

# COVID-19 AND ETHNICITY

## Minutes of the third Expert Reference Group (ERG) meeting on 9 July 2020

### Item 1: Welcome & Introduce New Members

1. Ima Jackson (Co-Chair) opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. She introduced a new member of the Group, Professor Aisha Holloway.
2. She noted that the Group had another packed agenda and as such they were not going to revisit the Terms of Reference at the meeting.
3. Continuing, she noted that ethnicity is a tool and indicator of how racialisation works within our systems. She encouraged the Group to think critically on the impact of COVID-19 on minority ethnic communities. Continuing, she said that the Group's work represented an opportunity to take an intersectional approach as well as to consider how marginalisation works.
4. In relation of the terms of reference, Rami Ousta suggested adding a section to explain what the Group means by ethnic minority.

### Action Point:

- **ERG** to share their thoughts on the Terms of Reference to Secretariat by 17 July.
- **Secretariat** to provide a definition of what the Group means by ethnic minority in approaching their work.

### Item 2: Minutes and Actions of the Previous Meeting

5. Ima Jackson (Co-chair) asked the Group whether they were content to approve the minutes and action points of their meeting on 25 June. She noted that she was keen to make best use of limited time the Group has for discussion at meetings. The Group will be asked to feed comments on the minutes and actions back to the Secretariat by e-mail.

### Action points:

- **Secretariat** to circulate the letter from the Interim NHS Chief Executive, John Connaghan, to Health Boards about making progress on race equality.
- **ERG** to provide comments to the minutes and actions of the meeting on 25 June by 17 July.

### Item 3: Advice and Recommendations Paper (Paper One)

6. Ima Jackson asked the Minister for Older People and Equalities and Paul Johnston to give an introduction on the Scottish Government's Advice and Recommendations Paper.

7. The Minister noted that, in outlining the paper, the Scottish Government had taken the approach of other advisory groups such as the COVID-19 Advisory Group in which the Scottish Government posed specific questions that experts should address. Continuing, she noted that the paper set out some initial areas where the Scottish Government would value the advice and guidance of the Group and that quick feedback from the Group would be welcome. She also noted that officials had been looking at ways in which the Group could progress on their work in between meetings and a Slack site for deliberations and information exchange had been established to that effect.

8. Paul Johnston stressed that the Scottish Government was very keen to have the views of the Group on a number of questions, as set out by the paper. He noted that the Scottish Government was expecting expert advice from the Group on issues requiring immediate action such as data, evidence and risk, but also in the long-term to address health and socioeconomic inequalities that minority ethnic communities face and have been particularly exposed as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. The input from the Group will serve to feed into the Race Equality Action Plan. He asked the Group for their views as to whether there should be further questions captured in the paper or if some issues required to be reframed. He ended by noting that the Scottish Government would welcome the initial views of the Group on the questions raised in the paper by 14 August 2020.

9. Jatin Haria asked whether the Group could make suggestions on the issues that had not been included in the paper and whether the Group could get a commitment from the Scottish Government that it will formally respond to the advice and recommendations submitted by the Group within a defined timeframe. In response, Paul Johnston noted that it was the Scottish Government's commitment to do so and that consideration will be given to timescales.

10. Rami Ousta noted that the Group should move beyond racial classifications and ensure that their conclusions are able to clearly set out what ethnic groups have been impacted by COVID-19. He gave the example of Irish and Gypsies to illustrate that they should be included in the data.

11. The Group then discussed about the recording of ethnicity data in health records in Scotland:

- Kaliani Lyle noted that, in order to be able to advise the Scottish Government on how to improve the quality of the data, the Group should be able to get a better understanding of what has been done in the past and why improvements in data collection did not work. Ima Jackson supported this approach, adding that ethnicity had been recorded and monitored for more than ten years and as such a good starting point for the Group will be to learn from these processes in the history of ethnicity data recording in Scotland.
- Vittal Katikireddi noted that the recording of ethnicity information was not mandatory in Scottish health records. He noted that the Group should ask PHS to provide more concrete options to include ethnicity as compulsory field and the practicalities of doing so.
- Rami Ousta noted that the benefit of collecting data on ethnicity is that there will be a strong evidence base to inform policy. He also noted that this could be

extended to religion too. Continuing, he stressed that it was crucial to educate and provide training for stakeholders collecting data on what is counted as ethnicity within the legal obligation. Similarly, he said that this could be paired with an educational programme advising Minority Ethnic communities why it was important and how they should be responsive to such step.

- Duncan Buchanan noted that Raj Bhopal had circulated a draft paper in advance of the meeting on how NHS Lothian improved its ethnicity data recording over the years which will provide lessons.
- Paul Johnston noted that the Scottish Government could provide the Group with a background paper on what is and is not mandatory in terms of collecting ethnicity information at present as well as learning from what has been done in the past.

12. The Group then moved on to discussing further issues to consider in addressing the questions set out in the paper:

- Rami Ousta highlighted that the Group should give consideration to actions to mitigate future risks which may be particularly important in the event of another full lockdown. In his view, the Government will need to keep the Emergency Sustenance Grant Scheme for affected communities. He mentioned that the Minority Ethnic Resilience Network – formed by 75 organisations across Scotland – had been critical in ensuring that Scottish Government support reached out to communities. He added that the Network could be further developed by creating sub-groups representing certain sectors such as frontline workers. He highlighted the role of communities as conduits for future action and the need to involve them to mitigate future risks.
- Gina Netto noted that it is important to take into account the high presence of ethnic minority groups in some sectors of the Labour Market Strategy group. She also emphasised the high proportion of ethnic minority young people who also need to be taken into account in measures to help young people get into work.

13. The Group considered how they will operate to formulate the responses to the questions raised in the paper. As part of this, the idea of forming two sub-groups to look at the questions of 1) health data, evidence and risk and 2) systematic issues, especially inequalities was discussed:

- Aziz Sheikh highlighted that the COVID-19 Advisory Group – of which he is a member - considers the questions that the Scottish Government poses to them. At the same time the members of this advisory group can proactively provide advice and recommendations to the Scottish Government on important issues. Following both a “top down” and “bottom up” approach have proven helpful in the process of developing advice.

#### **Action points:**

- **ERG** to provide any further views on the paper, including any issues or questions that they think that should be included.
- **ERG** to provide advice and recommendations on the questions raised in the paper by 14 August.

#### **Item 4: Update on NRS analysis of COVID-19 deaths by ethnicity**

14. Ryan Scott (NRS) presented the findings from the NRS analysis of COVID-19 deaths by ethnicity published on 8 July. Duncan Buchanan (PHS) gave an update to the Group on PHS upcoming publication on COVID-19 outcomes by ethnicity which will be published on 15 July.

15. In discussing the NRS report, the following points were raised:

- Rami Ousta thanked NRS for their work. He noted that the Group had a duty to respond to all ethnic minority communities in Scotland protected by and recognised on the basis of colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin. Continuing he noted that data disaggregation must provide and address these in breakdowns as a core function. He asked NRS, how within the legal obligations, they did not follow up with further analyses for the White Irish group, where the death rate is the highest. He also stressed that breakdown of South Asian categories will be vital when not only understanding data but real impacts on communities within this racial classification practice in data reporting and analyses.
- Continuing, Rami Ousta called on the Scottish Government to show leadership about the way in which NRS and public bodies adequately reflect minorities.
- Kaliani Lyle noted that the issue of comparability is critical in the discussion on ethnic coding. Jatin Haria added that the Group needed to maintain the census categories to be able to compare findings across datasets.
- Ima Jackson encouraged the Group to think collectively as to how they want to approach the issue of ethnic classification, taking into account the enormous complexities, challenges and hazards of maintaining a response which racializes data.
- Vittal Katikireddi noted the merits of the Group to operate in sub-groups. He was keen that a sub-group developed some concrete options on how to improve ethnicity data. In response, Aziz Sheikh said that it was important that any discussion on data and evidence should not take place in isolation from the work undertaken by other SG's advisory groups which were already looking at this issue.
- The Group considered that it will be important for PHS to include ethnicity data in the test and protect system.

#### **Action point:**

- **Secretariat** to progress on the establishment of Slack platform with sub-groups.
- **Secretariat** to provide a background paper on how the ERG work interlinks with the work done by other SG advisory groups.

#### **Item 5: Reducing Risk and improving outcomes from COVID-19 in Scotland's ethnic and religious minority communities – Recommendations from COVID-19 Advisory Group (Paper Two)**

16. Aziz Sheikh provided an overview of the recommendations that the COVID-19 Advisory Group had made to the Scottish Government to reduce the risk of and

improve the outcomes from COVID-19 in Scotland's ethnic and religious minority communities. He made particular emphasis on the following points:

- In the absence of robust Scottish data on COVID-19 risk and outcomes by ethnicity and religion, the Scottish Government should assume that the impacts of the inequalities being found in England and Wales also apply to Scotland;
- Risk assessments are vitally important and as such the Scottish Government should consider and implement a formal risk assessment strategy for health and social care professionals, high risk population and the general population;
- Communications and Engagement with ME communities should be genuine and multidimensional. He said that Scottish Government communications campaigns had not been sufficiently tailored to consider, for example, major religious festivals, and in his view this represented "institutional racism".

17. Paul Johnston emphasised that the Scottish Government takes very seriously any criticism about its approach on engagement and communication with Minority Ethnic communities and is determined to address any form of institutional racism.

18. On workforce risks assessments, the following comments were made:

- Several Group members (Aziz Sheikh, Rami Ousta, Gina Netto, Aisha Holloway) emphasised the importance that guidance on workforce risks assessments was developed to other sectors in which Minority Ethnic Groups are over-represented particularly in frontline and high risk occupations.
- Aisha Holloway noted that the Welsh Government had published a "COVID-19 Workforce Risk Assessment Tool": <https://gov.wales/covid-19-workforce-risk-assessment-tool>;
- Emma Weedon noted that the Scottish Government's Clinical Cell, following advice from Professor Tom Evans, is updating its guidance on risk assessments, to reflect the current situation and the latest clinical advice. She noted that a draft on the advice should be ready in the week commencing 13 July and that this will be circulated to the Group.
- Responding, Aisha Holloway asked whether health and social care students could be explicitly considered in the guidance on risk assessment.
- Concerns were expressed about risk assessments and the vulnerability of certain groups and the risk of stigmatisation. While the interim guidance is welcomed, the Group should be aiming to think about further actions that may be taken to prevent harassment and stigmatisation within the workplace.
- Ima Jackson noted that guidance and risk assessment tools needed to be critically reviewed to make sure that the Groups are not replicating problems. In relation to risk stratification, she added that the fact that analysts were struggling with issues around data is an indication of the problems within the system of racialisation.

19. Vittal Katikireddi suggested that the Group asks PHS to provide a paper on how they are ensuring that the Trace and Protect system is meeting the needs of Minority Ethnic groups.

**Action point:**

- **PHS** to produce a paper taking into account how the Trace and Protect System is addressing the needs of ME communities.
- **Secretariat** to circulate draft paper from the Scottish Government's Clinical Cell on advice to update guidance on risk assessments.

### **Item 6: Next meeting and Close**

20. Ima Jackson (Co-chair) thanked everyone for their contributions at the meeting. She noted that the Group will need to decide how best to arrange their work via email with a view of making progress. She encouraged the Group to take an intersectional approach in their thinking as to how to tackle health and socio-economic inequalities faced by Minority Ethnic communities. This approach had proven helpful as part of her work as part of the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls.

21. The Minister for Older People and Equalities concluded by stressing that the Group's advice and recommendations will be crucial to ensure that the Scottish Government's response addresses scale of the challenge faced by Minority Ethnic communities in Scotland in light of the COVID-19 crisis.

22. The next meeting of the ERG will take place on 6 August.

### **Action point:**

- **Secretariat** to explore the use of another platform to hold the Group's virtual meetings.

### **List of Action Points**

- **ERG** to share their thoughts on the Terms of Reference to Secretariat by 17 July.
- **Secretariat** to provide a definition of what the Group means by ethnic minority in approaching their work.
- **Secretariat** to circulate the letter from the Interim NHS Chief Executive, John Connaghan, to Health Boards about making progress on race equality.
- **ERG** to provide comments to the minutes and actions of the meeting on 25 June by 17 July.
- **ERG** to provide any further views on the paper, including any issues or questions that they think that should be included.
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- **Secretariat** to circulate draft paper from the Scottish Government's Clinical Cell on advice to update guidance on risk assessments.
- **Secretariat** to explore the use of another platform to hold the Group's virtual meetings.

## **Attendees**

### **Co-chairs (ERG):**

- Ima Jackson, Senior Lecturer in the School of Health and Life Sciences at Glasgow Caledonian University
- Vittal Katikireddi, Senior Clinical Research Fellow, University of Glasgow, and honorary Consultant at Public Health Scotland

### **Co-Sponsors:**

- Christina McKelvie, Minister for Older People and Equalities
- Paul Johnston, Director-General, Education, Communities & Justice, senior SG sponsor for ERG.

### **Expert Reference Group:**

- Douglas Anderson, Senior Scottish actuary specialising in longevity and diversity
- Jatin Haria, Executive Director of the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights
- Aisha Holloway, Head of Nursing Studies at Edinburgh University
- Kaliani Lyle, Former Scottish Government Race Equality Framework Advisor
- Gina Netto, Reader in the School of the Built Environment, Heriot Watt University
- Rami Ousta, CEO of BEMIS
- Aziz Sheikh, Professor of Primary Care Research & Development and Director of the Usher Institute

### **Scottish Government:**

- Melanie Weldon, COVID-19 Public Health Directorate.
- Dr Marion Bain, Deputy DCMO
- Liz Hawkins, Senior Principal Research Officer, Equality and Social Justice Analysis
- Alison Stout, Principal Research Officer, Equality and Social Justice Analysis
- Jess Dolan, Head Equality Unit
- Hilary Third, Head of the Race Equality Team
- Emily Adams, Equality Unit Policy Manager
- Ian Turner, Equality Unit
- Stephen Pathirana, Deputy Director of Trade and Investment Delivery, and Chair of the SG Race Equality Network
- Laura Merenciano, COVID-19 Public Health Directorate
- Emma Weedon, Employee Experience and Health Workforce (for Alison Carmichael)
- James Vasey, Health Workforce (observing)

### **PHS/NRS:**

- Duncan Buchanan, Public Health Scotland
- Ryan Scott, National Records of Scotland (for Pete Whitehouse)

### **Apologies:**

- Raj Bhopal, Emeritus Professor of Public Health, University of Edinburgh
- Nasar Meer, Professor of Race, Identity and Citizenship in the School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Edinburgh

- Gregor Boyd, Senior Statistician, Office Of Chief Statistician
- Alison Carmichael, Team Leader, Employee Experience & Health Workforce
- Uzma Khan, Deputy Director for Economic Policy, and Economy COVID Group Hub Strategic Lead