

# Facts Don't Lie

One Working Class: Race, Class  
and Inequalities

# Runnymede: Intelligence for a Multi-ethnic Britain

Runnymede is the UK's leading independent thinktank on race equality and race relations. Through high-quality research and thought leadership, we:

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- Provide evidence to support action for social change;
- Influence policy at all levels.

## Runnymede

Unit 119

Pill Box

115 Coventry Road

London E2 6GG

T 020 7377 9222

E [info@runnymedetrust.org](mailto:info@runnymedetrust.org)

[www.runnymedetrust.org](http://www.runnymedetrust.org)

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

In this time of pandemic, inequality in all its forms is a growing threat. More than ever, as we reflect on the individual and collective tragedy of those 120,000 lives lost to COVID-19 (Gov.uk, 2021), and the crippling economic impact on our families and communities, our nation demands a leadership that not only offers figurative and literal healing but reinforces the bonds that unite us.

Instead, the Prime Minister's Special Adviser on Minorities, Samuel Kasumu, speaks of his dismay that the government is 'choosing to pursue a politics steeped in division' (Kasumu, 2021). From the heart of Whitehall, Kasumu's words leave no doubt that a government facing unprecedented challenges in unifying a nation has instead chosen a moment of national crisis to divide us, not least by seeking to drive a wedge between constituent groups within the working class, framed around the notion of white marginalisation.

According to this narrative of division, reinforced by statements made by equalities minister Liz Truss, it would appear that the universal challenges faced by the working class, regardless of ethnicity, have nothing to do with traditional manufacturing jobs being relocated to parts of the world where wages are lower and health and safety standards are non-existent.

Instead, our government would have us believe an absurdity: that the privations of the 'white working class' in fact emanate from the gains made at their expense by other minority groups, whether the same-sex couple who fought for the right to marry, the disabled person who demanded a functioning toilet on a railway train, or the Black woman who sought answers as to why she is four times more likely to die in childbirth than her white friend and neighbour.

It is disingenuous for any government to deflect the over-riding truth that the problems faced by post-industrial communities result from decades of under-investment in infrastructure, education, jobs and training. Further, it is deeply divisive for any government to suggest that said under-investment is a consequence of the 'fashion', to use the Truss vernacular, for over-indulging minority groups that the minister apparently believes have long been engaged in an ethnicity-based competition for equality and scarce public resources – and in which she declares the 'white working class' the loser (Truss, 2020).

The politics of blame only encourage one vulnerable community to resent other vulnerable communities, while doing nothing to assist anyone to escape the shackles of their privation and poverty.

## Individual, structural and institutional racism

### Definitions

- Individual racism: holding racist values (example: 'I would be upset if my child married someone who was Muslim'), racist beliefs (example: 'Black people don't work as hard as white people') or racist behaviours (example: using derogatory language to describe someone's ethnic or racial background).
- Institutional racism: the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racial stereotyping (Macpherson, 1999).
- Structural racism: people of colour have been and are held back from achieving their cultural, political and economic potential. They are alienated from positions of power, representation and resources and are not afforded equal opportunities because of systems. Structural racism (also known as systemic racism) is the condition where 'society's laws, institutional practices, customs and guiding ideas combine to harm racially minoritised populations in ways not experienced by white counterparts' (Lingayah, 2021).

We believe there is another way to address our shared problems, including the creeping deterioration in the availability of public resources that has only made the poor poorer and the weak weaker, regardless of the colour of anyone's skin. That way is based on finding solutions rather than simply looking for someone else to blame, reflecting a community spirit that recognises we do indeed have "more in common than we have that divides us." (Jo Cox Foundation, 2020).

A decade ago, when the Equality Act 2010 became law, its first provision was the Section 1 'Public Sector Duty Regarding Socio-economic Inequalities'.

Where commenced, Section 1 would require public bodies including local authorities, the police, schools, armed forces and the NHS to exercise their functions in a manner intended to reduce the inequalities of outcome that result from socioeconomic disadvantages based on factors such as class, education, occupation and place of residence.

Though the duty has been commenced in Scotland in 2018 and is scheduled for commencement in Wales in March 2021, England does not benefit from it because successive governments, whether Labour, Coalition or Conservative, have failed to issue the Commencement Order that would bring the provision into force.

In the context of the pandemic, its commencement would have meant that before schools transitioned to remote teaching, education authorities in England would have been subject to a legal obligation under Section 1 of the Act to consider how best to ensure working-class children on free school meals (FSM) would be fed while the school gates were locked, and how best to ensure working-class children would have access to laptops to prevent their *de facto* exclusion from online classes.

Likewise, hospitals would have been subject to a legal obligation under Section 1 of the Act to consider how best to ensure that all staff would have equal access to PPE (personal protective equipment), not least when it became clear that Black and minority ethnic (BME) clinicians were dying of COVID-19 in disproportionately greater numbers than staff of other ethnicities.

Implementing Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 offers universal benefits, not least to the most vulnerable groups in society. Now is not the time for a politics that drives a wedge between our communities, setting one against the other in the

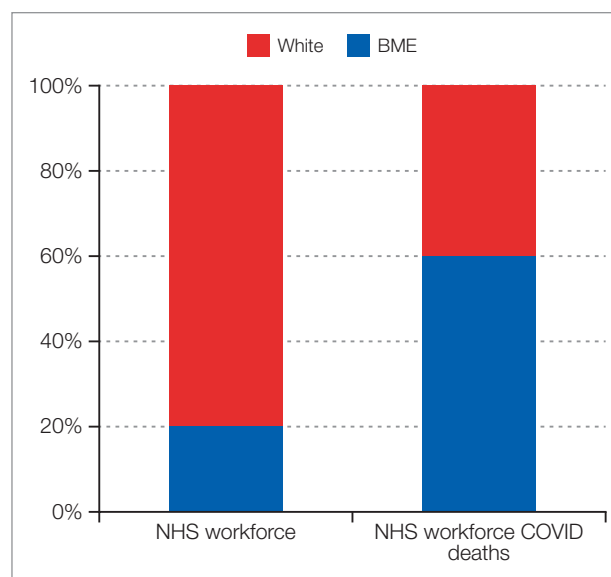
battle for diminishing resources. What England needs is a government committed to using the resources of the public sector to create a climate in which jobs, dignity and hope are offered to everyone on equal terms, regardless of ethnicity, in particular those working-class residents of our post-industrial towns and cities.

We therefore urge this government to issue the Commencement Order for Section 1 of the Act as a matter of urgency, to ensure that public bodies use their powers in a way that examines the differential impact of decisions they take on behalf of communities experiencing poverty and marginalisation, and ensures that those decisions neither exacerbate inequalities nor inflame tensions, whether or not they are based on age, class, disability, gender, marital status, race, religion or sexuality.

The realities around pervasive structural racism have only been reinforced during the COVID pandemic. One need not look any further than the fact that 60 of the first 100 NHS clinical staff to die of the disease were BME, despite only 20% of NHS staff overall being from a BME background (Cook, Kursumovic and Lennane, 2020). If the government and society want to shift the needle on racial equity, we need to address institutional and structural racism.

There is hope where the government is prepared to focus on better collection of data, including on ethnicity pay gaps and comparing the outcome differences between different classes rather than between working-class groups. However, it is entirely simplistic and retrograde of the government

**Figure 1. NHS workforce vs NHS workforce COVID deaths**



to define progress around racial equity in terms of simple metrics like access and equality of opportunity (Secretary of State Gavin Williamson, letter to the Office for Students; OfS, 2021). Clearly, it is not good enough that a Black woman can access the NHS to give birth to her child, yet she is four times more likely to die in labour than a white woman.

This government would have us believe that economic inequality has nothing to do with ethnic inequalities and structural racism. More than that, the rhetoric suggests that there is no *actual* link between ‘race’ and unequal socioeconomic outcomes. If this were true, we would expect to see ethnic inequalities and the poverty faced by Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black African and other minority ethnic groups tumbling away – dissipating not just in a monetary sense but also in an educational, health, labour market and housing sense. This report outlines how this is, in fact, incorrect. Inequalities in areas such as child poverty, health and the labour market are not reducing, and, now more than ever, they have an ethnicity angle. We firmly believe that all individuals who do not have equal socioeconomic outcomes

deserve our attention, but we cannot dissociate poverty from ethnicity if we are to have a series of successful policies that address these issues.

We unfortunately live in a society where both ‘race’ and ‘class’ drive inequalities, sometimes independently of one another but often in tandem. Many of the issues that white working-class children face are the very same issues that Black working-class children face. The working class, by definition, is a multiracial entity, not one that is simply white. It is vital that we counter the current narrative that seeks to build division between communities facing many of the same issues. Rather than focusing solely on data that separates BME working-class people and white working-class people, the government should be collecting better data and commenting on the disparities that exist between middle-class, upper-middle-class and working-class groups. The opportunities white working-class groups are denied as a result of the negative impact of middle class privileges and the privileges afforded to the rest of society are experienced too by BME working-class people.

## 2 THE DRIVERS

It is important to understand exactly what structural racism is. It is the condition where 'society's laws, institutional practices, customs and guiding ideas combine to harm racially minoritised populations in ways not experienced by white counterparts' (Lingayah, 2021). It is equally important to note that this does not deny or diminish the inequalities and barriers faced by many white individuals. The intersection between 'race' and 'class' in that sense is what makes the working class 'multiracial' by definition. However, it recognises that the barriers faced in terms of education, employment, housing and health are always patterned by 'race' for minority ethnic individuals. The government would have us believe that we have to choose between caring and closing the gap on inequalities for either the 'white working class' or ethnic minorities. We can in fact do both, simultaneously. By accepting that our society is structurally racist and reshaping our institutions accordingly we will benefit all working-class people, both Black and white. The systems that currently exist do a disservice to all working-class people but this government appears to be framing one group as the reason that the other is falling behind. This is the fault of the system, not the individual.

There are a number of questions we can ask to understand why racially differentiated outcomes is not just a problem of a few bad apples in the workforce, but rather is the product of institutional policies, norms and practices that sustain or drive outcomes based on 'race' and class.

Why were 60 of the first 100 NHS clinical staff to die of COVID-19 BME, when BME people comprise only 20% of NHS staff in total? Is the NHS institutionally racist? If the NHS is institutionally racist, what hope is there for equality and equity in other institutions like the police, the judiciary and the Home Office, where BME and Muslim people face the strong arm of the state?

How can it be that an individual may not be racist, but if they join the Metropolitan Police tomorrow as a young liberal recruit, regardless of ethnicity, they are expected to impose objectively racist policies such as stop and search, adding young Black men to the Gang Matrix, identifying Muslim terrorist threats based on what people read on social media rather than fact and evidence, or reasonable proof?

### FACT BOX: Do we live in a post-racial and equal society?

#### 'Race' and 'class'

- Homelessness more than doubled (Georgie and Gleeson, 2019) in London between 2011 and 2019, and Black people are more than three times more likely than all other ethnic groups to experience homelessness (Shelter, 2020).
- Positioning 'white working-class' disadvantage as an *ethnic* disadvantage rather than as class disadvantage places this group in direct competition with Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. It does very little to address the real and legitimate grievances that poor white people in Britain have.
- We should recognise that the working class has been 'left behind' if not actively held back, and that these issues affect all working-class people, including BME working-class people.
- There were 130,000 preventable deaths in the 2010s due to austerity policies (Helm, 2019).
- 100,000 council homes (Statista, 2020) have been sold in the past decade through the Right to Buy scheme, reducing the housing stock available to working families. By 2019, the UK was building 30,000 fewer council homes each year than in 2010 (Booth, 2019).
- 500,000 people in the UK are forced to live in temporary accommodation due to fire safety concerns similar to those that were raised in Grenfell Tower prior to its disastrous fire (Tims, 2020).

Why is it that a child is eight times more likely to read a children's book with an animal character than a Black character? What is a young Black or Asian child feeling or thinking after leaving school without reading a single book written by a person of colour, and what are white children taking home from this absence? (CLPE, 2018). The books we read, the films we view, all convey a sense of belonging, of who we are as a nation. If people of colour are written out, erased, their stories not told, how do we build trust between and among our communities? Minorities will always be seen as an add-on, a tokenistic addition to the lives of white people and to a country that is seen to be white. But Britain isn't just white: it is inclusive of the descendants of African, South Asian, Caribbean and Chinese people who were subjects of the British empire, including of seafarers who worked on ships across the globe and built the mixed communities of port cities such as Liverpool, Cardiff and Bristol. The older communities grew after the Second World War when Black Caribbean and South Asian workers were encouraged to migrate to work in rebuilding Britain and the communities became more visible later as they were joined by their families.

An individual teacher, who may or may not be racist, is not responsible for a curriculum that has no writers of colour. It is not individual acts of racism that lead to children leaving school at the age of 16 without having read a book by a person of colour, when only one GCSE English literature course features a novel or play written by a Black author (Penguin, 2020; Weldon and Begum, 2020). Yet we are led to believe that there is little institutional deficit in the way in which the curriculum is shaped, or when the teaching workforce is mainly white (Salisbury, 2020), or when Black boys and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are excluded at a higher rate (Runnymede Trust, 2020b).

Structural racism affects individuals on a day-to-day basis, through factors over which they have limited control, such as overexposure (Haque, Bécares and Treloar 2020). This means that one person may be overlooked for a job because someone with a 'more English-sounding' name is preferred; another may never get to see someone who looks like them in a role of significance to which they aspire. Structural racism also means that, collectively, Black and minority ethnic people are held back from achieving their cultural, political and economic potential.

Structural racism is the reason that the vast majority of the Grenfell victims were from BME backgrounds; it is the reason why 40% of African graduates are overqualified for their roles; it is the reason

Black people are nine times more likely than their white counterparts to be stopped and searched by the police; and it is the reason why for every £1 of White British wealth, Pakistani households have around 50p, Black Caribbean households around 20p, and Black African and Bangladeshi households approximately 10p. It is also the reason why over 40% of young people in custody are from BME backgrounds, why BME women are disproportionately impacted by funding cuts and why Bangladeshi households are 15 times more likely than White British households to experience overcrowded housing (Marmot, 2020). It is no coincidence, then, that BME groups are more likely to be classified as working class, and this is why this analysis that differentiates between 'race' and 'class' is divisive and unhelpful.

Indeed, in the immediate and most harrowing case of the ongoing pandemic, research carried out by the Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity has shown that the most significant risk factors driving COVID inequalities among BME people is 'entrenched structural and institutional racism and racial discrimination' (Nazroo and Bécares, 2021).

One of the key impacts of structural racism is that there is a continual sense among racial justice advocates that we are 'fire-fighting'. The disproportionate impacts of COVID-19, the Grenfell fire, Prevent, the Windrush scandal and continual discrimination in the labour market mean that there is little time to deal with the structural and institutional issues that are the cause of these emergencies. In a sense, it is a vicious cycle. To deal with the deep-rooted and pervasive nature of racism in our society, we must tackle the issue in a root-and-stem way. But this requires time and concerted effort which is not afforded, as in the meantime Black and minority ethnic people are dying on a daily basis because of this very racism. This is also true for the working class as a whole. Food banks, emergency shelters and Universal Credit are emergency measures – and inadequate ones – for the deep inequalities that the working class as a whole face on a daily basis because of the way institutions have been designed.

An analysis of class is just as pertinent and important as one of 'race'. In fact, any analysis should try to intersect 'race' and class, not least because a substantial number of the working class are BME people. Many examples illustrate why class matters, but perhaps none more so than the tube station analogy. For every tube station you travel in an eastward direction on the Piccadilly



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Line, life expectancy falls by one year (London Health Observatory, 2012). Life expectancy and its intersection with class perhaps demonstrates most strikingly why an analysis of class is needed. The lack of class data that governments have historically collected is indicative of their positioning on these issues. By collecting more and better inter- and extra-class data, we would begin to clearly see that the inequalities that matter are not within the working class but between the working class and the middle class and the rest of society. This is what would genuinely 'level up' the country, not a culture war that seeks to pit ethnic minorities against white people in a made-up rivalry.

## 3 THE NUMBERS AND THEIR IMPACT

It is perhaps often easy to hypothesise about what institutional and/or structural racism are. It can also sometimes be confusing and blur our understanding of the issues at hand. There is an easy way to briefly move away from rhetoric: by turning to numbers and facts. Facts don't lie, and there are certain facts and figures that have been pervasive for longer than the 10 years since the socioeconomic duty was first introduced. These figures shine a light on the unequal outcomes in health, economics, housing, the criminal justice system, education and the labour market, among other areas.

### 3.1 Health

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on the ways in which inequalities have been built into our system and how 'race' and class impact on outcomes, affecting people from cradle to grave. Black people are four times more likely to

die from COVID-19 than white people (Booth and Barr, 2020). Among all NHS staff, BME staff account for around 21% of staff, including around 20% of nursing staff and 44% of medical staff. Within those three categories, of those who have died, 63%, 64%

#### FACT BOX: Do we live in a post-racial and equal society?

##### Health

- Black women are four times more likely than white women to die in childbirth in the UK (Summers, 2021).
- Black people are four times more likely than white people to die from COVID-19 (Booth and Barr, 2020).
- 60 of the first 100 NHS clinical staff to die of the disease were BME, despite the fact that only 20% of NHS staff overall are BME (Cook, Kursumovic and Lennane, 2020). *That is what structural racism looks like* (for a definition of structural racism, see the box on page 2).
- Between March and May 2020, there would have been 58,000 additional COVID-related deaths had white people experienced the same death rate as Black people (Parth, Kapoor and Treloar, 2020).
- Infant mortality has risen among the poorest 10% of people living in the UK, to 36% above the UK average (Mellor, 2020).

#### Figure 2. The tragic case of Dr Peter Tun

Source: Chaand Nagpaul, CBE (Chair, BMA), lecture given at the NHS Health and Race Observatory, 11 February 2021.

#### The tragic case of Dr Peter Tun

BMA

- On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, Dr Peter Tun – a neurological rehabilitation associate specialist working on a non-Covid ward at Royal Berkshire hospital – expressed grave concern about Covid's spread
- He asked Trust managers to provide him and his colleagues with facemasks while treating patients
- In a desperate email, he warned that, without immediate action, *'it will be too little and too late'*
- The Trust rejected his plea as then-current PHE guidance didn't require masks on non-Covid wards
- A manager replied: *'These supplies are not widely available and need to be used sensibly ... This is the trust position at the moment and I do not have any powers to influence this.'*
- Patients on Dr Tun's non-Covid ward became infected and he tragically died on April 13<sup>th</sup> – prompting the Trust to begin a serious incident investigation



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**The Guardian**  
 Emails reveal doctor's plea for PPE before Covid-19 death

Dr Peter Tun's messages show he warned Royal Berkshire hospital about lack of vital equipment

and 95% were BME. The picture is similarly grim for patients admitted. The UK population is 17% BME, but BME people have accounted for 34% of intensive care unit admissions (Cook, Kursumovic and Lennane, 2020).

Research has also proven beyond reasonable doubt that there is no genetic basis for 'race', which has confirmed what we already knew (Parth, Kapoor and Treloar, 2020): that BME people are not dying at higher rates because of their genes. BME individuals are dying because of the socioeconomic disadvantages that they face from an early age. These have meant that they are more likely to work in jobs outside of the home, more likely to be key workers, less likely to have been supplied with adequate PPE (Haque Bécares and Treloar, 2020), more likely to live in overcrowded housing and have less financial capabilities to buffer against the high economic impacts of COVID. Those in the lowest 10% of economic households – which are over 50% BME – would have to spend 74% of their household income in order to meet the health standards expected to avoid COVID (Tinson, 2020). Merged together, this has proven to be a disaster that

highlights both how and why the unequal outcomes faced by the poorest do not happen by chance.

Beyond COVID, this picture has been a reality for much longer. Black women are four times more likely than white women to die in childbirth in the UK, with asian women twice as likely to die compared with white women (NPEU, 2020). The health-related life score for Bangladeshi individuals in 2017 was 0.556, 0.580 for Pakistani individuals and 0.739 for white people. These scores were almost identical when taken in 2012, showing that in a five-year period little had changed in terms of the poorer quality of life for certain ethnic minority groups (EHRC, 2020; 2011 Census data). The inability to stay healthy is also patterned by socioeconomics. England's poorest households would need to spend 74% of their disposable income to meet Eatwell guidelines (Scott, Sutherland and Taylor, 2018). The 'scarring' effects of having to confront racism on a daily basis mean that Black African women, BME people broadly, and Gypsies, Roma and Travellers were found to suffer poorer mental health than the rest of the population in Britain and were more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression (Williams, 2019).

## 3.2 Housing, poverty and financial inequality

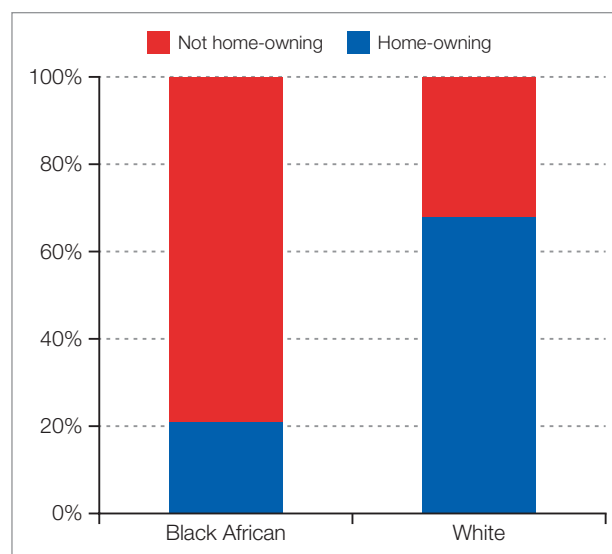
Around two-fifths of people from ethnic minority backgrounds live in low-income households, twice the rate of white people (Runnymede Trust, 2020a). The situation is particularly acute for Black Africans (50% of whom live in poverty), Pakistanis (60% of whom live in poverty) and Bangladeshis (70% of whom live in poverty). This means that around half of BME children in this country live in poverty (Khan, 2020b). Such a statistic is shocking and should be enough on its own to make those in power realise that issues of racism are not 'fashionable' and dividing the poorest along class lines is not helpful: this is a matter of life and death for our youngest.

Within this unequal poverty distribution, just 21% of Black African households own their own home, compared with 68% of White British households (Fawehinmi, 2019). Furthermore, Black African and Bangladeshi households have ten times less wealth than White British households (Khan, 2020a). It is also worth making it clear that the poverty faced by large numbers of white people in this country – a large majority of whom are working class – is equally unacceptable, and that building stronger bridges between groups that face similar challenges is key. Coupled with this is the idea that London is

a city that has little to no inequality and that there is simply a need to 'level up' the rest of the country in comparison with the capital.

London has some excessively rich pockets that skew the data, with a knock-on effect on housing outcomes and subsequent analysis. Geographically,

**Figure 3. Home ownership in the UK**



in 2019, London had the largest ethnicity pay gap in Great Britain, with minority ethnic groups earning 23.8% less than white employees – worse than 2018, when the gap was 21.7%. This is particularly important as there are a disproportionate number of Black workers living in London compared with other parts of the country (ONS, 2020). At the same time, of the 17 local authorities in this country with the highest rates of child poverty, 10 are in London (CPAG, 2018). In each of these local authorities, BME children account for over 50% of the youth population. Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black adults are more likely to live in substandard accommodation than white people, with 30.9% of Pakistani and

Bangladeshi people living in overcrowded housing, compared with just 8.3% of white people.

BME groups are also more likely to face higher housing costs in retirement. These increased housing costs will further erode the already lower-than-average retirement incomes received by BME groups (Government Office for Science, 2016). Ethnic minority households also constitute half of overcrowded households in Britain (in many of which children are sharing bedrooms). The higher rates of ‘after housing cost poverty’ attest to the importance of addressing housing costs in order to tackle BME child poverty (Khan, 2020b).

## FACT BOX: Do we live in a post-racial and equal society?

### Economic outcomes

- Just 21% of Black African households own their own home, compared with 68% of White British households (Runnymede Trust, 2020c).
- Black African and Bangladeshi households have ten times less wealth than White British households (Khan, 2020a).
- More than 40% of young offenders in custody are from BME backgrounds. The proportion of BME boys and men in young offender institutions in England and Wales is nearly four times the 14% BME proportion of the wider UK population (Grierson, 2019).
- Poverty rates vary significantly by ethnicity, but all BME groups are more likely to be living in poverty. For Indians the rate is 22%, for Mixed groups it's 28%, Chinese 29%, Bangladeshi 45% and Pakistani 46%. This is due to lower wages, higher unemployment rates, higher rates of part-time working, higher housing costs in England's large cities (especially London) and slightly larger household size (Khan, 2020a).
- ‘Around 18% of Bangladeshi workers, 11% of Pakistani and Chinese workers, and 5% of Black African and Indian workers are paid below the National Minimum Wage, compared with 3% of white workers’ (Khan, 2020a).

## 3.3 Labour market disadvantage and discriminatory outcomes

Labour market discrimination gives us perhaps the clearest example of unresolved racism. It also gives us the clearest indication of who is stuck in poverty and points to being in work as not necessarily being the way out of poverty. As already mentioned, seven in ten children living in poverty are in working households. The way out of poverty, then, is not as straightforward as entering the labour market (Inman, 2020).

Within the labour market itself, the risk of in-work poverty is higher for Black and minority ethnic workers than for white workers. Within BME groups,

the in-work poverty rate is highest for Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers, at about 34%, while white households continue to have the lowest in-work poverty rate (12%) of all ethnic groups (Weekes-Bernard, 2017).

All in-work poverty is wrong, but there are certain additional barriers that BME workers face. For example, job-seekers with African or Asian sounding names must send up to 60% more applications than white counterparts with equivalent CVs to get a positive response (Nuffield College, 2019). Furthermore, BME groups are more likely to be in

## FACT BOX: Do we live in a post-racial and equal society?

### Labour market

- Job-seekers with African or Asian sounding names must send up to 60% more applications than white counterparts with equivalent CVs to get a positive response (Croxford, 2019).
- The risk of in-work poverty is higher for BME workers than for white workers. Within BME communities the in-work poverty rate is highest for Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers, at about 34% (Barry, 2021).
- Geographically, in 2019, London had the largest ethnicity pay gap in Great Britain, with BME groups earning 23.8% less than white employees, which is worse than 2018 when the gap was 21.7% (ONS, 2020).

low-paid work, low-wage sectors and insecure jobs. However, even within the same low-pay sectors, BME workers are likely to be lower-paid than their white counterparts.

A focus on commencing Section 1 of the Equalities Act would mean that society would have to have due regard for those at the sharp end of poverty, regardless of ethnicity or background. This is particularly pertinent during and after COVID. TUC analysis, based on labour market data for the third quarter of 2020, has shown that the unemployment rate for BME workers has risen steadily since the beginning of the pandemic, from 7% to 8.5% (TUC, 2021). This means that around 1 in 12 BME workers are currently out of work. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate for the 'white working class' stood at 1 in 22 for the same period.

Particular BME groups also face tougher labour market conditions. For example, there is a high prevalence of part-time work among Bangladeshis,

with 33% of employees working part time compared with 22% of the wider population (The McGregor-Smith Review, 2017), 29% of Muslim women (aged 16–64) are in employment compared with around half of the whole population (2011 Census), and the median pension wealth for the BME population with pension savings is £189,900 compared with £217,490 for the overall population.

These facts do not lie, and they show beyond doubt that calling for the issues that affect BME workers, children and individuals to be addressed is not about being 'fashionable'. The attempts to sideline these individuals' voices and the issues that they face are dangerous. This is particularly true when we consider that many of their white counterparts face a number of the same issues. In once-bustling working-class areas, workers now struggle to find work, be paid an adequate wage and live their life to their full potential. Let us be clear: this is not the fault of BME working-class people. Rather, it is the state that is currently failing both groups simultaneously.

## 3.4 Educational inequalities

The divisive narrative that seeks to pit working-class groups against one another at its heart stems from educational inequalities. Free school meals (FSM) data, which accounts for roughly 13% of all school children, is used as a proxy for the entire school population (Gov.uk). Within FSM data, white boys in particular have lower attainment rates than some ethnic minority groups. This chunk of data has been used as a battering ram by the current government to drive a wedge between of this ethnic group and others.

However, the data on white working-class boys being left behind is very misleading. That data is

based solely on the subset of children who receive free school meals, which is in fact only 17% of the school population.

It is not possible to extrapolate a headline figure – that says unequivocally that white working-class boys are being left behind – when one is looking only at 17% of the children in a classroom.

By using this model, we ignore, for example, the two high-achieving sons of a white hospital nurse – who identifies as working class – who does just enough night shifts that her boys don't qualify for free school

## FACT BOX: Do we live in a post-racial and equal society?

### Education

- Pupils from more-disadvantaged backgrounds often lack the required digital equipment and study space to participate in effective remote learning. The negative effects on educational progress are over 50% larger for disadvantaged children (Sibieta, 2021).
- Only one GCSE English literature course features a play written by a Black author (Penguin, 2020; Weldon and Begum, 2020).
- Research shows that the curriculum is narrow in scope and teachers need more support to equip them to teach migration, belonging, and empire sensitively and effectively (Runnymede Trust, 2020b).

meals. Her successful white working-class sons are not included in the data, because they're not on free school meals.

The ethnic group that's struggling most in our schools is not white working-class boys, or Black working-class boys: it's Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children (Gov.uk, 2020). And they are being let down massively by the system.

In essence, pitting the interests of the 'white working class' against those of ethnic minority groups has allowed consecutive governments to ignore the larger social and economic structures that are the root causes for this inequality. In this sense, the FSM data is used to highlight the disadvantaged position of white students and does not paint an accurate or holistic picture. As Gillborn et al. (2012) noted, 'Deep and persistent patterns of overall race inequality have been erased from the policy agenda; the fact that most minority groups are out-performed by their White peers is entirely absent from debate'.

Rather than focusing on the educational inequalities that persist for children of many ethnic backgrounds, the government attempts to pit one vulnerable group against another. Indeed, 'disingenuous' is an appropriate way of describing this government's concerns for the working class as a whole. There is no government data collected on the 'working class' or which shows the relative advantages experienced by the upper middle or professional classes in comparison with the working class. If there was a serious concern to 'level up' this country, the government would be seeking to level the playing field between the working class as a whole and the middle and professional classes, rather than seeking to build imaginary barriers between the white and Black working classes.

From the research that has been undertaken, however, we know that White British pupils as a whole are less likely to live in the most disadvantaged areas, most likely to have the highest household income and least likely to be eligible for FSM. In this sense, it is not that we should not focus on the low attainment of the 'white working class' but rather that we should turn our attention to the poor outcomes faced by all children and look to drastically improve the situation for all children who have lower attainment rates. Rather, government analysis focuses solely on the 'left-behind white working class' and blames their lower achievement on our over-concentration on issues of 'race'.

Pupils from the most disadvantaged backgrounds also, as a collective, lack the required digital equipment and study space to partake in good remote learning. This has been particularly concerning during COVID. The negative effects of the pandemic on educational progress are over 50% larger for disadvantaged children. The clear net result of this will be a widening of existing inequalities (Sibieta, 2021).

The above issues are also exacerbated by a combination of low academic expectations from teachers, heightened surveillance, exclusions and criticism which have created barriers that hit Black students the hardest. This is demonstrated in the fact that the rate of exclusions is highest for the Travellers of Irish heritage, Black Caribbean and Gypsy/Roma ethnic groups. Black Caribbean pupils are nearly four times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion than the school population as a whole and are twice as likely to receive a fixed-period exclusion (DfE, 2021).

The issue is also not isolated to younger children. In the UK, 71% of Asian students and just 57% of

Black students who graduated in 2017 achieved a first or a 2:1, compared with 81% of white students (Universities UK, 2019). Having graduated, Black workers with degrees earn 23.1% less on average than white workers, and Black people who leave school with A-levels typically get paid 14.3% less than their white peers.

The facts again point to an ethnic penalty for BME children and students, but also to unequal outcomes for white working-class children compared with their middle- and upper-class peers. This should be a question of all 'left-behind' children being given greater opportunities and levelling up all children – not pitting working-class groups against one another.

### 3.5 Criminal justice outcomes

The criminal justice system is another setting within which BME people fare worse. More than 40% of young offenders in custody are from BME groups, and these groups face harsher sentencing and treatment generally within the criminal justice system. Rates of prosecution and sentencing for Black people, for example, are three times higher than for white people, while in England, 37.4% of Black people and 44.8% of Asian people felt unsafe being at home or around their local area, compared with 29.2% of white people. The use of stop and search, Prevent, hostile environment policies and immigration measures continue to disproportionately target BME groups. For example, the representation of young Black men on the Gangs Matrix is disproportionate to their likelihood of criminality and victimisation. Of the almost 4,000 individuals on the matrix at any given time, 78% are Black and 9% are from other ethnic minorities (Gayle, 2018). The Lammy review (2017)

found that BME disproportionality in the criminal justice system costs the taxpayer at least £309 million each year, while the proportion of BME young offenders in custody rose from 25% to 41% between 2006 and 2016, despite the overall number of young offenders falling to record lows.

Last year, approximately 600,000 stop and searches took place (under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994); 75% led to no further action. Black men were nine times more likely to be stopped than white men. The figures under Section 60 of the Act – that is, stop and search without cause or suspicion, are worse: 18,000 people were stopped and only 4% of those stops led to an arrest. Black men were 18 times more likely to be stopped under Section 60.

And yet the Metropolitan Police literally states that the data does not show a racial bias.

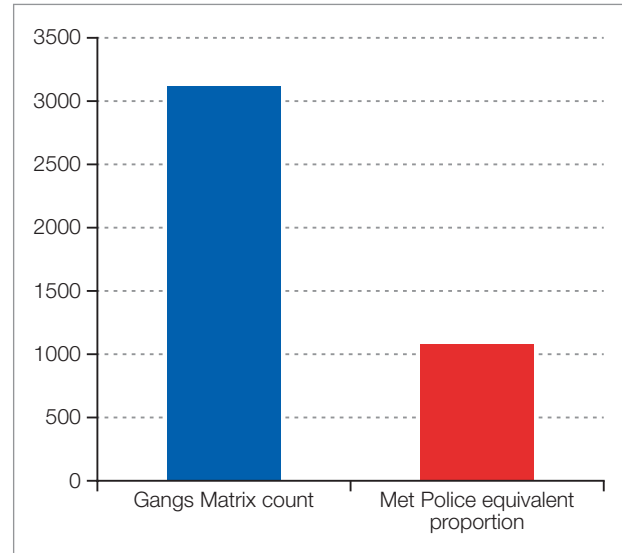
## FACT BOX: Do we live in a post-racial and equal society?

### Criminal justice

- There are numerous accounts of Muslim students in schools, colleges and universities being referred under Prevent for what emerge as the most mundane of reasons, including simply reading a particular library book or engaging in campus-based pro-Palestine or anti-racist activism (Elahi and Khan, 2017).
- As a result of its specific targeting of Muslim communities, Prevent has been regarded with suspicion as a tool to collect intelligence (Dawson, 2016). And the criticisms of Prevent have been stronger, more specific and more widespread since the approach made it the responsibility of schools, universities, hospitals, local councils, prisons, etc. to prevent individuals from becoming terrorists.
- The representation of young Black men on the Metropolitan Police's Gangs Matrix is disproportionate to their likelihood of criminality and victimisation. Of the almost 4,000 individuals on the matrix at any given time, 78% are Black and 9% are from other ethnic minorities – this compared with Met figures stating that 27% of those behind violence in London are Black (Gayle, 2018).
- Black Britons are now nine times more likely to be stopped and searched for drugs than white people, despite using illegal substances at a lower rate (Townsend, 2018).
- More than 40% of young offenders in custody are from BME backgrounds. The proportion of BME boys and men in young offender institutions in England and Wales is nearly four times the 14% BME proportion of the wider UK population (Grierson, 2019).

There are numerous accounts of Muslim students in schools, colleges and universities being referred under Prevent for what emerge as the most mundane of reasons, including simply reading a particular library book or engaging in campus-based pro-Palestine or anti-racist activism. As a result of its specific targeting of Muslim communities, Prevent has been regarded with suspicion as a tool to collect intelligence (Dawson, 2016). The criticisms of Prevent have been stronger, more specific and more widespread since the approach made it the responsibility of schools, universities, hospitals, local councils, prisons, etc. to prevent individuals from becoming terrorists.

**Figure 4. Gang Matrix demographics, compared with actual Met figures**



Note: Gang Matrix figures are in blue, Met figures in red.



## 4 THE SOLUTIONS

There is no single solution to reducing poverty and inequalities, and minimising the differential impact of poverty in the lives of disadvantaged children. Poverty, deprivation and racism are by their nature complex, though there is no shortage of effective solutions to tackling the root causes of our challenges. The most effective and protective solutions will be the those which address the interconnected ways in which working-class families, children and young people fall into poverty and are unable to climb out of poverty – in particular the use of large-scale solutions to tackle poverty (both income poverty and multi-dimensional poverty), which can also be insightful in informing policy for targeted interventions to support deprived communities across England.

Economic growth is still the most powerful route towards reducing poverty across the world; a successful strategy and plan for reducing poverty must include measures to promote sustained growth, and some have called for this growth to be inclusive. The challenge for policymakers is to combine growth-enhancing policies with measures that bring working-class communities into the economic sphere and offer them opportunities to benefit from greater prosperity and wealth.

The evidence base from OECD countries demonstrates the positive benefits of combining inclusive growth policies and investment in the form of tax and benefits systems to offset low household incomes. The relationship between spending on child and adult poverty benefits and poverty rates internationally shows that, generally, the higher the percentage of a country's GDP spent on families, the lower their child poverty rate, for example (UNICEF, 2012).

Poverty and material deprivation have multiple impacts in terms of producing poor life outcomes for children and families, and the interventions to tackle it are likely to be multi-pronged and multi-dimensional.

A number of policies and programmes could make significant difference for the most disadvantaged families and children; these interventions need to be marked out clearly to win support from government, if it is sincere in its commitments to level up. The

poorest sections of our society will often be hard hit by austerity measures and cuts. At its simplest, a balanced set of policies to address child and adult poverty will mix support to families directly and direct resources to their households:

- Commencing Section 1 of the Equalities Act, the socioeconomic duty, would require public bodies to adopt transparent and effective measures to address the inequalities that result from differences in occupation, education, place of residence or social class. It would mean that an authority must have due regard to the desirability of exercising decisions in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socioeconomic disadvantage. The government could commence this duty and have a direct and immediate impact on improving the lives of the working class.
- Better data must be collected to demonstrate the inequalities that exist between different classes. It is not because we have focused 'too much' on BME groups or made issues of racism 'fashionable' that the 'white working class' is being 'left behind'. It is because there are ever-growing inequalities between the working class as a whole and the middle and professional classes.
- Policies such as the two-child cap on Child Benefit have had a disproportionate impact on ethnic minority children. Removing this cap would immediately help many of the poorest families in this country (Runnymede Trust, 2012). It is also concerning that child poverty, with such obvious and excessive rates (as shown in Table 1), is so low on the policy agenda. Child poverty is also not just bad during childhood: it has long-term 'scarring' effects during the rest of that child's life and impacts their likelihood of getting a good job. Acting to raise children out of poverty brings enormous benefits, while the costs of not doing so are severe, as short-term deprivation at a young age can have irreversible long-term consequences. Poor children often fall into lifelong downward spirals of low education and reduced productivity, sustaining intergenerational cycles of poverty.

**Table 1. Child poverty rate by ethnicity, before and after housing costs**

Ethnic group	Poverty rate before housing costs	Poverty rate after housing costs
White	17	26
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	26	41
Asian/Asian British	32	42
Indian	20	27
Pakistani	46	54
Bangladeshi	42	60
Chinese	22	31
Any other Asian background	23	41
Other ethnic group	33	53
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	28	47
All children	19	30

Source: DWP, 2020: table 4.5db.

- Provide accessible, high quality services to the most deprived families and children, including in areas such as nutrition, health and education, which determine multi-dimensional poverty and whether children can fulfil their potential.
- Support households to achieve a minimum household or family income, whether through cash transfers or social safety nets, so that financial barriers do not prevent children from reaching their potential in learning and education.
- Regional investment is needed to stimulate real economic growth and help people out of mass unemployment. This would include providing a real safety net and support out of poverty, rebuilding local public services and investing in green and sustainable industries.
- Those working to change economic outcomes and the wider system should use statistical tools and/or modelling to assess how their reforms would affect BME groups and working-class groups currently disadvantaged in the economy.
- The COVID crisis has exacerbated the already unequal economic outcomes both within London and around the UK. Now more than ever, we need to address the indignity of low pay and growing poverty. We need a genuine minimum wage.
- Different regions or localities will have different priorities, but these should all focus on tackling whatever inequalities need the most extensive focus at the local level (transport, labour market, housing, etc.). This also requires reinvesting in public services to pre-2010 levels.
- Recommendations from the 2019 Runnymede Trust and CLASS report (Snoussi and Mompelat, 2019) also include:
  - Reintroduce birthright citizenship as part of a wider review into race, immigration and citizenship law and policy
  - Relink benefits and inflation, and ensure benefits more closely correspond to the relative poverty line
  - Lift the ban: give people seeking asylum the right to work, so that they can use their skills and live in dignity
  - Implement the idea of ‘universal basic services’, expanding the welfare state to include housing, food, transport and internet access
  - Improve the security of housing tenure: as well as building more social housing, this will require providing more long-term, low-cost secure private accommodation (e.g. five-year leases with inflation-protected rental rises)
  - Adopt the Institute of Employment Rights’ ‘Manifesto for Labour Law’ to improve the security, pay, conditions and bargaining power of workers (IER, 2018); this includes establishing a Ministry for Labour to rebuild and promote collective bargaining structures.
- Issues such as child poverty do not occur in a vacuum. Children are poor because their parents are poor (Khan, 2020a). This means that while targeting early years interventions and policies is the right thing to do, it will only be effective

when we also address adult poverty. This means embedding better social safety nets and addressing the wider structural inequalities that we have touched on above. This is particularly pertinent as work is no longer a way out of poverty. Seven out of ten families in poverty are in work. This, combined with the historically lower wages of BME individuals and the working class, insecure jobs, overcrowded housing and lower levels of savings, means that without state intervention, some groups and many children will not simply be able to pull themselves out of poverty by 'working harder'.

- The reality is that child poverty is far too high for all children and policy attention has not followed. What is more concerning is that these inequalities stem from economic hardship and inequality – often exacerbated by racial discrimination in the workplace and structural issues more broadly. The discrimination faced by ethnic minorities in the labour market is equating to higher levels of unemployment, lower levels of savings and ultimately worsening outcomes generally (Nuffield College, 2019). But discrimination faced by ethnic minorities is not a result of some unseen 'white working class', nor vice versa. It is the result of decades of inadequate policies, failing to help the working class. The implementation of the socioeconomic duty would place a lawful obligation to alleviate this situation, which is most keenly felt by the working class people of this country.
- The government's sole focus on FSM data as a proxy for looking at the underachievement of all white working-class students is dangerous and misleading. We need a more accurate analysis that explores the inequalities between the working class as a whole and the middle and professional classes. Pitting the 'white working class' against BME working class people is a false equivalence that not only does not stand up to data but is encouraging a divisive narrative.
- We need to re-establish child poverty targets specifically aimed at the poverty levels found among BME and working-class children.
- At the heart of these inequalities lies a key consideration which is often absent from investigations into ethnic inequalities in health: that the inequalities faced by ethnic minority people are driven by entrenched structural and institutional racism and racial discrimination (Nazroo and Bécares, 2021). Structural and institutional racism therefore shape the inequalities faced by Black and ethnic minority people by leading to their disproportionate representation in insecure and low-paid employment, overcrowded housing, and deprived neighbourhoods.
- It is also not simply about equality of access or indeed, equality of opportunities. We know that both equality of access and of opportunities is not equating to equal outcomes and being afforded the same chances. In the STEM subject area, for example, higher numbers of BME students go to university to study these subjects. However, not only are they more likely to drop out of university without completing their degree but even when achieving the same or better degree outcomes, they are still less likely to be represented in the workforce. This 'pipeline' issue is indicative of a wider issue (Nottingham University, 2019). It is not simply good enough to give BME individuals, as a whole, equal 'access' and equal 'opportunities' if we do not also interrogate why, where these processes are afforded, the outcomes do not match. Unless we do this, on an institutional level, we will continue to see the unequal outcomes in education, the labour market, health and housing disproportionately faced by BME groups and the working class more broadly.

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## **About the Editors**

**Dr Halima Begum** is chief executive of the Runnymede Trust. She has held senior leadership positions across policy, programmes and research with a range of organisations including the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the British Council, and LEGO Foundation.

Halima's experience spans education, equality, human rights, public health, the environment and post-conflict reconstruction. Her portfolio of responsibilities has included leading the Sino-British Action Plan on food insecurity, the UK effort to promote girls' education in Pakistan, and research collaborations between higher education institutions in Britain and Asia. She began her career as a policy analyst on the Commission for a Multi-Ethnic Britain, before joining Action Aid and the LSE Centre for Civil Society.

As a disabled Muslim woman raised in London, Halima is a lifelong campaigner for equality and civil rights. In the early 1990s, she co-founded Women Against Racism to combat the rising incidence of racial and religious intolerance in the East End. Today, she chairs the UK Women's Environmental Network and sits on the board of various organisations including Toynebee Hall, the Ella Baker School of Organising and the Labour Campaign for Human Rights.

**Nick Treloar** is a research analyst at the Runnymede Trust. He has previously worked on issues of ethnic inequality within the areas of voter registration, policing, the labour market and the economy, while also authoring multiple pieces on the ethnic inequalities of COVID. Nick also has a strong policy background, having spent much time engaging, working with and influencing government officials on areas of ethnic inequalities. Nick's previous role was at Forward Thinking, where he focused on research and policy relating to issues of Islamophobia.

### **Runnymede**

Unit 119  
Pill Box  
115 Coventry Road  
London E2 6GG  
**T** 020 7377 9222  
**E** info@runnymedetrust.org

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Registered Charity 1063609

[www.runnymedetrust.org](http://www.runnymedetrust.org)

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