is going to be suitable. Again, this goes back to talking about accommodation suitable for people that have additional needs, and that can be based on your race, that can be based on the disability that you have. Do we make homes that are suitable for children with disabilities, with access to ramps and bedrooms on the ground floor? No. Mainly you find that in retirement homes or accommodation for over-55s.”*

In reality, therefore, whilst it may seem that Suravi’s should be a priority case, her family would in effect be ranked against the circumstances of many other families in (even more) extreme need.

> *“We’ve got children with disabilities in high-rises in temporary accommodation, four or five children in one bedroom, with one bathroom…We often had children in temporary accommodation [with] a disability, and oftentimes the lifts weren’t working, and we’d call the*

*hotel accommodation, and they'd say, 'Well, it's going to take five days to work…I don't think just the child having a disability is going to get children's services thinking, okay, we need to do something about this."*

As the above quote highlights, children's social services were also said to be unlikely to get involved. These statutory social work services were extremely stretched, meaning that even if there were housing-based concerns for the wellbeing of children, they may not be responsive. One representative from a domestic abuse charity shared examples of the difficulties that she had encountered in trying to facilitate statutory children services' support for her clients who had no recourse to public funds:

*"I've made referrals where there's imminent risk to child on the same day, and the response is shocking. So we make referrals to Section 17 support, where the woman has no recourse to public funds, and she's destitute. She can't stay anywhere, and we are chasing up those referrals…we're being very clear and factual about what's happening, and how it's impacting the child specifically. I think what we'd want at this stage is social worker involvement, and that threshold is very high now, because they have changed their criteria."*

Discrimination on the part of private landlords was also said to potentially impact on Suravi and her family. For example, landlords might take advantage of the fact people from some minoritised communities are less likely to be aware of, or feel able to exercise, their legal rights (see also Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2024). It was also suggested that some private landlords could make racist assumptions that circumstances that are unacceptable for White households are acceptable for people from a different background:

*"….'you're of Bangladeshi heritage. You won't have a clue about how to appeal something, or how to go to the courts'? Whereas, if it was someone who was an English-speaker from a White background, they would think, okay, I might be in a bit of trouble here; they probably know that they're talking about; they probably know what route to go down in terms of suing someone or taking them to court…or it could be that assumption that, you've come from Bangladesh, and there's assumptions around that economy she's come from, and how this should be normal for her; you know, she should easily adapt to this."*

If her first language was not English, that could be a further source of disadvantage for Suravi, again particularly as regards defending her legal rights.

*"Yes, I could see it [discrimination] happening for her where she's not made aware of all her options when it comes to appeals, and what the process looks like…If she has a language barrier, how is that communicated?"*

It was also flagged that aspects of the homelessness system which require responsibility to be taken by applicants - such as being able to demonstrate that you're not 'unreasonably and deliberately refusing to cooperate' with local authority efforts to relieve your homelessness - might be particularly difficult to navigate for those who face language barriers.

*"We've had women that completed homeless applications, and are given personal housing plans, and there's all these actions on there for them to complete within 56 days, and they have to complete these actions to show that they are trying to make a difference to relieve their homelessness, but it's unattainable for them, because they're not literate when it comes to computers. They're unable to bid, they're unable to read or write English."*

Whilst local authorities usually offered information in a range of community languages, frontline workers highlighted that the service had in some instances deteriorated due to funding cuts:

*"…we struggle if someone comes in and there's a language [need]... They've changed the way they do it I think, because of the cut-backs. I know a lot of people have complained, it's*

*taking ages to get a translator, and you've got someone who's been sitting here for hours to try and translate the information that they need to know. That's a big barrier, you know."*

## Vignette 4 – Marcus

**Marcus is an unemployed single Black man in his 40s living in his own social rented flat. Neighbours have repeatedly reported that he is engaging in anti-social behaviour with loud noises during the night and the police have been called out several times but have taken no action. He also has escalating rent arrears.**
**The social landlord's tenancy sustainment team has tried to engage Marcus but without success. Eviction proceedings have now therefore commenced.**
**There is a suspicion that Marcus has mental health problems, and possibly a learning disability, but he has never been assessed or diagnosed.**
**Marcus has a sister living locally and he is known to occasionally attend a local church.**

One focus group discussed Vignette 4 'Marcus'. Participants commented that underlying mental health issues were very common in people accessing homelessness services. Particularly when undiagnosed and unsupported, these mental health challenges could precipitate very difficult to resolve personal and housing crises. The situation was often even more difficult for those living in the private rented sector than in social housing:

*"Often, if that mental health [problem] is not detected quite early, it spirals out of control until somebody has a crisis, and the first point of call is the police, and the police then section individuals. If they can find a hospital bed, they'll go into a bed…Then, of course, the first thing that usually goes, is their home, because they can no longer afford it. The landlord will evict the individual, more so if they're private. Social landlords might keep them on for a little bit longer than that, but the ultimate thing is that they are made homeless, and subsequently, they end up in, HMOs and exempts, which is their last port of call."*

The situation of someone like Marcus was then said to become particularly dire if they found themselves in exempt accommodation or other forms of HMO, as they very often did. The shared and often poor physical quality of these environments, as well as the lack of tenure security, compounded their housing precarity and pre-existing mental health problems.

*"We will have a lot of people floating around in and out of HMOs, constantly getting evicted, or…rough sleeping as well, and that's really hard to work with, where there's no accommodation…and behavioural issues around their mental health. So there's a constant bouncing backwards and forwards from that."*

Alongside the appalling physical and managerial standards said to characterise much of this exempt accommodation (as discussed above), the support provided was reported to be minimal to non-existent.

*"…I get a lot of feedback where support isn't what it could be in the HMOs…I will have people blatantly tell me that they'd rather go back on the streets than in some of the HMOs…for the guys that I see coming in, and their mental health issues, the HMOs, for me, aren't really adequate with the support that they're offering."*

If Marcus approached his local authority for assistance, they should assess his homeless status, and will also collect information on other statutory criteria, such as his local connection to the area and whether he has a priority need. His mental and physical health needs are relevant to the latter, but the extremely stretched nature of mental health services in particular meant that accessing specialist assessments was said to be a major challenge. Housing officers reported that they frequently found themselves suspecting that there was a significant mental health issue affecting a homeless applicant, but struggling to obtain a definitive diagnosis:

*"…we've had people in and we were absolutely convinced there's a mental health issue going on here, but I don't know if it's the fact…[mental health team] are seeing them for a short window of time compared to what we see them, and we have a bit more engagement with them, so I feel [mental health team] go away sometimes and we don't get the answer that we're hoping for in order to try and help them. So [mental health] might say, 'We're not concerned…' and …we're not in agreement with that."*

In all likelihood, Marcus would be assessed as non-priority homeless, and his accommodation options would therefore be extremely limited, outside of exempt accommodation. He would have little chance of accessing social housing, and private landlords were reported to be reluctant to accommodate people on benefits[30], let alone those who also face homelessness and mental health challenges.

The voluntary sector used to have a greater role in supporting people in Marcus' situation, but austerity-linked funding cuts mean that relevant services in the West Midlands were said to be depleted, putting significant additional pressures on already struggling council services.

*"The Council is actually under pressure these days, and that's largely because the third sector has been dismantled, in terms of austerity, and therefore, there's not as many third-sector organisations who are able to support these men, or women, having these types of problems. So the pressure always backs up on [the Council], who can't always cope with that pressure, and of course, [the Council] in terms of its own services have been cut and cut and cut again."*

Race was seen as an important factor in Marcus' case. When asked if Marcus's experiences would be any different if he was White participants said yes. First, it was said that historic and structural racism, may have impacted on the likelihood of Marcus being in the position in the first place.

*"…think it's kind of complex, actually. It may be due to in terms of people's social mobility…it may be in terms of how society perceives that person, as well. We've had…legislation to reduce or stop [discrimination] from happening, but I think that it still happens in society. I don't think we can sit here and say, 'Well, it doesn't happen.'"*

Second, and similar to comments made in response to Maya's case, participants highlighted that there were negative societal perceptions of Black people which would likely impact on his treatment by a range of public authorities as well as by society in general.

*"In terms of where Black people are, it's disproportionate in terms of society. You see a lot more Black males in terms of mental health illness; you see them a lot more in prisons; you see a lot more of them on unemployment benefits; you see a lot of them in terms of health issues. So, generally speaking, that's how society views Black people."*

*"…in terms of the way society sees Black males, and females [this impacts]…which is a social discrimination against Black people, in all walks of life."*

The pervasive and normalized nature of many of these biases meant that robust quantitative data on racial and ethnic disparities in treatment and outcomes was said to be very important in challenging them (see also Chapters 3 and 4).

*"When you're talking about stereotypes and racism and mistreatment in Black and Asian communities, I think it's really hard to evidence that, because it is so covert a lot of the time, because how do you evidence that we didn't make a referral for a mental health service because that person was Black? How do we get the numbers?"*

[30] Note that the this practice will be made illegal if the current Renters Rights Bill passes into law.

This quote also hints at the difficulty in proving that racist attitudes were the direct cause of poorer outcomes, even in contexts where racist assumptions (such as that Black men are dangerous) are quite overt.

Specific issues of disparities in health treatment and outcomes for Black people were raised, particularly as regards mental health (see also Chapter 4):

> *"Then, there's a separate thing, going onto mental health, is the experiences of Black people have with the healthcare system, and how they are failed, I think that's widespread generally, anyway."*

In the case of Marcus there was also some discussion around cultural barriers. Some participants expressed the view that in Black and Asian families there can be less openness or information about mental health issues and support available, and felt that there is a need to break down barriers in this regard.

> *"I do feel culture plays a big part in this. Things from my own experience as well, where I feel maybe in certain groups when it comes to talking about mental health...Do people know where to go?...Does pride come into it, When I think of my own family when it comes to mental health...just based on my own experience growing up. There's certain things that we didn't talk about, and I feel like within the Black and Asian community we have a lot of that."*

However, it is difficult to be sure if these sorts of perceptions represent accurate and attuned insights into genuine cultural differences between ethnic groups in the West Midlands, or do themselves contain an element of unsupported assumption.

## Conclusions

While each scenario drew out specific points affecting minoritised people in the particular circumstances sketched out, there were also strong recurring themes that cut across all or several of the vignette discussions.

First, framing all of these discussions was the unsustainable pressure being felt across the homelessness system by the dire shortage of affordable housing across all tenures in the West Midlands. This affected low-income groups across the board, but disproportionately impacted on many minoritised communities who were more likely than White households to be living in poverty and in precarious housing circumstances. It was sobering to learn that, in such a pressurised context, even those living in severely overcrowded situations, and with a disabled child, for example, would attract little rehousing priority. Extreme shortages of social housing meant that front line workers were focused on 'managing expectations' and strictly ranking families' need against that of others to offer the limited supply of accommodation only to those in the most dire circumstances.

Second, it was shocking to hear just how poor and cramped the conditions were in much temporary accommodation in the West Midlands, with basic needs like onsite cooking and laundry facilities sometimes not made available even for families with children living in this accommodation for protracted periods. As the statistical analysis indicates, families from minoritised communities are likely to spender longer in temporary accommodation than White families in the WMCA area. For single men facing homelessness risks in the WMCA area, including those with complex support needs and those with experience of the asylum system, the atrocious standards prevailing in much of the exempt shared accommodation sector cast a very long shadow, often undermining their already fragile health and well-being.

Third, there was a strong sense that discriminatory attitudes and actions on the part of certain key actors in the housing system, particularly private landlords, affected the chances of Black and Asian households in the West Midlands finding and keeping suitable accommodation. This discrimination was said to pertain not only to race and ethnicity directly, but also encompassed prejudice against

people in receipt of benefits, and families with children, particularly larger families, all groups within which people from some minoritised communities are over-represented[31].

Fourth, with respect to the full gamut of public services, but in particular police, housing and mental health services, and to some extent voluntary sector services too, there was widespread concern about racism, both conscious and unconscious. This took the form of damaging assumptions about minoritised people, families and communities that made it less likely that there would be an appropriate response to the homelessness risks they faced. Such assumptions were said to include biased perceptions that Black women were less 'vulnerable' than White women who experience abuse, violence and homelessness, that Black men were especially 'dangerous', and that controlling behaviours were to be expected, and were somehow more acceptable, in Asian families. Alongside these instances of individual racism, there were also aspects of institutional racism that impacted on access to these services for some minoritised communities, particularly inadequate support to overcome language barriers.

Fifth, and linked with the subtle and pernicious nature of much of the racism said to affect those at risk of homelessness in the West Midlands, was the importance placed on rigorously monitoring and data collection in order to robustly evidence relevant racial disparities. Echoing a point made strongly made by key informants, it was argued that without statistical 'proof' of these disparities, it was impossible to 'call out' such prejudice and discrimination.

Sixth, local authority and other public services had faced significant cuts in recent years at a time when austerity measures had also led to the contraction of much of the voluntary sector provision. This was not just the case in housing sector but in wider areas, including mental health. This left a patchy and inadequate network of support for a whole range of groups at risk of homelessness across the West Midlands, with minoritised communities worst affected.

[31] Note that this practice will become unlawful if the Renters Rights Bill is passed.

# Chapter 6 - Promising Practice in Prevention

## Introduction

In setting out our plans for this deep dive into designing out homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the WMCA area we committed to identifying examples of apparent good practice, or emerging ideas, that might warrant rolling out and/or closer examination.

In this chapter we present examples of promising practice, or emerging ideas, that we encountered in our fieldwork, structuring this discussion using a typology of homelessness prevention that we have developed in collaboration with academic colleagues, but was originally inspired by policy development work that took place in the West Midlands. We begin by describing this typology before presenting examples of promising practice that correspond with each stage of the prevention typology. Note that, in keeping with the ethics and confidentiality arrangements agreed for this study, these examples are presented anonymously.

It should also be noted that the relatively small-scale of our qualitative fieldwork, particularly with wider public services in the WMCA area, means that this chapter is far from providing a comprehensive account of the preventative efforts taking place across WMCA area. Nor have we conducted an evaluation of any of these initiatives. Rather, the discussion below reflects a selection of interesting efforts and ideas that were specifically highlighted to us by key informants in the course of our wide-ranging interviews with them.

## Homelessness Prevention Typology

Attempts within the UK and other high-income countries to improve preventative interventions on homelessness have precipitated multiple classification frameworks for understanding different approaches to prevention (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2021). An organizing framework, or 'typology', on homelessness prevention that has proven particularly useful in the UK context was originally co-produced by voluntary and statutory sector stakeholders in the West Midlands (St Basils, 2015), before being further adapted and extended in academic research. There are five core 'stages' in this temporally-driven prevention typology (Mackie *et al*, 2024):

- **Universal prevention:** population-wide interventions to tackle poverty and increase 'protective factors' in the whole population.
- **Upstream prevention:** early-stage homelessness prevention focused on high-risk groups, such as vulnerable young people, and risky transitions, including leaving local authority care, prison, or mental health in-patient treatment.
- **Crisis-stage prevention:** preventing homelessness likely to occur within a foreseeable period, such as following an eviction notice.
- **Emergency-stage prevention:** support for those at immediate risk of homelessness, such as providing temporary accommodation and assistance with essential needs.
- **Repeat prevention:** preventing a reoccurrence of homelessness for people who are currently or recently homeless, for example through Housing First or tenancy support.

## Universal prevention

It has been recognised by the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce that designing out homelessness requires focus at the universal prevention level, bolstering 'protective factors' across the population at large, but also being intentional about including those at most risk of homelessness (WMCA Homelessness Taskforce, undated (a),(b)).

In ongoing (separate) work with WMCA colleagues developing ideas around universal prevention, we have identified the 'protective factors' that enable most of us to weather life crises without facing homelessness to include: access to a decent income (through either work or reliable social security benefits); access to secure and safe housing; positive social and family relationships; good health (physical and mental), or appropriate support with any health challenges we face; and the education and skills required to navigate relevant service and information systems.

One particularly striking example of universal stage prevention that was shared with us in the WMCA area took an ambitious strengths-based, data-driven approach to reducing homelessness risks. This initiative targeted employment support to minoritised communities with highly qualified young people but also high rates of unemployment:

> *"[Neighbourhood] has got a high number of Pakistani graduates. Even though it's an area which has got high rates of deprivation, and therefore likely to be an area where we get homelessness presentations from, or if not homelessness presentations overcrowding, you've got an opportunity there in terms of future generations in terms of that upstream prevention to go, 'Actually, we don't want that to happen to these young people that have managed to, despite all of the challenges, made their way through university…'Okay, if a good job…prevents things like homelessness, prevents things like institutional care settings, then we need to target those cohorts of population... we need to do some targeted work with those communities, targeted work with those young people in terms of what are the job opportunities in the, city and how do we how do we broker those on behalf of those communities?…So it starts to turn the tap off." (Local authority sector)*

Another employment-related attempt to reduce overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in the homelessness system was relayed by a representative of a different local authority. In this case they had used their position as a major local employer to provide pathways into better jobs for marginalised groups.

> *"…we find that we have fewer applications from individuals that perhaps are from those [ethnic] groups and/or their qualifications are not as high…We've had to create pathways to help people to develop the - just even the maths and English that you required to be able to get on to the higher educational pathways within our organisation, to support people that are coming in through lower entry roles perhaps…move and progress through, because otherwise their school attainment impacted their ability to be able to progress organisationally…we have made a big difference in terms of the workforce population…" (Homelessness sector)*

While our modelling work indicates that the impact of employment factors on the disproportionate homelessness risks faced by minoritised communities is relatively modest (see Chapter 2), poverty is a major driver of homelessness as a whole, and is a crucial 'indirect' factor in the increased odds of homelessness being experienced by Black groups in particular. So insofar as these employment-focused initiatives enable people from minoritised communities to avoid or move out of poverty, then they should make a valuable contribution to designing out homelessness.

Of course, social security policies and levels are core to universal homelessness prevention, and local actors in the WMCA have only limited ability to influence these powerful levers. But there was evidence of DWP, local authorities and housing providers taking preventative action at local level, particularly around discretionary pots of money, at the next, upstream stage of prevention, as discussed in the next section.

## Upstream prevention

Early-stage homelessness prevention focused on high-risk groups where there is no immediate or identified risk of homelessness is categorised as upstream prevention in this typology. In the WMCA area we came across a number of examples of use of council-held data to pro-actively target benefits

advice and other forms of support on families that may be at risk of homelessness, who are disproportionately from minoritised communities (Watts *et al*, 2019). One local authority officer explained how they had triangulated data from across council services to identify families at high risk:

> *"[Family] are council tenant[s]. They're in housing arrears. They're known to social care, or they're in council tax arrears, etc. They've got antisocial behaviour going on, a few door-knocks. There's potential domestic abuse in there.' All of a sudden you're generating a family that has got a trajectory towards homelessness, and they're on our books. They haven't presented. They probably won't present yet, but they're on our books. Therefore, how do you get in? How do you get in earlier and start working with that family?" (Local authority sector)*

Clever use had been made of behavioural science to word text messages offering support in a way that people were likely to respond to, alongside deploying marketing techniques to target certain days of the week, and certain times of the day, when response rates are likely to be higher:

> *"We are creating digital triage tools whereby we can send thousands of text messages with links to people all at the same time with a message saying, 'If you need help, call us.' It just means, if we can identify particular vulnerabilities around particular cohorts of population, whatever they may be, whatever the issue may be, it means we can send out messaging. Where people can help themselves they will get links to say, 'This is the form you need to fill in. Have a go at it. If you struggle with it, come back to us or come and see us at this venue, this venue." (Local authority sector)*

An area where there was said to be scope for culturally-attuned upstream preventative interventions was support for multi-generational households. It was argued that social care, financial advice, and employment and educational interventions can all have a role to play in reducing pressures on household members that may precipitate homelessness. There was experience of successful efforts on this front in the West Midlands:

> *"…we come across a lot of multi-generational households where we've got three generations in the same household, and there are multiple needs in terms of packages of social care, in terms of adaptations to property, poverty within the household, worklessness as a consequence of caring responsibilities, inability to engage properly in the educational system…because of pressures within the home. You know, you've got potential there for at least one section of that household thinking the only choice they've got is to go and present as homeless to get away from that family pressure…Culturally, it's acceptable to have three generations in a household…Where it goes wrong, and where the demand on homelessness and housing comes into play, is the pressure on that household. The inability to secure adaptations or extensions." (Local authority sector)*

Another angle on upstream forms of support was to engage people in groups vulnerable to homelessness via everyday, non-stigmatising community resources, like hairdressers or libraries, in order to offer support before a homelessness crisis takes hold:

> *"…where do people go? Who are our groups? So we did a detailed piece of work last year where we looked at all of the families that went into temporary accommodation in one quarter…a huge proportion of those were single mums, mostly in partial or full receipt of benefits…once you start to understand that, you can then try and say, actually, how do you target your interventions?...Then that's where we're going to try and start pulling out and saying, what could we do differently? So could we, for example - thinking about that whole community thing - could we do something around homelessness that went into hairdressers?" (Homelessness sector)*

There were also some encouraging cases shared of wider public services, such as social work or the police, flagging issues at an early stage to housing and/or homelessness services, enabling

support to be offered well ahead of a crisis ensuing:

> *"…we've got some really good examples of where people have flagged things early. So I think about a social worker that's been campaigning for this family to be allocated a four-bedroom property, which is particularly challenging. Last year, the landlord indicated that they were going to sell. So even though they'd just agreed another 12-month tenancy, the social worker started the conversation then and said in a year's time this family is going to be homeless. They've got a disabled child. That isn't the right outcome for them." (Homelessness sector)*

Another example came from the employment and benefits field, where a DWP representative described working in partnership with social housing providers and local authorities to head off risks of eviction amongst claimants vulnerable to rent arrears and subsequent homelessness. This upstream engagement was said to occur before the 56 day period within which Jobcentres and other public bodies have a Duty to Refer people they believe to be at risk of homelessness to local authorities under the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) (Watts *et al*, 2019). DWP see their key contribution as helping assure financial stability, including via the flexible support funds that they have access to:

> *"Again, it's all about financial stability more than homelessness because we see that as a way of preventing those things...We work with all of the registered landlords to try and ensure that we prevent [eviction]. Obviously, we've got a Duty to Refer and all of that, but we try and get ourselves involved ahead of that to try and prevent evictions and the like, and we've been quite successful in the way that we do that…we do have money available to us. We have flexible support funds and emergency funds, and obviously, we can link in with local authorities around their emergency funds that they have as well, that they can perhaps support." (Employment sector)*

Notably, however, these efforts seemed 'ethnicity-blind', rather than being intentionally targeted on minoritised communities disproportionately exposed to poverty and homelessness.

## Crisis-stage prevention

This stage of prevention encompasses intervention designed to prevent homelessness likely to occur within a foreseeable period, such as following an eviction notice. In broad terms it aligns with the 56-day prevention duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

We found in the West Midlands that creative ways were being explored to help those at imminent risk of a housing crisis avoid the use of the homeless 'route'. One group that this was particularly pertinent to was women survivors of domestic abuse, of whom a disproportionate number were drawn from South Asian communities (see Chapter 2). Consideration was being given to the use of social housing management powers to enable women and children to move to safety, rather than forcing them to go through the homelessness route, and in all likelihood spend extended periods in often poor quality temporary accommodation:

> *"…we have a really high number of presentations around domestic abuse, and some of that, I think, is because of the way that we manage it and that households are forced to present as homeless rather than the ALMO [Arms Length Management Organisation] management moving them. So there's a little bit, again, of us saying, actually, it's our stock, it's our allocations policy…in these circumstances it should be a management move rather than somebody being forced through the homelessness route." (Housing/homelessness sector)*

## Emergency-stage prevention

This refers to support for those at immediate risk of homelessness, such as providing temporary accommodation and assistance with essential needs, to avoid imminent danger or rooflessness that they might otherwise face.

Here some good, or at least interesting, practice examples focused on what was argues to be the need for culturally-competent emergency services for South Asian women fleeing domestic violence. One local authority representative argued strongly for the need for diversity competency in the domestic abuse sector, rather than relying on a small number of specialist services.

> *"I'm a big advocate of diversity competence. Again, it's from my experience of watching homeless Asian women come into the system and getting a really crap deal in terms of cultural competence from frontline staff …It was that thinking about being able to look at where we're going to be in ten years' time from a homelessness position and from a city point of view in terms of our diversity of population. I did this back in 2005. I saw the population projections. 'We are heading towards becoming a majority-minority city. We cannot continue to think that the answers to domestic abuse and homelessness lie in a handful of specialist organisations representing South Asian communities, because we're going to be much broader than South Asian communities."* (SF4, local authority sector)

Two related but distinct points are being made here. First, that South Asian woman sometimes get poor provision from these few and small specialist services in the WMCA area. Second that, due to ongoing demographic changes, specialist and mainstream services will need to adapt to provide inclusive and high quality service to other ethnic groups.

This stakeholder went on to describe how she had used her commissioning powers to end distinct funding streams for mainstream and specialist refuges in her area:

> *"I had a lot of backlash from mainstream refuge providers, but I scrapped the distinction between, 'This is a pot of money for specialist refuge, and this is a pot of money for mainstream refuge,' and I brought the two pots of money together. I commissioned out on a diversity competence basis…I'm talking about knowledge, skills, and awareness… ctivities to say, 'You need to, through the bidding process, demonstrate diversity competence… 'What we said was, 'We want choice for all minority communities across all of our homelessness provision through the domestic abuse refuge sector, and it needs to look like this.'"* (Local authority sector)

## Repeat prevention

Repeat prevention refers to interventions designed to prevent a reoccurrence of homelessness for people who are currently or recently homeless, for example through tenancy support.

A key theme that emerged of particular relevance to preventing repeat or ongoing homelessness for people from minoritised communities was the importance of partnership working between specialist (culturally-specific provision) and mainstream (technically skilled) services, so that each benefited from the other's strengths. A number of key informants emphasised the importance of such partnerships, while noting that they were not always easy to broker. In one case a specialist service which had lost a local authority tender was encouraged to work in partnership with the successful (mainstream) provider but declined:

> *"I tried to get a deal for the [specialist] provider that had lost out to say, 'Well, you could talk about some sort of a partnership approach …Which will be good for your organisation because they've got training money. They can skill up your staff. Your staff will be far more skilled than they've ever been….They kind of thought about it for a little while and then said, no, they were going to go it alone, and unfortunately now they run an exempt provision, so…"* (Local authority sector)

More generally, the need for good partnership working to maximise preventative opportunities was a point widely made. The WMCA was seen as having made a positive contribution in this regard:

> *"…I think the openness that the combined authority brings, I think is a bit of a sea change …There are inroads into people working together and doing things differently." (Voluntary sector)*

## Conclusion

This chapter has showcased examples of promising prevention practice or emerging ideas from local authorities and other partners in the WMCA area that may be valuable in designing out homelessness amongst minoritised communities. It will be far from a comprehensive account of homelessness prevention activity in the WMCA area, given the limits of our fieldwork, and there is certainly scope for more comprehensive approaches across all stages of the typology. However, given that homelessness responses seem to be becoming ever more crisis-focused across England (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2023; Mackie *et al*, 2024), it was encouraging to see some very interesting examples and ideas identified at all levels of prevention.

At the universal level of prevention, there were ambitious, strengths-based employment-focused initiatives to reduce homelessness amongst high-skilled but economically-deprived minoritised communities, and to leverage the local authority position as a major employer to improve access to good jobs for minority groups. There were a range of imaginative upstream efforts, or ideas, to reduce homelessness risks amongst vulnerable groups. These included data-driven initiatives to target pro-active benefits and financial support, exploring use of everyday community facilities to reach high risk groups, as well as making use of social care, educational and other interventions to ease the pressures on multi-generational households that may lead to homelessness. Creative ways were being explored to avoid those facing a housing crisis having to use the homeless 'route', including deploying management transfers to rehouse women fleeing domestic violence. The importance of partnership working between mainstream and specialist (ethnic-minority facing) voluntary organisations was flagged as a means of providing services which were both culturally-sensitive and high quality to people who have experienced homelessness to prevent its recurrence. The extent to which these prevention efforts across all stages of the typology were intentionally inclusive of minoritised communities at disproportionate experience of homelessness varied.

# Chapter 7 Conclusions and Recommendations

This research sought to explore the scale, pattern, and drivers of homelessness amongst minoritised communities in the WMCA area, and also to examine the contribution of a range of public authorities and voluntary organisations to both ameliorating and exacerbating these homelessness risks. We undertook statistical analysis of official homelessness data and also survey-based datasets, interviewed senior stakeholders from a range of sectors, and conducted focus groups with relevant frontline professionals.

Our research confirmed that minoritised communities experience disproportionate levels of most forms of homelessness in the WMCA area, as they do in England overall. The excess risks of statutory homelessness are generally higher for Black and Mixed ethnicity groups, while Pakistani/Bangladeshi groups are at much greater risk of hidden forms of homelessness such as sofa surfing or living in overcrowded circumstances. WMCA also appears to have particularly high homelessness rates for 'Other' ethnicities, which includes Middle Eastern and North African groups who feature prominently in recent asylum migration flows. Statutory homelessness applications by people with experience of the asylum system have risen substantially in the WMCA in recent years, contributing to sharply rising pressures on the statutory homelessness system.

Our analysis indicates that wide-ranging and long-term structural disadvantage, including the enduring effects of historic racism, impact on present day risks of homelessness. Thus, elevated levels of renting (rather than owning) housing amongst Black and Mixed ethnicity groups contributes substantially to their increased homelessness risks in the West Midlands, as does their disproportionate exposure to poverty. However, even once all these factors are taken into account, ethnicity has an independent effect in increasing the odds that Black households in particular will experience homelessness, indicating that ongoing discrimination also plays a role.

Overt racism by private landlords was the most prominent theme in this regard, and was reported to be a key barrier to accessing housing across minoritised communities. Landlord discrimination was said to pertain not only to race and ethnicity directly, but also to encompass prejudice against people in receipt of benefits, and families with children, particularly larger families; all groups within which people from some minoritised communities are over-represented. New migrant communities were said to be at particular risk of exploitative behaviour by unscrupulous private landlords.

Poor 'diversity competence' was often described on the part of public and voluntary sector services, manifesting most obviously in a failure on the part of some services to meet the language needs of service users. However, frontline practitioners and some key informants were also forthright about the racism, both conscious and unconscious, that they perceived to exist in health, police, housing, and some voluntary sector services. This took the form of damaging assumptions about minoritised people, families and communities that made it less likely that there would be an appropriate response to the homelessness risks that they faced. Such assumptions were said to include biased perceptions that Black women were less 'vulnerable' or trustworthy than White women who experience abuse, violence and homelessness, that Black men were especially 'dangerous', and that controlling behaviours were to be expected, and were therefore somehow more acceptable, in Asian families.

The statutory homelessness system in the WMCA area was perceived as struggling to cope by many key informants and frontline professionals, with a range of statistical indicators also suggesting a system under greater pressure than in other parts of England. The acute shortage of affordable housing in the West Midlands was said to be driving these pressures, with the shortfall in new social lets relative to demand, coupled with LHA limits that restrict access to the private rented sector, making it extremely challenging to find settled housing for homeless households. It was sobering to learn that, in such a pressurised context, even families living in severely overcrowded situations, and with a disabled child, for example, would attract little rehousing priority despite at least arguably

fulfilling the criteria for statutory homelessness.

Poor and cramped conditions were reported as widespread in the temporary accommodation provision in the West Midlands, despite a legal requirement for it to be 'suitable', with basic needs like onsite cooking and laundry facilities sometimes not available even for families with children. Minoritised families were often worst affected as they tended to spend longer in temporary accommodation than White families, and were less likely to obtain social or private housing at the end of the statutory homelessness process. Key informants attributed these ethnic disparities, at least in part, to difficulties in sourcing suitable properties for the larger families found most commonly in Black African and some other minoritised communities. Meantime, for single men facing homelessness risks in the WMCA area, including refugees and those with complex support needs, the main homelessness prevention or relief 'offer' was said to be referral to supported exempt accommodation, largely in Birmingham. Atrocious standards were said to prevail at the problematic end of this exempt accommodation sector, with exploitative practices and criminal involvement rife.

Interestingly, though, while the homelessness risk for Black households is very adverse in the West Midlands, it is less bad than is predicted by statistical modelling based on quantitative relationships observed across the whole country. This might be indicative of some aspects of policy response in the West Midlands which are mitigating what would otherwise be an even more adverse situation.

In this study we also sought to identify the role that wider public services, beyond the housing and homelessness sectors, could and should play in preventing homelessness amongst minoritised communities. A key example in this regard related to the need for a much more robust response by the criminal justice system to domestic abuse, especially as experienced by women from South Asian communities, for whom this is a key driver of homelessness. Another key example was the requirement for better mental health support for social tenants who may be at risk of eviction as a result of anti-social behaviour arising from underlying trauma, many of whom were said to be Black men.

A particularly prominent theme that cut across a wide range of public services related to the need for robust data and monitoring on responses to, and outcomes for, minoritised groups. This was argued to be especially important given the unconscious and often subtle nature of the discrimination that places minorities at particular risk of homelessness. It was argued that without statistical 'proof' of ethnic disparities, it was impossible to identify and 'call out' such unequal treatment, which was often unwitting in nature. Even where relevant data did exist, it was often under-utilised to identify and tackle ethnic disparities. This could lead to 'ethnicity blind-' approaches on the part of public services, leaving adverse outcomes and potentially discriminatory practices unaddressed. Local authority representatives often seemed more exercised about the need for robust data and action to target ethnic inequalities than other public or voluntary sector stakeholders.

Another recurring theme raised by was an apparent 'trust deficit' on the part of some minoritised groups, discouraging them from seeking help from public sector and more mainstream voluntary sector agencies. While specialist grassroots services were sometimes viewed as the solution to these perceived issues of trust and reach on the part of mainstream services, it was flagged that these grassroots organisations were often very small, under-resourced and somewhat disconnected from the more professionalised voluntary sector services. We were also told that these specialist services do not always have the technical skills, knowledge, expertise or capacity to provide a high-quality service to the communities they work with.

Running through all of our discussions with key informants and frontline practitioners was recognition of the impact on both local authorities and other public services of austerity measures, dating back over a decade, which had also led to the contraction of much of the voluntary sector provision. This left a patchy and inadequate network of support for a whole range of groups at risk of homelessness across the West Midlands, with minoritised communities often worst affected. In this difficult climate it was therefore especially encouraging to see some interesting examples of promising prevention practice, or emerging ideas, from local authorities and other partners in the WMCA area. In particular, we came across ambitious, strengths-based employment-focused initiatives intended to reduce

homelessness amongst high-skilled but economically-deprived minoritised communities, and to leverage the local authority position as a major employer to improve access to good jobs for minority groups. There were also range of imaginative, data-driven upstream efforts to reduce homelessness risks amongst vulnerable groups, including the targeting benefits and financial support on vulnerable communities.

## Recommendations

The recommendations below require action on the part of a range of actors, including central government, local authorities, combined authorities, other public bodies, and both mainstream and specialist voluntary sector bodies.

***Implement 'universal' structural changes required to reduce population-level risks of homelessness***. These include a substantial expansion in the supply of social and other affordable housing, especially larger family homes (Bramley, 2024); increasing and sustaining the LHA maximum rate to at least the 30th percentile of rents, and ideally to the 50% percentile (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2023); reviewing the homelessness legislation in England to extend wider public service duties to identify, act and cooperate to prevent homelessness[32]; and placing local authority finances on a more sustainable footing so that the damage done by austerity-linked funding reductions can start to be undone, especially in places like Birmingham which have suffered the consequences of 'bankruptcy' (Riding, 2024). These overarching interventions are relevant to all groups at risk of homelessness in the WMCA and in England as a whole, but resonate particularly for minoritised communities given their heightened risk of homelessness.

***Connect with the cross-government homelessness strategy.*** The UK Government should use the forthcoming cross-departmental homelessness strategy to embed understanding and action at national level on the disproportionate impact of homelessness on minoritised communities. The WMCA is well placed to influence this strategy given its presence on key 'task and finish' groups supporting MHCLG's strategy development work.

***Re-engineer the link between the asylum and statutory homelessness systems.*** At present the asylum system is a predictable, yet avoidable, generator of high homelessness demands in the WMCA area and elsewher. Clearly a radical new approach is required. The UK Government should consider, for example, whether the provision of asylum accommodation could be devolved to local authorities, with appropriate financial support, allowing claimant households with a positive decision to remain living in this as temporary accommodation until settled housing found (see Commission on the Integration of Refugees, 2024; Mort & Morris, 2024). Given that a very high proportion of asylum seekers ultimately gain refugee status, the UK Government should follow the lead of Scottish Government and commit to and resource integration efforts from Day 1 of arrival[33], and should give serious consideration to the overwhelming case for allowing asylum seekers to work if their application takes more than 6 months to resolve[34]. Enabling asylum seekers to become more independent of state support should open up 'non-homeless' routes for them to secure housing for themselves and their families, and mitigate against the tendency of some migrant support services to act as automatic 'referral agencies' into local authority homelessness services.

***Grip the supported exempt accommodation scandal.*** The robust mandatory approach to regulating this sector signaled in the current consultation on The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023[35] is to be welcomed, including the intention to introduce national minimum

[32] Such duties are currently being actively considered in Scotland via the Housing (Scotland) Bill and the 'White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales.

[33] https://www.gov.scot/publications/new-scots-refugee-integration-strategy-2024/

[34]

[35] https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/supported-housing-regulation-consultation/supported-housing-regulation-consultation

standards and to (potentially) link receipt of Housing Benefit to meeting those standards. However, it is imperative that the Government provide clarity on how both the new licensing regime and support standards will be funded. At the same time local authorities, both within and beyond the WMCA area, accustomed to referring vulnerable single people into Birmingham's supported exempt accommodation must prepare for the likely contraction of this sector and plan for more appropriate accommodation options in their local area. The gripping of this scandal is particularly important from the perspective of minoritised communities, as single male refugees and Black men with complex support needs are amongst the groups most heavily concentrated in this often appalling provision.

***Tackle racism amongst private landlords.*** It is also very welcome that the current Renters Rights Bill proposes to make illegal discrimination against prospective tenants in receipt of benefits or with children– issues that disproportionately affect minoritised groups. However, the Government should give consideration to whether discriminatory action by private landlords on grounds of race - already unlawful under the Equalities Act 2010 - can be more tightly regulated and challenged via, for example, the proposed Private Rented Sector Landlord Ombudsman. Alongside this there should be expanded, and targeted, access to legal advice so that new migrants and other groups most often exploited by unscrupulous private landlords are better able to defend their rights. Local authorities should consider commissioning legal advice agencies to focus support on relevant minoritised communities, potentially deploying community asset transfer-type models to subsidise agencies working in areas where there is scarcity of quality advice.

***Prioritise upstream prevention with minoritised communities.*** A key priority for local authorities and other local partners should be to use evidence-based approaches to target support on minoritised communities known to be at especially high risk of homelessness, building on some of the promising practice identified in this report. This should include, for example, using existing council data to target pro-active, upstream employment, benefits and financial support on communities at high risk of homelessness for poverty-related reasons. It is also worth considering the use of mainstream community facilities (in the private as well as public sectors) as a means of reaching out to high-risk groups before they face a homelessness crisis. One area where there was said to be scope for culturally-attuned upstream preventative interventions was support for multi-generational households. This may involve local authorities exploring the use of social care support packages, physical adaptations and extensions, and other interventions that may ease the pressures on multi-generational households that may otherwise precipitate statutory homelessness applications.

***Examine key local partnerships***. We would suggest that the WMCA take a further, closer exploration of key areas of partnership working between public bodies that are currently failing to prevent homelessness as effectively as they could amongst minoritised communities. As noted, the most prominent example shared with us concerned the need for a much more robust response by the criminal justice system to domestic abuse, especially as experienced by women from South Asian communities who are at disproportionate risk of homelessness for this reason. If assured of effective interventions by the police and courts to ensure their safety[36], alongside the ability to access 'sanctuary scheme'-type support from local authority and/or commissioned providers, it may be possible for some of these women to remain living in the family home rather than face all the disruption and trauma of homelessness and prolonged stays in temporary accommodation. This is another area where timely and affordable legal advice is critical. A further key example related to what was reported to be a highly disproportionate levels of evictions in the WMCA area affecting Black men with mental health problems. A more effective response by mental health services – working in partnership with housing providers - may enable more of them to stay in their home and avoid homelessness.

***Reject 'ethnicity-blind' approaches and promote robust ethnic monitoring*.** Mainstream public

[36] This should include learning from the new orders currently being piloted in England. https://www.college.police.uk/article/new-pilot-domestic-abuse-protection-notices-and-orders

and voluntary sector services need to be intentional about being fully inclusive of all of the ethnic groups in the communities that they serve. This means rejecting 'ethnicity blind' approaches, and instead pro-actively and consciously tackling the structural and systemic disadvantages that place some minoritised groups at particular risk of homelessness. This will include a role for promoting greater cultural awareness and diversity competency in some services, including via service commissioning requirements. And certainly it is vital to ensure that community language needs are met. But often what is required is simply to ensure equal and fair access to services for minoritised communities on the same basis as everyone else, rather than necessarily requiring service adjustments to accommodate different needs, preferences or values between ethnic groups. We heard repeatedly about the need for robust ethnic monitoring across public and voluntary sector services in order to identify and tackle racist assumptions (often unconscious) and discriminatory practices (often unintentional) that can lead to adverse outcomes for minoritised communities.

***Reconsider the relationship between specialist and mainstream voluntary sector services***. Heavy reliance on small-scale specialist organisations to meet the needs of the diverse ethnic groups at risk of homelessness in the WMCA area is infeasible. The sheer scale of diversity in the WMCA area means that there can be no solution without the commitment of mainstream voluntary services to this agenda. These larger voluntary sector organisations should commit to working in partnership with grassroots organisations to maximise their reach within minoritised communities which are underrepresented amongst their service users, and to take responsibility for overcoming any trust or credibility issues that limit their effectiveness in offering a community-wide service. For their part, grassroots, ethnic minority-facing organisations should work in partnership with larger voluntary organisations, and public bodies, to upskill their staff and volunteers to provide a quality service to their communities. Grassroots organisations also have a role to play in managing community expectations about the likelihood of accessing social housing via the statutory homelessness system, which in the WMCA area is very low.

Beyond these specific recommendations, and in common with other reports in this programme of work, this study speaks to the need for transformational societal change that tackles structural inequalities and racism in sectors that extend beyond the housing and homelessness systems, to encompass the labour market, social security system, criminal justice and health systems (Rogaly et al, 2021; Trealoar & Begum, 2021). Moreover, this needs to be part of a broader effort to tackle the social fractures that drive the kind of racist attitudes and assumptions that make it less likely that there will be an appropriate response to the homelessness risks that minoritised communities face. Core to this is an urgent need to detoxify the prejudicial public and political discourse that has been so degraded by 'hostile' environment policies and rhetoric over the past decade or so (Mondon & Winter, 2024).

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# APPENDIX 1: Key Informant Topic Guide

Explain nature and purpose of the research

In the earlier stages of this project, we produced a State of the Nation report analysing available survey and administrative data on patterns in homelessness among minoritized groups, and we know from that that there are variations in the risks of homelessness faced by different minoritized communities, and by those with different legal/citizenship status. We'd like to explore what those patterns look like in the West Midlands specifically and what can be done about it by local actors.

Entirely voluntary and do not have to answer any questions you don't want to

Participation is confidential – may be anonymously quoted in project outputs

Permission to participate/record (confirm on the record)

1. **Introduction**

*Can I start by asking just a few questions about you and your role*

- What is your job title/role; how long have you been working at [organisation]?
- What are your key areas of responsibility (briefly)?

2. **Understanding of homelessness amongst minoritised communities**

*As you know, this research is concerned with 'designing out' homelessness amongst minoritised communities in WMCA so would like to talk about the current situation, from your perspective*

- What is your understanding of levels of homelessness amongst minoritised communities in WMCA at present?
  - Does this vary by local authority area? If so, how?
  - Have they changed in recent years *(Probe: growing, falling, changing profile)*?
  - Disproportionate as compared with White-led households?
  - Are some minoritised communities affected more than others? *(Probe: different ethnic groups (Black/Asian/Mixed, but also getting as granular as possible; also refugee/asylum communities as well as British-born minorities)*
  - Are particular minoritised communities concentrated in particular forms of homelessness? *(Probe: statutory homelessness/temporary accommodation; rough sleeping; overcrowding, concealed/sharing households and other 'hidden' forms)*
  - For particular minoritised groups facing homelessness, do you tend to see a particular profile of households/particular demographic groups affected? *(Probe: single v family; economic status; language etc issues; legal/citizenship status;)*
  - Do you have a sense of why these patterns exist/what are the systemic, upstream drivers? Do they vary in different parts of WMCA?
  - Do different minoritised groups require different kinds of responses/preventative interventions?
  - To what extent do you think racial discrimination/racism is part of the drivers of these patterns/differences? *(Probe: individual, structural, institutional racism)*

3. **Role in addressing minoritised homelessness**

*I'd like to talk a little now about the role that you/colleagues play in working with/assisting minoritised people at risk of homelessness*

- To what extent do you/your colleagues work directly with minoritised communities who are homeless or at risk of homelessness? How is it you come into contact with those groups? What kind of services/help do you provide?

- Does your organisation/colleagues play a role in preventing homelessness amongst minoritised groups? What does that involve? Is this an 'intentional' aspect of your work or a (positive) unintended consequence of your core concerns?
- How close to the point of homelessness are you typically involved? *(Probe: do you tend to see people at risk of homelessness but well in advance of it (i.e. fairly upstream) or at the point of crisis/emergency? Is it primarily about preventing repeat homelessness?)?*
- Are there particular kinds of household that it's easier/harder to prevent homelessness for? *(Probe: ethnicity, legal status, age, level/type of need, household type/size, situation/circumstance, other?*
- Why are they easier/harder to help? *(Probe: stage of presentation/contact, behaviour/engagement of household, preventative options available, lack/availability of resources, legal issues, other factors?)*
- Is there more that your organisation/sector could do to prevent homelessness – both generally and amongst minoritised communities in particular? Is there any way that you feel you could intervene at an earlier point to reduce homelessness risks?
- Are there aspects of your current operations that may exacerbate homelessness risks for minoritised communities?
- What are the barriers and enablers to your organisation/sector doing more/intervening earlier/minimising risks?

**4. Role of other organisations/sectors in addressing minoritised homelessness**

*I'd like to widen out now to talk a little now about the role that other organisations/sectors public authorities play, or could play, in preventing homelessness amongst minoritised communities.*

- What, in your view, are the most important sectors for preventing and addressing homelessness? Are there others that should also play a role or more of a role? *(Probe: LA housing/homelessness services; housing associations; private landlords; social services; children's services; education/schools; health services; criminal justice; DWP; employers; voluntary sector homelessness services; ethnic-minority facing voluntary organisations; faith groups; others?)*
- What sorts of things do they currently do to prevent homelessness amongst minoritised communities, as far as you are aware? *(Probe: how up or downstream are these actions/interventions, with those at early risk or facing imminent crisis)?*
- From your perspective, do they currently do enough to prevent homelessness amongst minoritised communities? What more could they do? What do you think are likely to be their barriers or enablers?
- Are there aspects of the current operations of these other sectors/organisations that may exacerbate homelessness risks for minoritised communities?
- Do you work in partnership with any of these other bodies on homelessness? How effective is that partnership working in preventing homelessness? What are the strongest/weakest relationships? How could these partnerships be improved or made more effective?
- What can be done locally and at the combined authority level to address the issues/patterns we've covered? *(Probe:* actions by LAs, the CA itself, but also other local actors, health board etc)

**5. Summing up**

*I'd like to sum up the whole picture now*.

Overall, how effective do you think services/systems for preventing homelessness amongst minoritised communities in WMCA are? *Probe:*

- *Key strengths/weaknesses; ongoing challenges, missed opportunities, changes over time that have been both positive and negative;*
- *Are the right partners involved and sufficiently committed/bought in?*
- *Specific elements of response particularly effective/ineffective, if so why?;*
- *Particular groups benefited or fallen through gaps, if so which/why?;*

- *Enablers of/barriers to success?;*
- *Balance between universal/upstream preventative and more crisis/emergency responses (appropriate/optimal or not);*
- *What are the most important things that need to change?*
- *Any particular examples of good practice?*

**Close**

What have I missed? Is there anything you'd like to add?

Looking to set up cross-sector focus groups with frontline practitioners later in research. Is that something you can help with?

Many thanks for your participation.

# APPENDIX 2: Vignettes and Prompts Used in Focus Groups

**Vignette 1**

**Maya is of Black heritage and a lone mother with two children, aged 4 and 7. After leaving her abusive partner she moved into a private rented flat with her children two years ago. Her ex-partner still has contact with his children and Maya remains afraid of him. She works part time in the service sector but on a low income and is in receipt of Universal Credit. She has been struggling financially for a while, especially as her rent is above the Local Housing Allowance level. Her landlord has recently served her with a 'no fault' eviction notice because he wants to relet to 'professionals' who can afford to pay a substantially higher rent.**

Prompts:

*Probe throughout: different if she were White? Different ethnicity? Including issues of knowledge, trust, cultural sensitivity, discriminatory assumptions, discriminatory processes (individual/institutional racism)*

- How familiar is this kind of case?
- What is likely to happen to Maya and her children?
- Who, if anyone, would have likely been involved in helping Maya at the point she left her abusive partner? (Probe role of: local authority homelessness services (prevention duty), police, women's aid/refuges, (other) voluntary/charity/faith groups, police, employment, social security, Citizens Advice/other advice, etc.)
- Who, if anyone, would be involved in trying to enable her keep her current accommodation? Effectiveness/quality of interventions? (Probe role of: local authority homelessness services (prevention duty), police, women's aid/refuges, (other), GPs, voluntary/charity/faith groups, police, employment, social security/JCP, Citizens Advice/other advice, etc.)
- If she loses it, what is likely to happen next? Is she likely to become homeless and what kind of homelessness e.g. hidden homeless, statutory homelessness, etc.
- Is she likely to approach/be referred to the local authority, and what help would they offer her (probe homelessness prevention/relief duties; TA type; TA duration; location (out of area? Issues of safety?); impacts on Maya's employment; impact on children schooling, etc).
- Is she likely to approach/be put in touch with relevant voluntary sector organisations, e.g women's aid, CAB, grassroots local voluntary sector? Effectiveness/quality of offer?
- How could Maya's (threatened) homelessness have more effectively been prevented? Who should be involved? What should they do? How does that differ from what they do at the moment?
- Is it likely that different forms of racism (individual/institutional/structural) will impact on Maya's experience?
- Would Maya's experiences be different if she struggled with English? If she was not UK born? if she was not a UK citizen? If she was a refugee recently accepted with leave to remain?

**Vignette 2**

**Suravi is of Bangladeshi heritage. She lives in a run down, over-crowded four-bedroom private rented home with her husband Kamal and their five children (aged 5, 8, 11, 13 and 15) along with Kamal's brother's family. Kamal works informally in a friend's business. Suravi is not working. Living circumstances are becoming more difficult, particularly as their 11 year old has a disability and is a wheelchair user. She would like to find a home for herself, Kamal and her children where they would have some space of their own.**

Prompts:

*Probe throughout: different if they were White? Of different ethnicity? Including issues of knowledge, trust, cultural sensitivity, discriminatory assumptions, discriminatory processes (i.e. individual/institutional racism)*

- How familiar is this kind of case?
- What is likely to happen to the family?
- Which services would likely come into contact with the family and what would they do (if anything) to support them?
- Are they likely to approach/be referred to the local authority, and what help would they (probe homelessness prevention/relief duties; TA type; TA duration; location (out of area?); impacts on employment, school etc).
- What housing and/or other support would be available for her in the West Midlands?
- Is she likely to approach/be put in touch with relevant voluntary sector organisations and what would effectiveness/quality of offer likely be?
- Is there likely to be any involvement from schools in the family's case, if so what and how?
- How could the risk of homelessness and the family living in unsuitable accommodation have more effectively been prevented? Who should be involved? What should they do? How does that differ from what they do at the moment?
- Is it likely that different forms of racism (individual/institutional/structural) will impact on Suravi and her family's experience?
- Would Suravi's experiences be different if she was not UK born? If she was not a UK citizen? If she struggled with English? If she was a refugee recently accepted with leave to remain?

**Vignette 3**

**Axmed is a single man aged 28. He is refugee from Somalia. Axmed is highly qualified, acquiring a university degree in his home country, but was forced to flee because of local unrest. He arrived in the UK 5 years ago and has recently been granted leave to remain. He has no family in the UK but has built up a network of friends via volunteering work in the local Mosque. Axmed is highly motivated but his mental health has been affected by the violence he witnessed in Somalia. He has been told that he has to leave his Serco accommodation within 28 days.**

Prompts:

*Probe throughout: different if he were refugee from different part of the world? Including issues of knowledge, trust, cultural sensitivity, discriminatory assumptions, discriminatory processes (i.e. individual/institutional racism)*

- How familiar is this kind of case?
- What is likely to happen to Axmed?
- Who would help Axmed find new accommodation (if anyone)? Effectiveness/quality of interventions? Probe role of: Home Office, local authority homelessness services (prevention/relief duties), social landlords, voluntary/charity/faith groups, employment services, social security, mental health services, Citizens Advice/other advice etc
- What are the chances of him becoming homeless? Is he likely to become homeless and what kind of homelessness e.g. sleeping rough, hostels/night shelters, sofa surfing, etc.
- Would he approach the local authority, and what help would they offer him (probe homelessness prevention/relief duties; exempt accommodation;).
- Would he approach homelessness or refugee charities – what help could/would they typically offer? Quality of offer? Who else could/would help him? (e.g. church, family etc.)
- How could Axmed's homelessness have more effectively been prevented? Who should be involved? What should they do? How does that differ from what they do at the moment?
- Would Axmed get support for getting back into work? If so who and what support?
- What if Axmed had a wife and children? What difference would that make to the process and likely outcomes?
- Is it likely that different forms of racism (individual/institutional/structural) will impact on Axmed's experience?

**Vignette 4**

**Marcus is an unemployed single Black man in his 40s living in his own social rented flat. Neighbours have repeatedly reported that he is engaging in anti-social behaviour with loud noises during the night and the police have been called out several times but have taken no action. He also has escalating rent arrears. The social landlord's tenancy sustainment team has tried to engage Marcus but without success. Eviction proceedings have now therefore commenced. There is a suspicion that Marcus has mental health problems, and possibly a learning disability, but he has never been assessed or diagnosed. Marcus has a sister living locally and he is known to occasionally attend a local church.**

Prompts:

*Probe throughout: different if he were White? Different ethnicity? Including issues of knowledge, trust, cultural sensitivity, discriminatory assumptions, discriminatory processes (i.e. individual/institutional racism)*

- How familiar is this kind of case?
- What is likely to happen to Marcus? What are the chances of Marcus keeping his accommodation? What are the chances of him becoming homeless?
- Who, if anyone, would be involved in trying to enable him to keep his accommodation? Effectiveness/quality of interventions? (Probe role of: social landlord, local authority homelessness services (prevention duty), adult social care, mental health services, GP, voluntary/charity/faith groups, police, employment, social security, family, Citizens Advice/other advice, etc.)
- If he loses it, what is likely to happen next? Is he likely to become homeless and what kind of homelessness e.g. sleeping rough, hostels/night shelters, sofa surfing, etc.
- Would he approach/be referred to the local authority, and what help would they offer him (probe homelessness relief duties; priority need, intentional homelessness, exempt accommodation, unmet support needs).
- Would he approach homelessness charities – what help could/would they offer? Quality of offer? Who else could/would help him? (e.g. church, family etc.)
- How could Marcus's homelessness have more effectively been prevented? Who should be involved? What should they do? How does that differ from what they do at the moment?
- Is it likely that different forms of racism (individual/institutional/structural) will impact on Marcus's experiences?
- Would Marcus experiences be different if he struggled with English? If he was not UK born? if he was not a UK citizen? If he's a refugee recently accepted with leave to remain?

**Wrap up**

As we explained at the beginning, we're interested in finding out why people from Black and minoritised ethnic communities who are disproportionately homeless or at risk of homelessness in the West Midlands, what services there are and how the 'system' could be improved to design out homelessness.

Do you have any views on why some ethnic groups in the area are more likely to be homeless?

Do you think different forms of racism (individual/institutional/structural) impact on inequalities? Why, how?

Do you think people in different ethnic groups may have different preferences and needs when faced with housing challenges and trade-offs?

Are there particular kinds of household that it's easier/harder to prevent homelessness for?(Probe: ethnicity, legal status, age, level/type of need, household type/size, situation/circumstance, other?

Why are they easier/harder to help? (Probe: stage of presentation/contact, behaviour/engagement of household, preventative options available, lack/availability of resources, legal issues,other Do you think people from different ethnic groups experience homeless services differently?

Have you seen any examples of good practice in the West Midlands in addressing racial inequalities in housing/homelessness?

Are there aspects of operations that may exacerbate homelessness risks for minoritised communities?

What are the barriers and enablers to your organisation/sector doing more/intervening earlier/minimising risks

What could local organisations do better and what can be done upstream to prevent homelessness?

What action and by whom could make the biggest difference?

Thank you

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