



Ethnic Minorities
& Youth Support
Team Wales

Tîm Cymorth
Lleiafrifoedd Ethnig
& Ieuenctid Cymru

All Wales BAME Engagement Programme
Impact of COVID 19 Crisis on BAME Communities
Topical Forum – Exiting Lockdown & Recovery
13th May 10:30-11:30 via Zoom link

Attendees – Rocio Cifuentes (EYST – Chair), Ginger Wiegand (EYST – Notes), Pat Dunmore (Citizens Advice Swansea NPT), Lee Tiratira (EYST), Aisha Ali (Clinical Consultant), Mohammed Hamayun (Red Cross), Ana Miah (Shajalal Mosque & Bangladeshi Association), Thanuja Hettiarachi (EYST), Daron Owens (Community Cohesion NW Wales), Jalal Goni (EYST), Reggi Al Hadi (Newport Yemeni Community Association), Patience Bentu (RCC), Usha Ladwa Thomas (community activist), Rahila Hamid (EYST), Michael Smith (Equality and Engagement Ceredigion County Council), Esther Gomez (Move-on Team Newport), Bethan Thomas (Community Cohesion NW Wales), Shaheen Sutton (National Lottery Community Fund), Robert Muza (Newport County Council), Rose Lewis (Cardiff and Vale Health Board), Heather Edwards (Newport County Council Central Hub), Muriel, Ali Abdi (Citizens Cymru & RCC), Sahar Al-Faifi (MEND), Sarah Morgan (Public Health Wales), Rhian Cook (Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner), Pavlina Mondol (Newport City Council)

After introductions, the chair introduced the forum topic: what we want Welsh Government (WG) to consider as they plan to exit the lockdown situation. The group then viewed a brief presentation summarising the basic tenets of the First Minister’s published framework for recovery “Leading Wales out of the Coronavirus Pandemic.” See a link to the framework here: <https://gov.wales/leading-wales-out-coronavirus-pandemic>

The chair then opened the discussion: That First Minister’s framework outlines key principles and questions WG will use to evaluate the risks and benefits and pros and cons of lifting any lockdown measure. What are some specifics that you want WG to consider in light of that general policy framework? For instance, people least likely to work from home are lowest earners. What are considerations around schools reopening and the impact on BAME children and families and parents. Or Impact on health workforce who are also disproportionately from BAME communities. IF we ease restrictions to soon, will more BAME frontline workers be put at risk. Those are just a few ideas, and we want to open up to your expertise and ideas. Anyone want to start with initial thoughts?

Data

One person asked if we have stats or data in Wales showing how COVID 19 have affected the BAME community.

- Public Health Wales are looking into it; Data is being developed and will be available soon.
- ONS recently released data on deaths and ethnicity: <https://bit.ly/2T12Eb4>
- WG has put together an advisory group to do rapid research.
- People are desperately trying to get data together to send to officials.
- On a wider note, there has been a persistent lack of data – ethnicity in relation to health has been particularly pronounced. Death certificates do now show ethnicity, where until just now, they did not.
- BAME people can get overlooked by research – its difficult for them to respond to research so their views do not get heard. conversation based research, with the organisations already supporting BAME communities should be the starting point for assessing the disproportional impact of CV19.

Possible necessity for different guidelines/messages for BAME people

- As Black and Asian people are at significantly higher risk than White British people, what additional measures can be taken to protect them in relaxation of lockdown? Should WG and public health Wales be issuing specific health message for BAME communities to mitigate risk?
- Currently, WG does not recommend or require the public to wear face masks outside the house. (For that matter, there is a lack of PPE.) Even in other countries where risk of COVID has gone down, authorities are actively telling community to wear face covering and gloves. Should we be telling people from BAME community to wear masks due to evidence they are more at risk?
- To ease restrictions, WG needs to do educational campaign targeting BAME people about taking Vitamin D. It was noted in another forum that such a campaign must be multi-lingual and nuanced. It must recognise that BAME people are not a monolith. There are many different ethnic groups and also individual medical considerations such as auto-immune conditions or sickle cell.
- Will WG provide places the allow people to self-isolate who are otherwise unable to do so? BAME people live in most deprived areas in small houses where social distancing is almost impossible. One person noted that her entire family was infected all at once. “We don’t have extra rooms or another property.” Provision of places to isolate could pertain to BAME people going back to work or who may be infected with COVID.
- Many with BAME backgrounds have other health conditions, such as diabetes and go to hospital regularly, yet hospitals cannot admit them now because of coronavirus. Is it

possible to create special branches of hospitals where people with other health conditions may go for treatment of those conditions?

- Managing fear and confusion of people will be a very important task.

Young People

- The impact of the COVID 19 crisis on young people won't be felt for a year or for years to come - in terms of their prospects going forward. How will this crisis impact young people and their futures?
- There are many BAME international students currently residing in and around Cardiff. Some are having extreme difficulties due to coronavirus, as they depended on part-time jobs which are no longer available. How can support for these young people be made available. Do they qualify for support as overseas students? In Cardiff, the local community is trying to support them, but this is a temporary measure. The support must from the government level which is more sustainable.

Religious Celebrations & Timelines

- One person noted that within the timeline, WG should consider religious celebratory events from now to August. In three months, Muslims have another Eid and there are Hindu celebrations over the summer – normally big community events. Another person pointed out that it would be similar to the recent Easter festival for Christians where people followed social guidelines, for instance video conferencing from church – it went smoothly and people understood. In other religions and festivals coming up, people will have to follow same thing.

Safe return to work/Taking care of people who have lost jobs or cannot return to work

- If employees are asked to return to work, as is already happening in England, how does that affect BAME workers who are less likely to work in sectors or jobs where working at home is possible? What are the implications and what should we do? EG People working in factories or who must take public transport to get to work.
- There are some concerns that some categories of workers will be sacrificed while decision makers are at home behind computers. Factory workers in dense environment plus BAME vulnerability to COVID – would that mean a second wave of people dying?
- The question was raised how could WG best offer reassurance? By ensuring sufficient PPE? Or by communicating an understanding of the decision process and measures in place to mitigate risk?

- One person suggested, “They must take into account and apply their minds to situations a lot better – there are a lot of factors to consider.”
- Another questioned if employers have instated 2m distances. Do all offices have 2m distance capability? Do employers provide PPE? Or does the individual? One person knew of employers who were finding it hard to acquire PPE.
- WG has put 2m distance in the workplace into law, but a big concern is if people know the law. Likewise, it has been noted in other forums that low-paid, temporary or workers in precarious positions may be afraid to question or report their employers for fear of losing their job.
- We need a further bailout for people unable to work because of a COVID 19 risk factor. For instance, a Taxi driver’s return to work is big risk and they are under a lot of pressure to bring income to the household. The government should consider bailing out and supporting them in meantime, until the risk goes away. Likewise, we need a furlough scheme for people whose employer is open, but they are at risk. People in at risk category should not be working.
- When putting measures in place, there must be big consideration for those who have no jobs to go back to (never mind furloughing). In Post-COVID recovery, we should consider One person in the group knows many EU nationals who’s pre-COVID jobs before were in the leisure and tourism industry. They have no work now and it looks like no work on the horizon. Their situation is particularly. An intersecting concern, post-Brexit, those with pre-settled status will need to prove a habitual residency test to receive benefits.
- There is a mention in the document of expanding of public health workforce for contact tracing – Who is going to get those jobs? What will they get paid? What is the risk level of those jobs? If a well-paid job with low risk, this could be a potential opportunity to employ people who have lost jobs or been otherwise affect by COVID 19. Or if a low paid, high risk job, it could represent potential exploitation.
- A Public Health Wales Representative noted that contact tracing will be resourced by staff across the Welsh Public Sector but there is likely to be more resources needed. The work will be done from home so is not as risky as patient facing roles. She will feed comments back to colleagues.
- The chair noted that it is good to know those jobs will be low risk, but we must realise that other workers must be protected. Public Health Wales informed they are developing risk assessments for BAME and other higher risk groups which will be available in a few days.

Safe return to school

- If schools are to open how should that happen? The group discussed which pupils should be prioritised in the phased return to school and if BAME pupils would be more at risk on contracting COVID 19 or passing it on to family members.
- The question was also raised how will schools manage the risk of spread of the virus as more children return to school? Particularly regarding BAME children, who may be or have family at home more vulnerable to COVID 19. One person in the group who has a BAME family with grandmother living in the house, noted his fear of his daughters returning to school for fear of infections. One person queried if the risk assessments being designed for health care staff could be adapted for schools.
- The point was made that there are particular risks for BAME children going back to school, but some may be at more vulnerable places at home if they don't go back; WG is trying to weigh up the evidence. We have previously discussed that BAME families are far less likely to have resources to home school, including digital access. There is currently a WG directive that local authorities and schools provide equipment and broadband for pupils who lack access, but that is happening slowly. In the meantime, these kids are missing out on education in overcrowded environments. So, we must ask how their return to school may happen safely.
- A suggestion was made to prioritise Year 6 pupils to return to school. If schools do not open before summer holidays, they will be moving straight on to high school. Could we make suggestion that year 6 pupils go back to school, even if only for 3-4 weeks, so they can leave their primary schools, saying proper goodbyes to friends and teachers. Some in the group have heard that year 6s are being considered as a priority.
- Another point was made that apart from Year 6 pupils, there are other vulnerable groups that should be prioritised. WG has said they would prioritise vulnerable pupils for places in the interim school "hubs" in addition to children of key workers. There is scepticism that is happening, and one person said they are not seeing it happen in their own experience. When the chair asked if anyone had an example of vulnerable children being offered or taking up a place in the current school hubs, no one in the group had an answer.

Holding on to the Gains

- What are the gains we want to maintain from this period? There have been some gains such as relaxation of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and expansion of unemployment benefits. How do we maintain those gains and realise an expansion of social safety net and human rights?
 - Current generosity relating to NRPF should be extended beyond this current crisis.

- Discourse on taking homeless people off streets and ensuring they stay of streets.
 - We are now appreciating migrant workers (where didn't before) and now see how vital they are.
 - There is a moratorium on evicting people seeking asylum from NASS housing; people are advocating for Welsh Government to advocate on behalf of this group in proof that it is becoming a nation of sanctuary – “Just because its not devolved, doesn't mean WG can wash its hands of a vulnerable population in Wales.”
 - Twenty-seven day period for new refugees to vacate NASS housing is in moratorium until June as well.
- It was noted that to achieve maintaining the gains is the trickier part. We need to evidence the impact this has had on individual lives and whole country – now is time to start tackling that. EYST will do their bit via written response to WG. Discussions around solutions for issues relating to refugees and people seeking asylum in Swansea are alive in a weekly online meeting. If anyone wants to be invited send email to Rocio: director@eyst.org.uk. CAB Swansea NPT but are putting together a paper about what they want the economy to look like coming out of the COVID 19 crisis, looking at disadvantage in a broader aspect. Pat is willing to share draft when it is ready and welcomes a few volunteers to be on a “working group”: pat.dunmore@citizensadvicesnpt.org.uk.

Public Health Response

- The question was raised will any laws or additional powers come into play in the public health response? Will monitoring and tracing impact privacy? Will people have to get up entry to their house?
- As mentioned above, expansion of public health workforce – can that be an opportunity for people who have born the brunt of the COVID Crisis – whether from a group more at risk from the virus or from a sector which had much unemployment or as a young person whose prospects will be dampened entering the job market in a recession? In order for those positions to be opportunities rather than exploitative, they must be safe, secure and well-paying.

Access to Rights and Entitlements

- There are concerns about BAME community, many of whom have barriers accessing services in normal times. Right now, barriers are heightened and support to address them is limited. How will people in BAME comms get access to advice from local authority and other government relief schemes available. Families are struggling to

even get Free School Meals. We are constantly support families. How will they access rights and entitlements?

Next Steps

- Next week's forum will focus on employment rights and supporting people back to work in safe way. EYST will try to invite someone from Wales TUC and share advice on employment rights. Potential topic for following week: schools reopening. Please email anyone at EYST your suggestions for specific topics to focus on in coming weeks.

Update: Next forum will most likely be 27th May