

# Practitioner article

## Addressing racial inequalities in Scotland's housing: the CRE Code of Practice

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# Shelter

## Addressing racial inequalities in Scotland's housing: the CRE Code of Practice

**Fazila Esat-Dawson discusses racial inequalities in the provision of housing and of housing and homelessness services in Scotland, and explains how the CRE's new Code of Practice will address the situation by promoting good practice and raising awareness of housing rights.**

### Introduction

As the latest homelessness figures show, racial inequalities continue to persist in the planning and provision of housing in Scotland. For example, black people or people who describe themselves as being in the census category of 'non-white, other' are more likely to apply for assistance under the homeless persons legislation than any other ethnic groups, suggesting that these groups are more likely to encounter problems retaining a secure and suitable home.

The **Code of Practice for Racial Equality in Housing Scotland** recently published by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) aims to help all those involved in housing to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good race relations. It should also help those who use housing services to understand their rights and to be aware of what constitutes good practice in the field of housing and race relations.

### The changing landscape

Since the first codes of practice in rented and non-rented housing were issued by the CRE in the 1990s, there have been changes both to race relations legislation and to Scottish housing law. Housing responsibility has become devolved to the Scottish Parliament and there has been a growth in the number of organisations, including social landlords, involved in this sector. The code takes into consideration these changes.

At the same time, Scotland's population has continued to become increasingly ethnically diverse, and the effects of globalisation have become more apparent with the arrival of new migrants, including refugees. Encouraging integration and community cohesion have therefore become ever more important considerations for housing organisations and agencies.

While there have been some improvements in housing and provision of housing services for ethnic minority people, evidence suggests that more still needs to be done to address racial inequalities and promote good practice in housing.

## Housing tenure

In Scotland, there are wide variations in home ownership and tenure pattern by ethnic origin. Of the renting population, ethnic minority people are less likely than the majority population to rent in the public sector (for example, from councils and registered social landlords) despite being more likely to experience certain characteristics of 'housing need'.<sup>1</sup> For example, 78 per cent of white people rent their homes in the public sector compared to 48 per cent of all minority ethnic people.<sup>2</sup>

This disparity is related to a number of factors, which may include:

- the lack of knowledge of the range of accommodation available in the public sector
- the need for a wide range of house type and size (not always available in the public sector)
- the importance of living in an area which is safe from racial harassment, and
- the importance of access to amenities catering for community needs.<sup>3</sup>

## Homelessness

The ethnic minority population are also more likely to be vulnerable to homelessness and hidden homelessness.

- Analysis of local authority homelessness monitoring data found that the incidence of 'recorded' homelessness affecting ethnic minority households was 75 per cent higher than across the population as a whole.<sup>4</sup>
- Hidden homelessness is suggested by evidence of overcrowding and over-representation in poor quality housing.<sup>5</sup>
- Refugees, Gypsies/Travellers and ethnic minority women fleeing domestic abuse are particularly vulnerable to homelessness.<sup>6</sup>

Many factors contribute to the homelessness of ethnic minority people:

- lack of information about housing options, rights and homelessness procedures
- lack of recognition by housing staff of the need for protection from racial harassment, and
- difficulty accessing information due to language differences, literacy issues, unfamiliarity with the system or lack of flexibility in service provision.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, ethnic minority people in certain areas may be less likely to seek assistance from their local authority due to the stigma that may be incurred from their own community.<sup>8</sup>

## Quality of housing

Differences still persist in the type and quality of housing in which ethnic groups live. Ethnic minority communities are more likely than people from other groups to live in poorer housing, be more anxious to move and have fewer opportunities to do so. (Poor housing is defined as dwellings that are cold and damp and overcrowded, or badly designed and built.)<sup>9</sup> Fewer ethnic minority people have central heating in their homes and overcrowding still remains a serious issue for all ethnic minority communities in Scotland.<sup>10</sup>

- Pakistani, Bangladeshi and African households have the highest incidence of households living below the occupancy rating standard.<sup>11</sup> This means they have fewer rooms than required by people living in a home, depending on their ages and the relationship between them.
- Bangladeshi households have the lowest percentage of households with central heating (84 per cent). This is followed by other South Asian, African and Pakistani households – only 89 per cent of households in each of these groups have central heating.<sup>12</sup>

## Housing location

While poor housing can be measured in purely physical terms, it can also be calculated at a community level in terms of lack of access to community facilities, crime levels, employment and social support networks.<sup>13</sup> The lack of awareness and consideration for the particular social needs of ethnic minority communities is likely to result in poor housing at a community level and culturally insensitive housing services. For example, not recognising the importance for certain communities of being in close proximity to social networks, shops that cater for particular diet, or religious and community facilities, or the impact of the fear of racial harassment<sup>14</sup> can also result in the provision of poor housing.

## Housing and health

The failure to meet the housing needs of ethnic minority communities also has a negative impact on their health and well-being. For example, the failure to provide varying sizes of housing, to consider the social needs of particular communities and to publicise housing information in other languages (where there is a need to do so) either forces a certain quality of life on people from ethnic minority communities or compels them to make certain choices which may compromise their financial fitness and health.

- Research shows that people are more likely to experience anxiety and depression as the number of housing problems they face increase.<sup>15</sup> Overcrowding in particular is associated with psychological symptoms such as depression.<sup>16</sup>

- Social exclusion and racial discrimination are established risk factors related to poor physical and mental health within ethnic minority groups.<sup>17</sup>
- Research in the field of 'stress biology' suggests that experiences associated with forms of social exclusion, such as racism, impact on physical health, for example in raising susceptibility to high blood pressure.<sup>18</sup>

## Addressing the inequalities

The CRE's **Code of Practice for Racial Equality in Housing Scotland** aims to set standards for achieving race equality in all areas of housing. It is intended to be a practical tool that will help organisations and individuals to avoid unlawful racial discrimination and harassment, and to promote equality and encourage good race relations. The code includes specific examples of areas where potential discrimination and disadvantage might occur. It also gives examples of actions housing associations can take to try and ensure that all tenants and residents receive parity of service.

The code is a statutory code. This means that the courts must consider whether its recommendations have been followed in cases brought under the Race Relations Act (RRA), if the code is introduced into evidence and the recommendations appear relevant to any question arising during the proceedings.

## Further information

To receive a copy of the code please contact CRE Scotland giving your **full name and address**, by emailing [scotland@cre.gov.uk](mailto:scotland@cre.gov.uk), telephoning 0131 524 2000 or writing to:

CRE Scotland  
The Tun  
12 Jackson's Entry  
off Holyrood Road  
Edinburgh EH8 8PJ

You can also download a pdf of the code from the CRE website:  
[http://www.cre.gov.uk/downloads/housing\\_code\\_scotland.pdf](http://www.cre.gov.uk/downloads/housing_code_scotland.pdf)

If you would like any further information, please send an email to [practicescotland@shelter.org.uk](mailto:practicescotland@shelter.org.uk) in the first instance.

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Executive Central Research Unit (2001) *Audit of Research on Minority Ethnic Issues in Scotland from a Race Perspective*

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Executive (2004) *Analysis of Ethnicity in the 2001 Census - Summary Report*

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Executive Central Research Unit (2001) *Audit of Research on Minority Ethnic Issues in Scotland from a Race Perspective*

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Executive Social Research (2004) *Black & Minority Ethnic Communities and Homelessness in Scotland*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Executive Social Research (2004) *Black & Minority Ethnic Communities and Homelessness in Scotland*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> Communities Scotland (2004) *Precis: The Housing Needs and Aspirations of Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in Angus and Dundee*

<sup>9</sup> Page, A. (Feb 2002) *Journal of Environmental Health Research* (Vol 1, Issue 1). *Poor Housing and Mental Health in the United Kingdom: Changing the Focus for Intervention*

<sup>10</sup> Scottish Executive (2004) *Analysis of Ethnicity in the 2001 Census - Summary Report*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

<sup>13</sup> Page, A. (2002) *Journal of Environmental Health Research*. *Poor Housing and Mental Health in the United Kingdom: Changing the Focus for Intervention*

<sup>14</sup> Shelter Policy Library (2004) *Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Crisis*

<sup>15</sup> Wilkinson, D. Crown Copyright (1999) *Poor Housing and Ill Health: A Summary of Research Evidence*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

<sup>17</sup> Scottish Executive (2005) *National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well –Being: Addressing Mental Health Inequalities in Scotland*

<sup>18</sup> Mentality (2002) *Mental Health Improvement: What Works? A Briefing for the Scottish Executive*