

Senedd Cymru
Pwyllgor yr Economi, Seilwaith a Sgiliau

Effeithiau COVID-19: Galwad Agored
am dystiolaeth a phrofiadau
EIS(5) COV - 29
Ymateb gan: EYST

Welsh Parliament
Economy, Infrastructure and Skills
Committee

Impacts of COVID-19: Open Call for
evidence and experiences

Evidence from: EYST

**EYST Wales Response to Senedd Economy, Infrastructure and Skills
Committee Inquiry on
Impact of Covid 19**



Ethnic Minorities
& Youth Support
Team Wales

Tîm Cymorth
Lleiafrifoedd Ethnig
& Ieuenctid Cymru

EYST Wales is an award-winning Wales wide charity established since 2005 which aims to support ethnic minority young people, families and individuals living in Wales and help them to contribute, participate and feel a valued part of Wales. It does this through a range of services targeted variously at ethnic minority young people, ethnic minority families, refugees and asylum seekers and also the wider public. We are a team of 45 staff with 5 core service areas: 1) BAME¹ (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) Young People; 2) BAME Families; 3) Refugees and Asylum Seekers; 4) BAME Community groups and; 5) Tackling Racism in the Wider community.

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

Between March and August, EYST Wales hosted weekly online topical forums exploring the impact of COVID 19 on BAME people and communities in Wales. During this period we have hosted 18 forums attended by over 749 participants in total, covering the following key topics: Impact of Covid-19 on BAME Communities; Impact on Muslim communities, Impact on BAME people's Employment & Businesses; Impact on children and young people; Impact on BAME Pupils; Impact on International Students; Food Security, Mental Health, Return to Schools and; Community Cohesion in the Covid Era. We also held two forums for children

¹ Note on use of term "BAME": 'BAME' is the most common term currently used to describe people who are not 'white' or are not 'indigenous' to the UK. We recognise that this is a contested term and that others prefer to use 'BME', 'Black' or 'Ethnic Minority/ Minority Ethnic' or 'POC' / People of Colour'. We will discuss and review the preferred terms to be used within our practice on an ongoing basis and also note that EYST team members, participants and partners may not all agree on their preferred terminology.

aged 11-16 and one for young people aged 16-25. This response draws on the feedback and learning from these forums as well as additional intelligence from EYST's wider work.

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

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

Effects on the economy and business – including how different sectors are being affected

Several sectors which have a relatively high proportion of BAME employees have been disproportionately impacted by Covid 19 lockdowns, including retail, restaurant, and hospitality. Workers in these sectors have already been affected by extensive furlough periods at 80% or lower pay or been subject to redundancy. Moreover, many or a majority of workers in these frontline, low paying sectors. With this successive waves and further lockdowns, these workers will continue to be adversely impacted, particularly in absence of further income protection.

Evidence, including that from the aftermath of the 2008 recession, shows that ethnic minority people experience higher unemployment rates during recessions are more likely to go jobless for a longer period. In its response to this inquiry, EHRC referenced Business in the Community research showing that in the wake of the 2008 recession, minority groups fared worse than the white majority, exacerbating pre-existing inequalities with higher unemployment, lower earnings, lower self-employment rates and higher housing costs.

In EYST forums, there were also concerns that many BAME-owned businesses were in sectors highly impacted by Covid 19 related restrictions as well as concerns that BAME business owners would face barriers to accessing business support funds such as lack of information, language barriers, and previous disappointment with public services.

In preparing for further impacts of Covid 19, it is key for Welsh Government to reflect upon who were beneficiaries of both employment and self-employment related Covid relief as well as business related Covid relief and to ensure that benefits are reaching people equitably.

Effects on jobs and workers – including job retention and safety at work

Key points:

- *BAME workers and their economic contribution needs to be better valued and remunerated.*
- *Workplace safety and fair employment practices need sufficient oversight and there must be safe ways to report employer malpractice and discrimination.*
- *Job creation and economic stimulus programmes must benefit those most affected by Covid 19, including BAME people.*

Job Creation

There are big concerns that BAME people will be disproportionately affected by unemployment both during the pandemic and in the recovery period. Evidence, including that from the aftermath of the 2008 recession, shows that ethnic minority people experience higher unemployment rates during recessions are more likely to go jobless for a longer period. Efforts to rebuild the economy post-COVID 19 need to account for and take steps to remedy this inequality as a moral and financial imperative. UK and Welsh Governments should work together to devise a stimulus package that will result in job creation targeted specifically at those most affected by Covid-19 unemployment, with particular focus on marginalised groups such as BAME, young and disabled workers and those from low socio-economic Young people stressed the need to make quality employment opportunities available to those in disadvantaged and stigmatised areas, particularly in neighbourhoods where young people have experienced long-term exclusion. These must be high quality jobs, paid at a living wage with clear pathways for progression. Likewise, Welsh Government must be transparent about the beneficiaries of job creation and economic stimulus programmes. Monitoring of any stimulus or jobs creation programme must assess its impact from an equalities perspective, including participation rates and “better off” outcomes of people who share protected characteristics.

Pay

There is a live socio-political debate about work being properly recognised and rewarded in a range of historically low-paying and low-valued sectors which have high levels of BAME and

migrant workers. These sectors include health and social care, cleaning, transport, distribution, food processing and agriculture to name a few. Now that we clap for these workers, it is time to make sure they are paid according to the value that society now recognises. Welsh Government should use its full procurement and commissioning power to abolish zero-hours and other precarious contracts and oblige any employer benefiting from Welsh government funding to pay the real living wage. Employers should also be required to publish their ethnicity pay gap and to publish targets towards achieving an ethnically representative workforce, at all levels of employment.

Workplace Safety and Protection of Workers

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

Racism and discrimination in the workplace

There are serious concerns that individual and institutional implicit bias is affecting treatment of BAME and migrant employees in the workplace. In the beginning of the pandemic, when PPE was scarce, EYST received many reports of particularly Eastern European workers being asked to work without PPE or social distancing in place. Other organisations had reports of frontline BAME workers, including NHS workers asked to do more dangerous work than their White counterparts. Moreover, there are concerns that some employers will treat BAME workers unfavourably in furlough and redundancy practices. Workers in low paying and/or precarious positions such as agency workers or those on zero hours contracts can be afraid to use the mechanisms in place to challenge, bias, discrimination, or racial harassment in their workplaces. It is essential that there are way for workers to safely report concerns about workplace safety and discrimination. It is also essential that there is independent oversight of employer practices both relating to workplace safety and discrimination in the workplace.

European Citizens & Migrant Workers

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

Citizens to enable them to access their rights and entitlements, as well as ensuring that Community Cohesion programmes work to promote inclusion and counter xenophobia.

Non EEA Migrant Workers

Wales benefits from the work of numerous people with UKVA work permits. Visa costs for these workers and their families can be prohibitive and the burden is often on worker rather than employers. In EYST forums, we heard about workers feeling pressure to take on additional shifts even in the lockdown period, partly because of pressure to afford visa fees. It is welcome that the Home Officer. But we urge to Welsh Government to continue to press the Home Office to lower visa fees. Some but not all employers do share or bear the cost of employee work permits. We argue that the employers who profit from their labour should bear the primary burden of these costs.

No Recourse to Public Funds

The relaxation of restrictions on people with no recourse to public funds during the lockdown has been welcomed and has avoided many instances of homelessness and food insecurity, and has allowed many survivors of domestic violence and trafficking to have recourse for refuge. We urge the Welsh Government to continue to press the Home Office to lift restrictions to no recourse to public funds. There will be workers in Wales affected by the pandemic and lockdowns who have these restrictions placed upon them and their families.

Representation in Employment

Lack of representation in decision-making is at the heart of many of the issues laid out in this document. Despite growing diversity in the Welsh population, there is a notable lack of diversity in senior management positions. Addressing this is fundamental to creating a healthy strong and sustainable future for Wales. The Welsh Government should mandate organisations in Wales to publish ethnicity pay gap data. Positive discrimination measures such as those recommended by the MacGregor-Smith review¹ should be utilised to their full effect. All Public bodies in Wales should follow the example of the Police force and set measurable targets to achieve ethnically representative workforces within a clear timeframe. Our future Wales should be run by people who look like the people who live in Wales.

Effects on transport – including the short and long term impact of the virus on demand, travel patterns and mode used and how this should be managed, support for sustainable transport and how public transport can operate safely during the pandemic for passengers and staff.

We have encountered people who have been adversely affected by curtailed bus routes, particularly people who live outside main cities. Creating a green, effective public transport system that is accessible and free or affordable to all could be part of a potential job creation

programme as well as decrease the over-dependence of Wales' population on cars and contribute to better air quality.

For asylum-seekers, and those living with severely restricted incomes including disabled people, large families, children and students, the cost of public transport can be prohibitive and concessionary, subsidised or free bus pass schemes should be extended for these groups.

Effects on apprenticeships and other skills provision – including experiences of apprentices, companies who employ apprentices, organisations who provide training and how skills and the skills system could contribute to the nation's recovery

Apprenticeships and business support for BAME young people

Young people stressed the need to make quality opportunities available to those in disadvantaged and stigmatised areas, particularly in neighbourhoods where young people have experienced long-term exclusion. They argued for access to high quality apprenticeships. They also argued for entrepreneurial education and increased support for young people to start and grow businesses, particularly intensive support in initial seed and start-up phases. In 2018/19 academic year only 890 out of a total 25,945 apprenticeships were completed by a person with a BAME background². That amounts to about 3.5% of apprenticeships whereas BAME people account for 5.6% of Wales' population. Moreover, apprenticeships are usually taken up by younger people and younger BAME people account for a higher percent all young people in Wales.

Provide positive opportunities for young people

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

Digital Inclusion

Digital has become even more important on the skills and infrastructure agenda with the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic. In some ways, lockdown restrictions have forced people to adapt to social media and other platforms to keep in touch with loved ones. However, the negative impact of the digital divide became even more apparent with the closure of public buildings, almost total migration of services online and the impact of closure of schools and subsequent expectation around home learning. Unequal access to digital devices, Wifi and

² <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Further-Education-and-Work-Based-Learning/Learners/Work-Based-Learning/apprenticeshiplearningprogrammesstarted-by-quarter-year-ethnicity>

digital skills have led to bigger divides between advantaged and disadvantaged groups. We argue that broadband in every home should be considered an essential utility.

The support of the Government and wider public sector to all of the above – including whether the support is working, or if there are gaps and what fine tuning is needed or additional support could be offered

For the most part, Welsh Government did seek to respond quickly and flexibly to the needs of third sector and community groups, including through the provision of additional emergency third sector funding for distribution via WCVA, which was given out relatively quickly. Other funders also did similar, and resultingly, there was increased opportunity for grant funding during the Covid period which was welcomed. However, due to the particular impact of Covid-19 on BAME people, not all groups were in a position to access this funding, and some still feel that more could be done to help groups access these resources.

In other cases however, funds released by Welsh Government for distribution via local authorities for example, were put to action to slowly and sometimes inconsistently. For instance, many welcomed Welsh Government announcement to invest significant funds for local authorities to provide digital devices and Wi-Fi to pupils who needed them for undertake home learning. However, most children didn't receive them until weeks into lockdown (if at all) and there was wide variation in response of various local authorities and individual schools.

BAME voluntary sector and community groups have extensive networks and are well placed to educate people about rights and entitlements and provide advocacy so that people receive their full rights and entitlements. Representatives from BAME sector organisations that attended EYST forums shared excellent examples of quick and effective mobilisation to cascade information, support home learners, distribute food parcels, provide social support and connect people with newly refashioned services. Community groups have the knowledge, networks and capability to deliver outcomes, but need to be adequately resourced to do it.

Recovery – What needs to be done to help Wales recover from the epidemic - including actions which should be taken by the government, commercial or from the community/third sector

Build a Resilient Economy based on Shared Rights, Risk and Reward

A resilient economy, one which can weather a storm or a shock, must provide a humane standard of living to all participants and work to reverse climate change. This pandemic has taught a lesson in value; the workers that used to be invisible and deemed low-skilled are now recognised as essential. To build a resilient economy, Welsh Government must use this moment as a possibility to reimagine how risk and reward could be more justly distributed

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

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EYST Wales

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