

# The advice gap

A study of barriers to housing advice for people from black and minority ethnic communities



# Shelter



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Cover photo by Tadhg Devlin.

To protect the identity of the people mentioned in this report, models have been used in photographs.

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‘Shelter did a lot. [The] CAB [Citizens Advice bureau] helped me to get counselling for the depression.’



# Foreword

Black and minority ethnic (BME) households are more than twice as likely as white British households to become homeless, and more than six times as likely to live in overcrowded accommodation. Logic therefore suggests that BME groups should be equally over-represented among those accessing housing advice. But the real story is quite different.

Shelter has been aware for some time that BME groups are under-represented in our client profile, as they are in that of other independent housing advice providers. Although some of the barriers preventing BME communities from accessing housing advice are common to other communities, there are a number of barriers that are specific to BME groups. Shelter commissioned this research to identify how BME communities access housing advice and the barriers that prevent them from doing so.

This timely study investigates how we can best meet the needs of BME communities for independent housing advice. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the study findings present a complex picture, and one to which there are no simple or exhaustive solutions. The reasons for the lack of access to housing advice among BME communities are as numerous and varied as the groups themselves. The needs of a settled Bangladeshi community and a newly arising community such as recent arrivals from the EU Accession States, for example, differ widely. Similarly, the factors that impact on the way that advice is accessed by different age groups vary considerably.

Shelter already provides a number of services that are tailored to meet the needs of BME communities. We are pleased with the progress and success of our projects and services, but are aware that the findings of this study must inform the further development of these services, as well as those of other advice providers, to meet better the needs of BME communities.

The study had a focus on young people to fit with Shelter's extensive programme of work for young people. The Vodafone UK Foundation is working with Shelter to tackle youth homelessness and social exclusion, and access to effective housing advice plays an important role in this.

It is imperative that we address the housing advice needs of BME communities, young and old – not only so that they are able to access independent housing advice on an equal basis with other communities, but also so that, through access to advice, we begin to address the disproportionate volume of housing problems experienced by BME households. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations presented in this report will contribute towards this by informing crucial developments in housing advice provision.



**Adam Sampson**  
Chief Executive, Shelter

‘The adviser  
made me feel I  
was using mental  
health issues  
to get housing  
and they were  
convinced my  
case was not  
genuine...’



# Summary

People from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities experience a disproportionately high level of housing problems and homelessness, yet many do not seek help with these problems from housing advice and support services. Shelter commissioned this study to understand better how people from BME communities access housing advice and the barriers they face in doing so.

The study findings draw on the views and experiences both of users of advice services and of service providers. The study involved face-to-face interviews with individuals from different BME communities across England and telephone consultations with organisations and housing providers working with these communities.

## Use of advice services

The findings confirm that people from BME communities face many serious housing problems, including overcrowding, disrepair, homelessness and exploitation by private sector landlords. Although most people from BME communities seek advice with their housing problems, they tend to do so by approaching friends or family, their housing provider or a local community organisation. People from BME communities rarely access independent housing advice services (such as Shelter or Citizens Advice) and therefore the advice they receive is usually neither independent nor expert. Most people seek a combination of both informal and formal advice, generally approaching a formal source of advice such as their local authority after discussing their problem with family or friends.

The study found that there is very little awareness of independent housing advice services among most BME communities. Many people were unaware that they had legal rights in relation to their housing problems or that there were organisations that could provide free advice to help them enforce these rights.

## Barriers to advice

The study findings identify a range of barriers to advice confronting BME communities. Overall, the main reasons for people from BME communities failing to access independent housing advice were a lack of knowledge about their rights and entitlements to housing and about how advice services could help them secure these rights. Language difficulties were also identified as a significant barrier for people who do not have English as their first language. Other barriers highlighted include practical issues such as opening hours, concerns about the impact of seeking advice on their immigration status, and cultural barriers such as a lack of cultural awareness among advice service staff.

## Improving advice services

The aim of the study was not simply to identify problems, but also to find solutions. Participants in the study made suggestions about how to improve access to advice services for BME communities. Most of the suggestions closely reflect the barriers that participants identified. The suggestions fed into the development of detailed recommendations for how advice services can be improved to meet better the urgent advice needs of BME communities.

‘In most cases I didn’t look for help as I am not aware I can get any or what type... I am new here and don’t know anything or where to seek any information.’



# Introduction

This report presents the findings of a study commissioned by Shelter into access and barriers to housing advice for black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. Through interviews with people from BME communities who have experienced housing problems, and organisations and advice providers working with these communities, the findings provide a valuable insight into advice provision for BME communities and the barriers to advice they face.

Although people from BME communities suffer a disproportionately high level of housing problems, many are not seeking assistance with these problems from housing advice and support services.<sup>1</sup> Shelter commissioned this study to understand better:

- how BME communities access housing advice
- the barriers that prevent them from accessing advice
- the experiences of BME communities, including young people aged 16 to 25, of seeking advice and information when facing bad housing and homelessness.

The study found that people from BME communities suffer a high volume of serious housing problems. Many of these people seek help with their problems, but there is a tendency to rely on families, friends and other informal sources of advice, rather than seeking assistance from providers of independent housing advice. Many people are unaware that they have legal rights in relation to their housing problems or that there are organisations that can provide free advice to help them enforce these rights.

The first part of this report focuses on identifying the difficulties faced by BME communities in accessing advice. It discusses the findings from interviews with people from BME communities who have experienced

housing problems, and advice providers and organisations working with these communities. With the key issues surrounding access to advice services for BME communities highlighted, the second part of the report focuses on finding solutions to these issues. The report looks at interviewees' suggestions for how services might be improved and concludes with detailed recommendations about how these issues can be addressed and access to advice services for BME communities improved. A glossary at the end of the report provides definitions of key terms used in the report and the appendices provide more details about the methodology and other supplementary information.

## Research aims

The study had a number of specific aims:

- to develop an understanding of formal and informal sources of information and advice used, and how BME groups become aware of these information sources
- to identify what forms of advice and information work well for different BME communities, and to identify good practice models of service provision
- to identify the range of advice and support services currently provided to BME communities and whether these are meeting their needs

<sup>1</sup> Minority Ethnic Women's Network, *Bridging the gap*, 2004.

- to explore the barriers that prevent BME households from seeking advice and information from statutory and non-statutory service providers (including language, harassment, cultural issues, discrimination, mobility, geographical location of services, and gender and status of service providers), and to explore how these barriers can be overcome
- to examine the views and experiences of BME service providers on how services can be improved in order to attract more people from BME groups
- to use learning from the research methods used in the study to provide good practice guidance on consulting with BME groups.

The study's focus on young people was intended to fit with Shelter's programme of work for young people aged 16 to 25.

The study also had a strong practical focus. Crucial improvements need to be made to advice services to meet the unfulfilled advice needs of BME communities. It is intended that the recommendations in this report, together with the study findings, should inform the development of national policy and practice in housing advice to meet the pressing needs of BME communities.

## Research methods

To produce a comprehensive picture of how BME communities access housing advice and the barriers they face in doing so, the study drew on the experiences both of people from BME communities and organisations and advice providers working with them.

The study was conducted in four locations in England to cover a range of communities and situations. The areas were:

- Oldham
- Dover and the south east of England

- London Borough of Hackney
- Bristol.<sup>2</sup>

## Face-to-face interviews with BME communities

Face-to-face interviews with BME communities comprised the main body of the research. Interviews were conducted with 172 people from selected communities, all of whom had experienced housing problems within the previous two years (the majority within one year) and were thus potential, if not actual, advice seekers.<sup>3</sup> For simplicity, these interviewees are referred to by the generic term 'advice seekers' hereafter.

The interviewees came from a wide range of BME groups including the African-Caribbean and Black African, Asian, Somali, Turkish and Kurdish, and European Union (EU) Accession State<sup>4</sup> communities. The different communities were chosen because of their varied social histories – being recent arrivals or more long-standing communities in the UK – one of the factors that affect people's housing status and their need for advice. The samples within each community included people from different age groups, with a particular emphasis on young people. A detailed breakdown of the full research frame and the demographics of the interviewees are provided on pages 55 and 56.

The interviews were structured around a questionnaire designed to capture people's advice-seeking experiences, the barriers they faced and their suggestions for improvements to advice services, as well as reasons for not seeking advice from those who had not.<sup>5</sup> The interviews were conducted by community researchers (see overleaf).

## Interviews with advice providers

To develop a broader understanding of advice provision for BME communities, semi-structured telephone interviews were undertaken with 29 organisations across

<sup>2</sup> Detailed profiles of each study area are provided in Appendix 1 on page 53.

<sup>3</sup> More details about how interviewees were selected is provided in Appendix 2 on page 54.

<sup>4</sup> For a list of the EU Accession States, see the glossary on page 51.

<sup>5</sup> For copies of the questionnaires used in the study call Shelter on 0845 485 4590.

the four study areas (between six and nine in each area). These included local authorities and other housing providers, housing advice providers and community organisations. These interviewees are referred to collectively as ‘advice providers’ hereafter.

These interviews took place before the face-to-face interviews with advice seekers and the knowledge gained contributed to the development of the questionnaire for those interviews, as well as shaping overall findings.

### **Community researchers**

The study employed innovative research methods using community researchers to undertake the face-to-face interviews with advice seekers. Local people drawn from the communities under study were recruited and trained as community researchers.<sup>6</sup>

Using community researchers benefited the study in a number of ways. Community researchers played a crucial role in the recruitment of interviewees. Their involvement enabled the study to access communities that it would not have been able to reach otherwise, for example new arrivals from EU Accession States and asylum seekers (difficult to access because as recent arrivals in the UK they have few links to established community organisations or other networks). Being from the communities themselves, the community researchers were able to use their personal contacts to recruit interviewees.

The fact that community researchers were able to conduct interviews in languages other than English was crucial: nearly a quarter of the interviews were conducted in other languages (see Table 6 on page 56 for details). Interviewees also felt more at ease being interviewed by someone closer to their situation and from their own community. Finally, in the aftermath of the study, the trained community researchers will serve as a legacy of the study

within the communities. It is hoped that the researchers will be able to assist Shelter in the future, for example in developing good practice guidance on consulting with BME groups.

At the end of the research a follow-up and debriefing day was held for all the community researchers. During the final feedback session, one researcher responded:

*‘This made me feel that my community was part of the research and setting the agenda – rather than having something done to us.’*

### **Workshops**

At different stages in the study the emerging findings were tested and validated at both a local level and through a series of workshops.<sup>7</sup> All the agencies interviewed were invited to participate, as well as other key housing and advice providers and relevant community-based organisations.

<sup>6</sup> For details about how community researchers were recruited and trained see Appendix 4 on page 58.

<sup>7</sup> A list of attendees at the co-operative enquiry workshops (as the workshops were known) is provided in Appendix 3 on page 57.

‘The place was filthy and unhygienic. It was noisy and being used by the prostitutes who rented rooms by the hour I think...’



# Background

This chapter provides some context for the findings presented in this report. It discusses the housing circumstances of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities and defines and explains housing advice.

## Housing circumstances among BME communities

People from BME communities experience a disproportionately high level of homelessness and housing problems. They are between six and seven times as likely as white British households to live in overcrowded conditions; more than twice as likely to be homeless; and twice as likely to live in unfit housing.<sup>8</sup>

The findings of this study confirm the high levels of housing problems among BME communities. Advice seekers and advice providers<sup>9</sup> interviewed as part of the study identified a variety of housing problems including:

- overcrowding
- housing in poor condition and disrepair
- homelessness
- rent arrears
- exploitation by private sector landlords (refusal to return deposits etc).

The high levels of housing problems among BME communities, as well as other factors such as unemployment and poverty, are likely to increase the need for housing advice among these communities.

## What is housing advice?

Housing advice is the provision of advice and information on legal rights and entitlements in relation to housing. Housing advice covers two main areas:

- access to accommodation, and
- use of, and rights relating to, the existing home.

These two main areas cover a wide range of issues, including homelessness applications and appeals, rent arrears, repairs and improvements, and accessing Housing Benefit.

Housing advice is delivered by an advice sector consisting of voluntary, private and statutory providers. This report focuses on voluntary and statutory advice providers, as well as community organisations working with BME communities. These are explained below.

## Voluntary sector housing advice providers

Voluntary sector advice providers include independent organisations such as Shelter, Citizens Advice, Law Centres and other independent advice providers. These may provide services from specialist advice to general legal help and casework services.

Funding for voluntary sector providers comes from a range of sources including the Legal Services Commission<sup>10</sup>, local authority grants or contracts, grants from charitable funding (for example the Big Lottery Fund), and government regeneration funding. Proposed changes to the delivery of legal services, as outlined in the 2005 Legal Services Commission Strategy<sup>11</sup> and the Carter Review<sup>12</sup>, will have significant implications for advice providers in the coming years. The introduction of new fixed-fee contracts and 'preferred suppliers' may limit the time available to advice providers to spend on complex cases, and some smaller agencies may lose their Community Legal Service (CLS) contracts. These developments are worrying in the context of the findings of this study.

<sup>8</sup> Source: Office of National Statistics, UK Census 2001, ODPM/DCLG Homelessness Statistics September 2005–June 2006, and English House Condition Survey 2001. For a definition of 'homelessness', 'overcrowding' and 'unfitness', see the glossary on page 51.

<sup>9</sup> 'Advice seekers' and 'advice providers' are generic terms for the two sets of interviewees in the study. For a definition of both terms as used in this report, see the glossary on page 51.

<sup>10</sup> Currently through Community Legal Service (CLS) contracts at different levels, such as Specialist Help or General Help with Casework, but proposals to change the system are under consideration.

<sup>11</sup> Legal Services Commission, *Making legal rights a reality*, July 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Lord Carter's review of legal aid procurement: see [www.legalaidprocurementreview.gov.uk](http://www.legalaidprocurementreview.gov.uk) for more information.

**Community support organisations**

Many community support organisations provide some form of housing advice. This is largely limited to information (for example on how to report repairs, how to access housing waiting lists, or how to claim Housing Benefit) and general help (for example making telephone calls, providing advocacy to access housing, and advising on homelessness procedures).

Community support organisations provide services at a local level, often working with specific client groups such as older or young people, women, BME communities, or immigrants in specific neighbourhoods.

**Local authorities**

Since the Housing Act 1985, local authorities have had a statutory obligation to provide housing advice to all people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Local authority housing advice services may be part of their homelessness service or separate from the homelessness service through, for example, a directly managed Housing Aid Service.



# Advice-seeking experiences

This chapter looks at the experiences of BME communities in seeking and accessing housing advice, as revealed through interviews with advice seekers<sup>13</sup> from different communities. It discusses the sources of advice used by the different communities and their experiences of dealing with advice services. It also provides an overview of the housing problems experienced by the different communities that caused them to need advice.

## Key findings

- More than 90 per cent (153) of respondents had sought some form of advice, be it from informal or formal sources.<sup>14</sup>
- Nine per cent of respondents (15) had not sought advice from any source at all, 12 of whom were EU Accession State nationals.
- More than half (56 per cent) of the respondents who had sought advice had done so from both informal and formal sources of advice. This includes more than half of respondents from each community under study, except the EU Accession State nationals and asylum seekers and refugees.
- More than a quarter (29 per cent) of respondents who had sought advice had approached formal sources of advice directly without seeking any assistance from family or friends.
- Most formal advice accessed by interviewees was from non-independent or non-expert sources, such as local authorities or community organisations. Very few interviewees had accessed independent specialist housing advice or were aware that such services existed.
- Sixteen per cent of those who had sought advice had only consulted informal sources such as family, friends and neighbours.
- Young people reported limited success in accessing advice and showed very little awareness of independent housing advice services. The majority of young homeless people participating in the survey had sought advice from friends, local housing associations, or the housing or homelessness department of their local authority.
- The EU Accession State nationals group contained the highest proportion of respondents who had not sought any advice (12 out of 28), despite experiencing similar housing problems to other groups.
- The majority of interviewees who had not sought any advice reported that their housing situation had not changed; none reported that the situation had deteriorated.

<sup>13</sup> 'Advice seekers' is a generic term to refer to the interviewees from BME communities. For a definition of this term as used in this report, see the glossary on page 51.

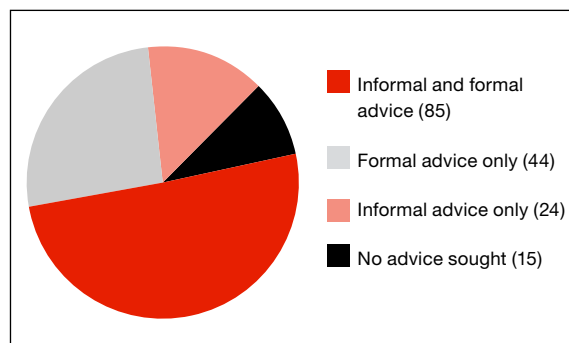
<sup>14</sup> For a definition of the terms 'formal' and 'informal' sources of advice as used in this report, see the glossary on page 51.

## Sources of advice

More than 90 per cent (153) of respondents had sought some form of advice. The study findings reveal that people from BME communities seek housing advice from informal and formal sources, and in the majority of cases from a combination of the two. Among those interviewed for the study who had sought advice, more than half (56 per cent) had sought advice from both informal and formal sources, usually approaching informal sources first. More than a quarter (29 per cent) had approached formal advice sources directly, and had not sought any help from family and friends. Sixteen per cent had only sought help from informal sources, and had not sought any formal advice. Nine per cent of those interviewed had not sought any advice, and had either dealt with their housing problems on their own or reported that they had taken no action (see page 24). Figure 1 shows the sources of advice used by the interviewees and Table 1 provides a breakdown of sources of advice by community.

With the exception of the EU Accession State nationals and asylum seekers and refugees, more than half of the interviewees from

**Figure 1: Sources of housing advice used by BME communities**



Base: 168 people from BME communities interviewed (this excludes the four interviewees for whom data are missing).

each community had sought advice from both informal and formal sources. (Most EU Accession State nationals had either not sought advice or only sought advice from informal sources, and most asylum seekers and refugees had either sought advice from both informal and formal sources, or formal sources only.)

In most cases where formal advice had been sought, the advice had not come from independent advice providers but local authorities or housing associations, or non-

**Table 1: Breakdown by community of sources of housing advice used**

	No advice sought	Informal advice only	Informal and formal advice	Formal advice only	Number of interviews conducted*
African-Caribbean	0	3	19	9	31
Black Africans	0	0	11	4	15
Somalis	1	1	7	4	13
Turkish and Kurdish	0	0	12	8	20
Asylum seekers and refugees	0	3	7	7	17
EU Accession State nationals	12	9	3	3	27
Asian	2	8	26	9	45
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>168</b>

Base: 172 people from BME communities interviewed.

\*Excluding four of the interviewees for whom data are missing.

expert sources such as community support organisations. The findings reveal little awareness among BME communities of the existence of independent and specialist advice services or how such services could help them to secure their rights. Interviewees also showed a poor level of knowledge about their rights and entitlements in relation to housing.

Most respondents had faced problems with their current home and turned to their housing provider to address them. If they had been homeless and needed to find accommodation, the majority had turned to a local authority or housing association; a number had also approached private sector landlords and letting agencies.

Very few people had sought independent housing advice to challenge decisions of housing providers. The communities most likely to have accessed formal independent housing advice were those from established BME communities who had English as a first or good second language, such as the Black African and African-Caribbean communities. The group least likely to have accessed independent housing advice was the EU Accession State community (also the group most likely not to have sought advice from any source).

Young people were keen to use advice, but reported limited success in accessing it, despite experiencing the same problems as the interviewees overall. The majority of young homeless people participating in the study had sought advice from friends, local housing associations or the relevant branch of their local authority.

### **Advice delivery**

Of the small numbers of people making use of formal independent advice services (as mentioned opposite, most formal advice came from non-independent sources), most visited an advice agency and received face-to-face

advice. Interviewees reported often having to wait a long time to be seen, and that they would then be told to return days or even weeks later for an appointment to see a housing adviser.

Very few of those interviewed had used telephone advice and many reported difficulties when trying to contact agencies by telephone. However, some interviewees said they would prefer to access advice that way.

Most people who indicated a preference for the method of advice delivery preferred face-to-face advice. An exception was some of the 16- to 25-year-old EU Accession State migrants who expressed a wish to be able to access information via the Internet.

### **Housing circumstances and problems**

Most of the interviewees (almost two-thirds) were living in rented accommodation, with a fairly even split between the private and social rented sector (31 and 29 per cent respectively). Nearly a quarter were living in the family home or staying with friends or family (five, eight and 10 per cent respectively). Seven per cent of respondents were homeowners and seven per cent were homeless (either with no accommodation, in temporary accommodation or living in a hostel).<sup>15</sup>

The housing problems reported by interviewees were similar across all the communities under study – poor-quality accommodation, lack of access to affordable accommodation, overcrowding, disrepair, and homelessness.

A large number of respondents had experienced problems with private rented accommodation, with many complaining of exploitation by private landlords, for example landlords refusing to return deposits or make necessary repairs. The EU Accession State nationals seemed to be particularly vulnerable in this respect; almost all had had unfortunate experiences with private sector lettings.

<sup>15</sup> Table 3 on page 55 provides full details of the accommodation status of all interviewees.

*'I got a room in a house while I looked for a job in London, £88 a week for a small, dirty, smelly room. I cannot cook. It is in Mile End and the landlord wants me to have sex. I would rather be homeless. I am moving out tomorrow.'*

Latvian male, aged 18 to 25.

Asylum seekers and refugees complained of having disruptive and problematic neighbours such as drug users, dealers and prostitutes.

*'The place was filthy and unhygienic. It was noisy and being used by the prostitutes who rented rooms by the hour I think and by drug users.'*

Afghani male, aged 45 to 54.

Homelessness was another big problem among the interviewees, particularly prevalent among those in the 16-to-25 age group. Many young people in the African-Caribbean and Black African communities reported family breakdown and having to leave home as the cause of their housing problems.

*'I left home a month ago and am homeless. I sleep anywhere I can find shelter – stairways, lifts. Coming here to Hackney Homeless Unit is the first step. I never knew what this place was about.'*

African-Caribbean male, aged 16 to 25.

In Oldham, the Housing Market Renewal scheme was causing dissatisfaction among homeowners, including many Asian families. Property was being compulsorily purchased and the compensation packages were deemed insufficient by many homeowners.

Overcrowding was a major problem among the Somali community. Somali households are often large, with family members who were originally refugees in other European countries coming to join their family in the UK. Current social housing provision is not designed to accommodate such large extended families and there are few larger properties available in the areas where there are existing Somali communities.

Somali respondents also identified a range of housing problems that they felt were specific to their culture and that were ignored or misunderstood by housing providers. These included needing housing in areas where they had access to mosques, lack of prayer space, and inappropriate shared temporary accommodation. Some respondents had been given accommodation where they were forced to share facilities with other tenants who were preparing pork, drinking alcohol or using drugs. Somali families are being encouraged to move to areas where they have no community ties, away from their support mechanisms and community facilities such as mosques and shops.

## Community-specific advice-seeking experiences

This section presents the experiences of seeking and accessing advice reported by interviewees from each community. Information about interviewees who had not sought advice is presented separately at the end of the chapter (page 24).

### Asylum seekers and refugees

All the asylum seekers and refugees interviewed for the study were living in Dover. The majority (14 out of 18) were Turkish, Kurdish or Iranian; the remaining four were Russian/Balkan, Afghani, Czech and Somali respectively. Most interviewees were single males.

All interviewees in this group had sought some form of advice with their problems. Asylum seekers and refugees were most likely either to seek advice from both informal and formal sources or only from formal sources (seven respondents in each case).

### Young people

The asylum seekers and refugees in the 16-to-25 age group seemed open to seeking advice to improve their situation, although some feared that seeking advice or help would affect their immigration status. There was also a prevailing feeling, particularly among those with asylum applications pending and

overstayers<sup>16</sup> that because of their immigration status they had no legal rights. When asked why he did not seek advice, one young Kurdish overstayer (aged 16 to 25) responded:

*'I have no rights as a failed person in the asylum system.'*

Most young asylum seekers and refugees had sought help from family and friends first, and all but one had then approached formal sources for further advice. The formal advice accessed by this group tended to be from agencies providing support specifically to refugees and asylum seekers. Among those whose claims for asylum had been accepted, many continued to use these services, both because of the useful support provided by these agencies and because of a lack of awareness about other sources of advice. Such agencies include the Migrant Helpline in Dover or its outreach service at The Links One Stop Shop in St Leonard's, Canterbury Housing Advice Centre and Kent Refugee Advice Network.

In spite of the poor quality of their accommodation, none of the interviewees had sought advice to challenge their landlords, for example to undertake repairs or recover deposits unlawfully withheld. None of them mentioned Shelter in relation to advocating on their behalf about these or other issues. One participant identified Citizens Advice bureaux and private solicitors as potential sources of advice and assistance, but this individual was unable to access these services because he was working full time and could not take time off work for appointments.

### **European Union (EU) Accession State nationals<sup>17</sup>**

EU Accession State nationals were interviewed in the south east of England. Of the 28 interviewed, 15 were Polish, 10 were Latvians, and the remaining three were Czech, Estonian or Russian ethnicity, and Romanian with Hungarian nationality respectively. The majority had moved to the UK since accession.

Recent reports suggest that nationals from these countries are making very few demands upon public funds.<sup>18</sup> This is reflected in the findings of this study: only three respondents from this group had sought formal advice directly – from a solicitor, a Citizens Advice bureau, and the Terrence Higgins Trust respectively. Almost half of EU Accession State interviewees had not sought advice from any source (12). They had dealt with their housing problems through negotiation with private sector landlords and letting agencies or by moving to new accommodation, or they had not taken any action. Of the remainder the majority had only sought help and advice from family and friends (nine out of 28). Overwhelmingly this community did not know where to go for advice and were unclear whether they had any right to free advice.

*'As someone looking for work from an EU country I do not want to make any trouble. I was told I would not get anything from the Government.'*

Hungarian male, aged 18 to 25.

It was not only those who had recently arrived in the UK who were unclear about possible avenues of redress. A Polish woman, aged 26 to 34, who has been living in the UK for over five years described extensive problems with her housing, but was unaware of how to seek independent help in resolving them:

*'My family and I have been in several privately rented flats – the agencies are terrible... We were refused places because we are Eastern European... Our deposits [were] not given back to us... [We] have had bug and rodent infestation that has not been dealt with since we moved in. Is there anywhere else we can go other than the agency that we rent from?'*

### **Young people**

The findings for the 16- to 25-year-olds in this group reiterate the trends noted overleaf for the group overall. Young people from EU Accession

<sup>16</sup> For a definition of the term 'overstayer', see the glossary on page 51.

<sup>17</sup> For more information about the EU Accession States, see the glossary on page 51.

<sup>18</sup> Of 130,000 EU Accession State nationals registered, the number claiming out-of-work benefit remains small at less than 800; Home Office, *The Accession monitoring report, May – December 2004, 2005*, available at [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk)

States were more reluctant to seek advice than other 16- to 25-year-old groups. Eight out of the 20 young people interviewed from this community had sought no advice at all; nine sought advice from informal sources only.

There was a marked lack of awareness of the existence of advice services among young people in this group. Interviewees did not know where to go for advice, were wary of potential costs of advice, and were concerned that free advice would not be of a sufficient quality to be of use.

*'In most cases I didn't look for help as I am not aware I can get any or what type... I am new here and don't know anything or where to seek any information.'*

Male EU Accession State national, aged 18 to 25.

### **African-Caribbean and Black African**

Interviews were conducted with the African-Caribbean community in Bristol and the London Borough of Hackney, and the Black African community in Hackney.

All respondents had sought some form of advice about their housing problems. The majority of respondents from these communities had sought advice from both informal and formal sources (19 out of 32 in the African-Caribbean community and 11 out of 15 in the Black African community).

In Hackney, there was a very high level of awareness and use of formal advice services among Black African and African-Caribbean respondents. Services mentioned included the Citizens Advice bureau and Hackney Community Law Centre. This contrasted markedly with the Turkish and Kurdish communities in the area, who made very little use of advice services.

The high level of awareness among the Black African and African-Caribbean communities can be attributed in part to the fact that these are long-standing communities with high English

language and literacy levels. In addition, both the advice agencies they mentioned using had a high visible presence in the centre of Hackney and had actively reached out to the BME communities. The reasons for the Turkish and Kurdish communities' reluctance to use these services are discussed later.

Less positively, there was little awareness of Legal Aid among the Black African and African-Caribbean communities in Hackney and respondents saw legal help from private solicitors as out of their reach if they were unemployed. The group had little or no awareness of the advocacy services offered by Shelter. If homeless or threatened with homelessness, they relied on the local authority homelessness department (Hackney Homeless Person Unit) and few sought independent advice to challenge homelessness decisions.

The two older interviewees (aged 60 or over) from this community in Hackney had both sought independent advice with their housing problems. (Both were referred for the study by Hackney Homeless Person Unit, which may explain the high level of use of independent advice). They both had severe housing problems and had faced, or were facing, homelessness. Despite a general feeling of discomfort about seeking help from others, they reported finding the advice they received very helpful, as expressed by one of the interviewees, a 60-year-old Nigerian woman:

*'Shelter did a lot. CAB [Citizens Advice bureau] helped me to get counselling for the depression. If not, I should have died by now I was so depressed.'*

In Bristol, the African-Caribbean respondents were less aware of independent formal advice services: only two out of 15 interviewees reported using independent advice services. Most dealt with their housing problems (mainly disrepair and a small number of homelessness cases) by contacting the local authority. One

interviewee, an African-Caribbean man aged 26 to 44, expressed scepticism at the ability of an independent agency to help with a housing repair issue in a local authority property:

*'It's the council's property. If we go somewhere else, they will tell us it's a council problem and that we need to go to the council for advice.'*

In both areas, interviewees from the African-Caribbean communities stated that it would be useful to have clearer information about who to contact about their housing issues and how to report them.

### **Young people**

All the young respondents from the African-Caribbean and Black African communities in Hackney had sought formal advice, but the majority had sought advice from family and friends first. Much of the formal advice accessed came from the Hackney Homeless Persons Unit, but there was some limited use of the independent advice providers Connexions and Off Centre, both of which services are specifically aimed at young people. The legal advice provided by Off Centre was rated very highly.

Most of the respondents were seeking accommodation and were homeless or potentially homeless; many reported family breakdown as the cause of their housing problems.

Young people in Hackney felt strongly that they needed advice and were entitled to it. This sense of entitlement contrasts markedly with the younger asylum seekers and refugees and EU Accession State nationals interviewed.

Despite this sense of entitlement, interviewees expressed concerns about the accessibility of the local authority housing system, stating that it was designed in a way that greatly restricted their ability to access housing. Some of the young people in Hackney felt unable to trust local authority housing advisers, perceiving

that the advisers had not believed that they needed help and had looked down on them:

*'[It was] difficult coming into the office, they made me feel like I was lying.'*

Black African male, aged 16 to 17.

A couple of 16-year-olds reported that they had approached social services but had not been able to access assistance.

*'[I was] not allowed to get a caseworker [because I was] too old.'*

African-Caribbean female, aged 16 to 17.

### **Asian**

Interviews were conducted with the Asian community in Bristol and Oldham. Most participants were of Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnicity, with the exception of five Indian participants in Bristol. Participants consisted of both first and second generation British residents.

All but two Asian interviewees had sought some form of advice with their housing problem, with an even split between those who had sought informal and formal advice (34 and 35 interviewees respectively). The majority of respondents had sought both formal and informal advice (26 out of 44 respondents who had sought advice).

Interviewees in Oldham had generally used their existing housing provider to address any repair and overcrowding problems. Some had also sought help with reporting repairs from Coppice Community Centre because the centre provides a service in community languages.

Among older advice seekers there was a tendency to seek advice from community organisations for similar reasons. Most older interviewees (60 or over) in Oldham were residents of First Choice Homes (a housing association established to take over the council's housing stock). The association's

Equality Team offers services in the relevant community languages, but participants reported having to wait for an interpreter. This meant that instead they would sometimes choose to report a problem through a community organisation to avoid delays. (The barriers to advice posed by language difficulties are discussed further on page 29.)

Interviewees were positive about their experiences of seeking advice from community organisations, despite shortcomings in such organisations' abilities to solve the problems in question.

*'The [Bangladeshi] Association gave me an appointment immediately. They phoned my housing association. I have little English and [they] made sure the work got done.'*

Bangladeshi female, aged 35 to 44.

*'They [the community organisation] have been very helpful, but not able to solve me being on the transfer list for 10 years... The council ignore me... [and] the council ignore them.'*

Bangladeshi female, aged 35 to 44.

Participants in Oldham had very limited awareness of independent housing advice providers. Only one participant out of all the age groups, a Pakistani woman aged 45 to 54, had sought independent advice about homelessness from a Citizens Advice bureau and a housing aid centre. Neither had been able to help her access accommodation. She described her unfulfilled expectations of seeking assistance from an advice service. Her comments highlight a lack of understanding about the role of such services:

*'Expectations are the most difficult for everyone to deal with. You expect them to help your problems. Advice is not the same as help. Help is what I wanted.'*

For some respondents other non-specialist support services had provided solutions. One couple reported that they would have been evicted if social services had not intervened.

### **Young people**

Almost all young interviewees from the Asian community had accessed advice from some source. Often this had been to help parents or other family members who did not speak English or faced other barriers such as poor health. (The majority of the young Asians interviewed in Oldham and Bristol were living with their families.)

When asked about their experiences, many young Asians commented on the delay between seeking advice and receiving it. They also complained about long waiting-lists, being sent around in circles, and being told different things by different people.

*'They keep on telling you to contact someone else, who then tells you to contact someone else, and [they] keep telling you to go to a different place.'*

Bangladeshi male, aged 18 to 25.

In Oldham, six out of the 10 interviewees in the 16-to-25 age group had sought formal advice. The main sources of advice mentioned were the Oldham Civic Centre, the Aksa Housing Association, Selhal Housing Group and First Choice Homes. None of the interviewees had sought independent specialist housing advice, nor did they show any awareness of such advice services. Two of the three young Pakistani participants reported that they felt more comfortable seeking advice from the Pakistani Community Centre because the staff there spoke their language and related better to them culturally.

Two respondents whose families were affected by racial abuse from neighbours reported seeking help from both their housing provider and the police.

## **Somali**

Interviews with the Somali community took place in Bristol. All but one of the Somali interviewees had sought advice. Somalis were most likely to seek advice from both informal and formal advice (seven out of 13 interviewees), but a sizeable proportion (four out of 13) had approached formal advice providers directly without consulting informal sources.

There was a perception among the Somali respondents that their community was treated unfairly or discriminated against, for example through being allocated poorer-quality accommodation or waiting longer for repairs than other communities. This has left many reluctant to seek help from organisations outside their own community.

One young Somali woman, aged 18 to 25, described the lengthy experiences of her family in trying to obtain better housing from the council:

*'My father visited the local council but he did not have interpreter so they did not listen to him. Shelter visited us when we were staying with our aunt, but they did not come back. Eventually the council heard us and we moved – first into a hostel and then a house.'*

As with other communities, many Somali respondents highlighted language difficulties as a major barrier to accessing advice, often preventing people from reporting problems or following up advice.

## **Young people**

A common finding among the young Somali interviewees was their perception that seeking advice was time-consuming and involved a lot of paperwork, yet it would often produce no concrete advice. As with the Somali community overall, young Somalis experienced language difficulties when accessing advice and some felt ashamed of needing help with their problems. (These issues are discussed

in detail in the chapter on barriers to advice on pages 29 and 32 respectively).

## **Turkish and Kurdish communities**

Interviews with Turkish and Kurdish community members took place in the London Borough of Hackney.

All Turkish and Kurdish respondents had sought formal advice. More than half had sought both informal and formal advice (12 of 20 respondents) and the other eight had sought advice directly from formal sources without seeking any advice from informal sources.

Turkish and Kurdish interviewees reported mainly using Turkish and Kurdish community centres for advice. This was because of language and cultural issues and a belief that independent advice services such as Citizens Advice and Law Centres were not aimed at them. Most interviewees from Turkish and Kurdish communities in Hackney had accessed help and advice with their housing problems through Halkevi, a local advice and community organisation. Some interviewees reported going to the Citizens Advice bureau for help, but experiencing delays in accessing advice because the service was not able to provide an interpreter immediately (it did provide one later).

## **Young people**

Many young people from this group had accessed advice from the Hackney Homeless Persons Unit or Connexions. The majority had sought advice from friends and family first.

Interviews with this group highlighted a number of key issues with their advice-seeking experiences. They had almost no understanding of the housing system or support services. Limited English skills also posed difficulties for many in accessing advice. Unresolved immigration status also meant some young people were reluctant to seek advice and help for fear it would affect their immigration status. (These issues are discussed further on pages 29 and 32.)

There was also a perception that the current system of statutory housing advice and assistance often led to young people being excluded. One Kurdish man, aged 18 to 25, commented:

*'[The council's] perception of young people can exclude some people from help as there are more vulnerable people around, such as sick people, pregnant women and so on. Young people can feel excluded from council housing.'*

Some of the interviewees described how they felt that the housing advisers they had seen had not believed they needed help and looked down on them.

*'The adviser made me feel that I was using mental health issues to get housing and they were convinced my case was not genuine... He completely put me off explaining my problems in detail... He didn't listen to me and made me feel even if I explained the details of my story they would not believe me.'*  
Turkish/Kurdish male, aged 18 to 25.

### People who had not sought advice

Nine per cent of the interviewees (15) had not sought advice from any source. They had chosen not to seek help from family, friends or neighbours, or from formal advice sources. They had either dealt with their problem by taking action themselves or had done nothing to address the issue.

The EU Accession State nationals were the community most likely by far not to seek any advice with their housing problem, making up 12 of these 15 interviewees. Of the remaining three, two were Asians and one was Somali. Interviewees from the other communities had all sought some form of advice with their housing problem.

Interviewees cited a number of reasons for not seeking help, including:

- they did not know where to go for help
- they did not know if anyone could help
- they were worried they would be taken advantage of
- they were working and thought they were not entitled to help because they had an income.

*'I don't know about places or organisations.'*  
Turkish male, aged 16 to 25.

Many were unable to comment on why they had not sought advice, possibly because they did not understand what was meant by advice.

Other research on advice-seeking behaviour, which was looking at the general population, identified similar reasons for people not taking action to resolve their problems.<sup>19</sup> That research found that 10 per cent of people with one or two civil justice problems had taken no action to resolve them.

Shelter's study asked those who had not sought advice what had happened to their housing situation. Although several respondents said that their situation had improved, the majority said that it had not changed.

*'... Everything is still the same. [I'm] not going to move from [this] house. [I] just gave up at the moment – I have important issues to deal with. Maybe later in the year I'll look at it.'*  
Bangladeshi female, aged 26 to 34.

Interestingly, none of the respondents said their problem had deteriorated as a result of not getting advice.

A number of respondents described taking action to resolve their problem themselves:

*'[My] situation has improved – no overcrowding issues [anymore]. Repairs are done to the property [and I am] still living within the local community that is good... We solved the problem ourselves within our community.'*

<sup>19</sup> Pleasance P, *Causes of action: civil law and social justice*, second edition, Legal Services Commission, 2006.

*Maybe if we had been consulted and involved from the beginning, then we would have not had to do this. We were lucky in that we had family that could help. Maybe other people did not.'*

Pakistani male, aged 60 or over.

*'That time I bought an electric heater to warm up my room and cleaned the walls by myself. I looked for other accommodation and moved out.'*

Female EU Accession State national, aged 26 to 34.

One young EU Accession State national, aged 16 to 25, had not yet taken action but expressed an intention to do so:

*'There are no changes [to my housing situation]. I am going to try to speak to the landlord and convince him to give the money back and later move out to a better place.'*

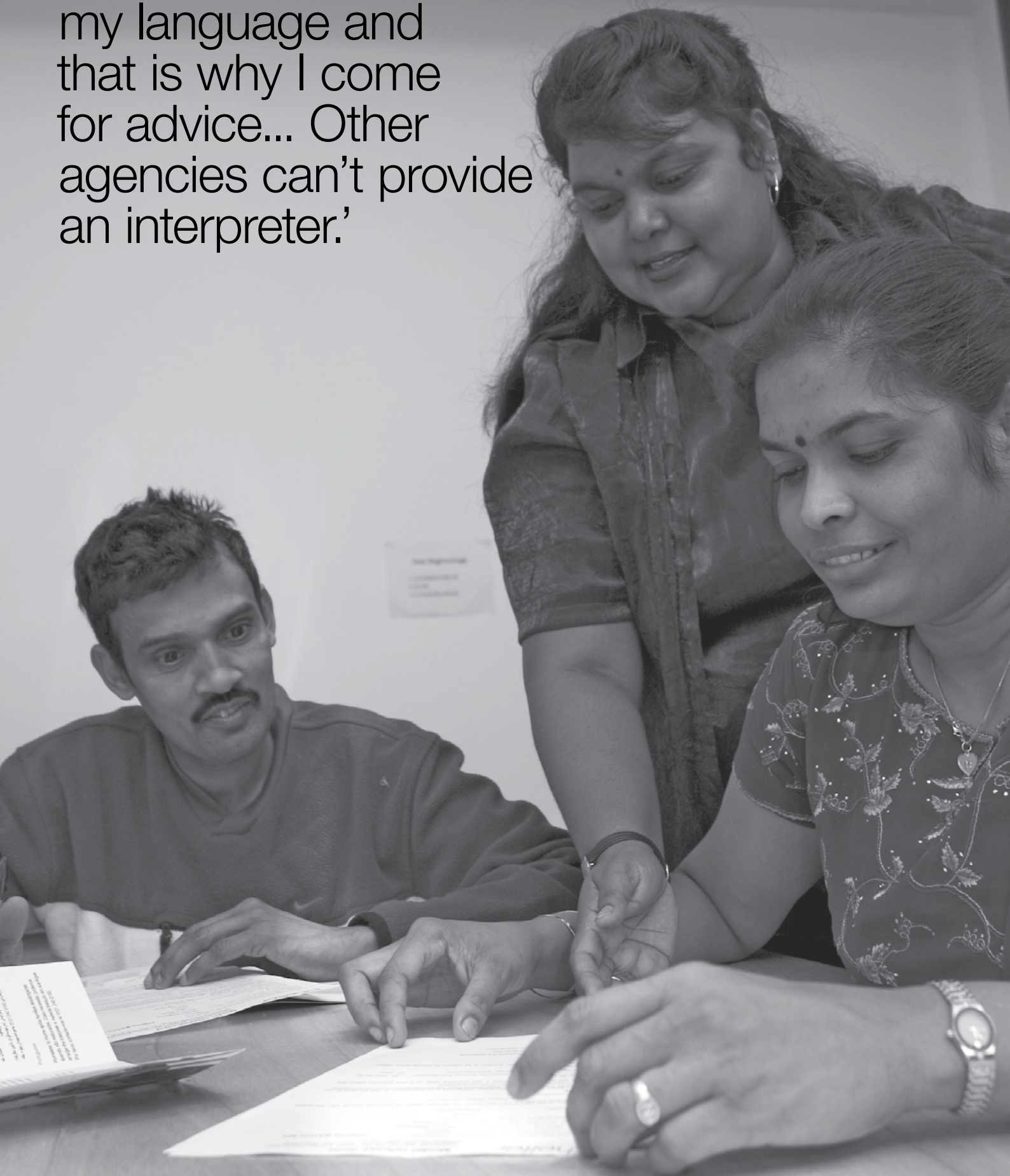
Among respondents who had taken any action, most reported having moved house to improve their situation, instead of tackling the problem with their original housing.

Only one respondent, a Somali man aged 26 to 34, specifically said that he still needed advice about his problem:

*'[My situation] has got slightly better... [but] still my housing problem is not solved properly. I still need help and advice regarding my housing situation. I am still living in an overcrowded place... It is still expensive for me.'*



‘Language is an issue [for accessing advice], but in the Bangladeshi centre they speak my language and that is why I come for advice... Other agencies can’t provide an interpreter.’



# Barriers to advice

This chapter examines the barriers to advice faced by black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, as revealed by the study. It focuses on people who had not managed to secure advice, but also reports on the obstacles encountered by some interviewees who had secured advice.

## Key findings

- Overall, a lack of knowledge about rights to housing, and about how advice services can help secure these rights, are the key reasons for people from BME communities failing to access independent advice.
- There are, however, multiple barriers prohibiting people from BME communities from accessing advice, including the following.

### Knowledge about housing rights

- A lack of knowledge of rights and entitlements to housing

### Awareness of advice services

- A lack of awareness of advice services and how they can help secure people's rights

### Practical issues

- The need for an interpreter where English is not a first language
- The limited or inflexible opening hours of advice services for those in employment or those with children or caring responsibilities
- Physical and mental ill health or old age making it difficult for people to travel any distance to advice centres
- The cost implications of seeking advice as a deterrent because of a lack of awareness, particularly among EU migrants, that many services are provided free

### Immigration status

- Failed asylum seekers and others with uncertain immigration status deterred from seeking advice by a lack of understanding of their rights and the fear of being reported to the immigration authorities

### Cultural barriers

- Public attitudes to refugees and asylum seekers reflected in the way public services are provided, for example the assumption that the needs of all refugees and asylum seekers are the same
- A reluctance to seek advice among older people because of a desire for independence and, particularly among older Asian people, a feeling that problems should be resolved within the family
- A reluctance to seek advice among young people because of a feeling that they should be able to cope alone or that services did not meet the needs of young people
- A perception, particularly in the Somali community, that cultural needs in respect of housing will be misunderstood or disrespected, leading to a preference for seeking assistance from within their own community

The study revealed a range of barriers that hinder people from BME communities from accessing advice. Many of these are not confined to BME communities and are likely to be universal problems that any potential advice seeker would face. Although this study focused on the views of people from BME communities, many of the findings will have a wider relevance.

A better understanding of the barriers facing BME communities informs the discussion in later chapters about strategies for how advice services can improve their provision of advice to these communities.

The barriers identified by the study that are presented in this chapter are divided into five categories:

- knowledge about housing rights
- awareness of advice services
- practical issues
- immigration status
- cultural barriers.

### Knowledge about housing rights

The study findings show that a key factor restricting people from certain BME communities from seeking and accessing housing advice is their lack of knowledge and understanding about their rights and entitlements to housing and advice.

This was particularly prevalent as a barrier to advice among asylum seekers and EU Accession State migrants, both groups being recent arrivals to the UK who are unfamiliar with services and systems in the UK. Many people from these communities were confused by the different agencies, organisations and bodies:

*'The job centre says one thing, the council says something different. It's confusing.'*

Kurdish male, aged 18 to 25.

Worryingly, within the EU Accession State community, there was no difference in the level of awareness about rights and entitlements between those who were established migrant workers and registered as such, and those who were first-time jobseekers with no recourse to public funds. All interviewees from this community showed a very low level of knowledge about their rights.

Worker registration<sup>20</sup> would be a good opportunity to provide migrant workers with information about accessing health and other services; however, the findings of this study highlight a failing in the provision of information at the time of registration.

*'Information on Home Office sites for new arrivals I haven't found easy to understand and find answers to questions. I am a new arrival and don't want to cause trouble. I need to have knowledge about UK system rights and responsibilities.'*

Latvian male, aged 18 to 25.

The lack of knowledge about their rights among this community deterred them from seeking help and taking action to address their housing problems, thus allowing private landlords to continue their exploitation of such tenants without redress. The EU Accession State community contained the highest proportion of interviewees who had not sought any advice to deal with their housing problems. A number of interviewees stated that they feared that making complaints about their landlords or seeking advice might lead to the loss of their tenancy and the money paid as a deposit.

*'It is just better to move on after you have got the deposit back... If I complain then I have heard they don't give the deposit back.'*

Latvian male, aged 18 to 25.

<sup>20</sup> For an explanation of 'worker registration', see 'EU Accession States' in the glossary on page 51.

Although Turkish and Kurdish interviewees accessing local authority services such as the Homeless Persons Unit had a reasonable level of success, many expressed a lack of understanding about their rights to housing and complained of the dearth of information available:

*'[There is] no helpdesk to guide you... [and] no leaflet that explains what you are entitled to.'*

Turkish/Kurdish female, aged 35 to 44.

The lack of knowledge of rights and entitlements among BME communities may also contribute to undermining social cohesion. There was evidence of emerging tensions between different communities regarding which communities were seemingly getting the most out of the system and the reasons for any imbalance. Interviewees from the Somali community were particularly concerned about the disparity they perceived in the level of services accessed by different communities.

### **Awareness of advice services**

Awareness of independent housing advice services was extremely low across all communities under study, illustrated by the low number of participants who had sought advice from such services. Most interviewees showed little or no awareness of the existence of such services or how they can help secure people's rights.

Young people arriving in the UK from the EU Accession States seemed to be completely unaware of what advice services were or that they had a right to access advice.

The lack of understanding of advice services was also apparent among longer-term UK residents. The research found that most young Asians in Oldham were unaware of where to go for advice. This resulted in a dissatisfaction with the services they did manage to access. They felt that advice services made them go round in circles and that they had to wait a long time for advice, but then nothing would happen to improve their situation.

This scepticism about the effectiveness of advice was apparent among many of the young people interviewed from different communities, reflecting a general lack of understanding about the role of advice services. Few had accessed independent advice services, but some had sought help from local authorities and other bodies. Many young people felt there was a lot of paperwork involved in accessing help with their housing, which they felt did not achieve much to improve their situation.

*'There is not any action except giving basic assistance, for example filling out forms, drafting letters and contacting third parties to seek further information.'*

Somali male, aged 18 to 25.

### **Practical issues**

The study identified a number of practical issues that were preventing people from BME communities from accessing advice services effectively.

#### **Language difficulties**

English language skills vary significantly among BME communities and so it is unsurprising to find that language is a significant barrier to advice for those communities who do not have English as a first language.

Language problems were highlighted by nearly all communities under study, with the notable exception of the Black African and African-Caribbean communities. Within the Asian community, language was only considered a barrier for older members of the community and those who had arrived in the UK recently (see overleaf).

The communities who did not find language a barrier to advice were those who were longer-standing UK residents – Black African, African-Caribbean and Asian (except older members of the Asian community). This is because, as longer-term residents, they are mainly British born and have a good standard of English.

Language problems reduce access to specialist advice sources. Participants lacking good English language skills are more likely to seek advice and help from community groups and organisations that have staff who are able to provide help and information in their language. However, these organisations are not able to provide specialist housing advice.

*'I use my community organisation [for advice] as they speak Punjabi and Urdu.'*

Pakistani female, aged 60 or over.

Independent advice services such as Citizens Advice bureaux may have some staff with community languages, but often they have to rely on interpreters, which causes delays. Many of those interviewees who had visited an agency requiring an interpreter had experienced lengthy waiting times or had had to return at a later date to allow time for an interpreter to be booked.

*'I lost a day's wages waiting for the Council and the interpreter.'*

Bangladeshi male, aged 45 to 54.

*'I had to wait every time I went to see them if I needed an interpreter... A lot of the time I went to see them and only half understood what they were saying because waiting for an interpreter would have been too long – there were many misunderstandings.'*

Somali female, aged 18 to 25.

Language skills varied significantly among the interviewees from the EU Accession State community. Although some of the participants did have good spoken and written English, the majority only had limited spoken English. Poor English skills made it difficult for them to find out about the services that were available to help them.

*'Someone who speaks Russian who could explain everything would be good – on what is the process, what I should do.'*

Estonian male, aged 18 to 25 (Russian-speaking).

*'I did not seek for help because my English is not good. I am afraid to communicate in English. I do not know about organisations to ask for help.'*

Polish female, aged 26 to 34.

Almost all those interviewed from the Turkish and Kurdish communities reported language as a barrier to accessing help or advice:

*'Yes, it is always difficult knowing the language. I can't say anything and understand anything. It is like being mute and deaf.'*

Kurdish female, aged 60 or over.

Most people interviewed from Turkish and Kurdish communities in Hackney had accessed advice about their housing problems through a local community and advice organisation that provides services in community languages.

*'The community centre – it was easier for the language as they speak Turkish. The CAB [Citizens Advice bureau] – I was not happy with them, they did not have an interpreter.'*

Turkish female, aged 26 to 34.

Different dialects pose a further linguistic difficulty that was highlighted by interviewees from Turkish and Kurdish communities and the Somali community. In the south east of England study area, communication problems were reported for this reason even where interpretation services had been provided. This issue was less likely to arise within community organisations.

*'Not all types of Kurdish or Turkish or Iranian are the same... [The] interpreter was from Azerbaijan so we could not communicate with each other.'*

Kurdish male, aged 35 to 44.

Within the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in Bristol and Oldham language was identified as a barrier mainly affecting those aged over 50 and those who had recently

arrived in the UK – both of which groups speak little English. Language is not a barrier for most second or third generation British-born members of these communities, and as such they will often assist their older non-English speaking family members to access services or seek advice on their behalf.

As with other communities, many of the Asian participants with language difficulties had sought and secured help from community organisations that were able to provide services in their languages.

*'Language is an issue but in the Bangladeshi centre they speak my language and that is why I come for advice... Other agencies can't provide an interpreter.'*

Bangladeshi female, aged 26 to 34.

### **Opening hours and waiting times**

The restrictive opening hours of advice services were cited as a barrier for many interviewees, particularly affecting those who were working or had childcare responsibilities. Long waiting times also made accessing services difficult or put people off seeking advice.

Several of the asylum seekers or refugees interviewed were working (formally and informally) and reported being unable to access services because of the limited opening hours:

*'They said go to the Citizens Advice bureau or a solicitor but we were all working Monday to Friday and did not have the time.'*

Iraqi male, aged 18 to 25.

Likewise, most EU Accession State interviewees were working and needed access to advice services outside of working hours. This was also a problem for a number of participants from the Black African community:

*'[The] CAB [Citizens Advice bureau] was difficult to contact... [The] housing officer [was] only available once per week. I couldn't justify the time off work.'*

Black British male, aged 26 to 34.

Family commitments and caring responsibilities posed a problem for other interviewees.

*'You can only obtain advice personally – with a new-born baby this was difficult [to wait a long time]... and they were not answering their telephones.'*

Kurdish female, aged 18 to 25.

A number of Asian interviewees reported health problems in the family and had found it difficult to access advice because of their caring responsibilities:

*'[I have] not had the time to go to the council due to work and family commitments. [I] had my sister's children living with me due to her being ill and in hospital. The office hours of the council need to be more flexible and convenient.'*

Bangladeshi female, aged 45 to 54.

The length of time it took to access advice was a major source of frustration and a barrier to advice for young people from a number of communities, particularly Asian. Young people complained of long waits for advice that then produced limited useful outcomes.

### **Health problems and old age**

Ill health can be another obstacle to accessing advice. Older Asian participants in the study reported that health problems made travelling to seek advice difficult, and expensive, for them.

*'I am alone in my house and I am ill as well, so going there [the advice centre] by myself is difficult.'*

Pakistani female, aged 60 or over.

Besides prohibiting access to advice, participants with health problems also said that these made dealing with housing or other problems more difficult.

Mental health problems were another contributing factor to people not seeking help. A number of the asylum seekers or refugees who were interviewed were suffering

from depression and general mental or physical health problems. These problems contributed to their not being able to seek help and were often exacerbated by their housing and social conditions in the UK.

All three older participants in Hackney (from the African-Caribbean, Black African and Turkish communities) stressed the need to be able to access help from a single source and not to have to visit many different agencies.

### Cost of advice

Although most housing advice services are free, many interviewees were unaware of this and were deterred from seeking advice because they were concerned that they would have to pay and could not afford to. This was particularly apparent among the EU Accession State community.

*'I could not afford to go anywhere that it might cost me to get advice.'*

Latvian male, aged 18 to 25.

*'[It] would be important [that] either advice is free or financially affordable or free.'*

Latvian male, aged 18 to 25

Despite highlighting their inability to pay for advice, several young EU Accession State nationals were distrustful of advice services that are free:

*'Information that is provided for free is not as important as trust in [the] person or organisation that provides [it]. Sometimes information for free is without value – one I can't use [it] and [it] doesn't help me at all.'*

Polish female, aged 18 to 25.

A couple of interviewees from this community also mentioned hearing stories of individuals from EU Accession States tricking new arrivals into paying for 'advice' that turned out to be untrustworthy. As a result they were wary of people offering assistance, as explained by one young woman from an EU Accession State:

*'I know there are a lot of Polish people who advertise on websites... that they will help you with different issues from work to housing issues... I have heard they just collect your money but you don't get anything back. If someone doesn't know anything about UK laws, regulations, systems and doesn't speak or read English for them that sounds promising, but I don't have a trust in those "helpers".'*

### Immigration status

Young 16- to 25-year-old asylum seekers and refugees in Dover and the south east generally seemed proactive when it came to seeking advice, but many were put off by the misperception that they did not have rights to advice because of their immigration status.

Young failed asylum seekers assumed they had no rights, and one went so far as to describe himself as 'the lowest of the low' in the system.

Among those with refugee status<sup>21</sup>, there was still little or no knowledge of their rights and entitlements, and no conception of having any rights regarding housing. This worrying finding corroborates to an extent with that about the lack of knowledge of rights among registered EU Accession State migrants (see page 28). This finding highlights a failing in the provision of information to immigrants when they gain refugee status.

For those who were overstayers<sup>22</sup>, there were other specific problems. They were unable to access the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) services that they had used while their claim was being determined. They were unaware of the existence of independent advice services. They were also worried that if they attempted to seek advice from other services this could result in their being alerted to immigration services.

*'I was offered temporary accommodation if I agreed to go home – so I turned the offer down and have been homeless since. If I ask advice somewhere else what will happen?'*

Iranian male overstayer, aged 26 to 34.

21 For a definition of the term 'refugee', see the glossary on page 51.

22 For a definition of the term 'overstayer', see the glossary on page 51.

Similarly, the small number of the EU Accession State participants who were working illegally or were unsure of their legal status in the UK were afraid to seek advice or help for fear of being deported.

## Cultural barriers

The study also revealed a number of cultural barriers to advice for BME communities.

### Lack of cultural understanding

There was a common perception among the majority of the communities under study that their cultural needs would not be understood or acknowledged if they sought advice or help. Some felt that they were 'looked down' upon because of their ethnicity. The only communities not to express this feeling were the EU Accession State communities and the Black African and African-Caribbean communities.

A number of the asylum seekers or refugees interviewed disliked 'the way people looked at you'. They felt that service providers such as local authorities tended to see all refugees and asylum seekers as one homogenous group, when in fact their needs differed widely.

*'They look at you badly at the job centre and at [the] Housing Benefit office.'*

Kurdish male, aged 18 to 25.

*'I cannot say they were racist but think they could have asked better.'*

Iranian male, aged 18 to 25.

One young Somali woman specifically alluded to discrimination on the grounds of her religion (Islam):

*'They didn't understand my culture and religion... When they ask your name and realise you are Muslim they ignore you. You are no interest at all.'*

A number of interviewees from the Asian community gave similar responses, feeling that their culture was misunderstood and that any needs they had arising from their culture or religion were not addressed. This led many to

prefer to visit community-specific organisations, such as the Bangladeshi Association.

*'I am a bit worried to visit other agencies [than community organisations] because they don't understand my culture and religious needs.'*

Bangladeshi female, aged 26 to 34.

### Discomfort with seeking external advice

All communities expressed some level of discomfort seeking advice about their problems outside their community. Generally, this seemed to be because seeking advice and help with a problem was seen as a sign of weakness and there was a strong desire among many communities to be independent. Some interviewees also expressed distrust at advice services outside their community.

Interviewees in both the young and older people categories expressed feeling uncomfortable about seeking help. Some older people felt this because of a desire to retain some independence and dignity.

*'I do feel uncomfortable. I don't want to put my problems on people. I don't want to be a liability.'*

Nigerian female, aged 60 or over.

Older people from the Asian community were keen for problems to be solved within the family rather than through recourse to outside agencies.

*'Family among themselves solved the problem by purchasing accommodation close to us.'*

Pakistani female, aged 60 or over.

Some young people felt uncomfortable asking for advice because they perceived that advisers thought that young people should be able to look after themselves and not be vulnerable. A number of Kurdish men in Hackney highlighted a stigma attached to seeking advice as a man:

*'I felt extremely uncomfortable because being a man and not being able to support oneself is very difficult for me.... In my culture a man must be strong and look after himself.'*

Kurdish male, aged 18 to 25.

As the community with the highest proportion of people not seeking advice, the EU Accession State community seemed to be the least trusting towards external help or advice services. A number of interviewees from this community highlighted their discomfort about seeking advice.

There was a perception among Somali respondents that their community was treated unfairly or discriminated against by housing services. This heightened many people's reluctance to seek help from organisations outside their own community.

### Young people

Young people felt excluded from accessing services because of their age. Young people accessing advice in Hackney felt that they were patronised because of their age, and that they were put 'under the microscope' or interrogated by advice providers as if they were lying about their situation. One individual mentioned feeling uncomfortable about having to submit a number of personal documents as part of the advice process and said that they were treated like a criminal.

Across other groups too there was a perception that the system has been set up in a way that excludes young people from accessing services:

*'The Council implied that I was able to deal with my problem myself. They did not see my vulnerability.'*

Kurdish male, aged 18 to 25.

*'I felt as though they did not really understand my problem or listen to me fully. [I felt that] my problem was not as big as some people they dealt with. I felt as if I [had] wasted my time and their time.'*

Kurdish female, aged 26 to 34.

Young Asians reported similar problems to young people in other communities. Some respondents expressed the concern that as young people they were not listened to:

*'It was not until other people [agencies] phoned up on my behalf that things seemed to happen.'*

Pakistani male, aged 18 to 25.

Some young Somali interviewees expressed a feeling of shame at needing help and not understanding their rights.

*'Sometimes it is very shameful... You have nothing and people in the office can see that – you are a rubbish person...'*

Somali male, aged 16 to 17.

### Gender

Only one female interviewee expressed the need for a female adviser, suggesting this issue does not pose a significant barrier for most communities.

*'I want to talk [about] my problems to a woman, but no one is asking me my choice.'*

Bangladeshi female, aged 35 to 44.

However, interestingly, this issue was highlighted a number of times by staff interviewed from advice agencies.

*'My client is female and needs to see a female adviser.'*

Interviewee from a community organisation.



'They didn't understand my culture and religion... When they ask your name and realise you are Muslim they ignore you. You are [of] no interest at all.'

# Learning from the field

The study consulted advice providers and organisations working with black and minority ethnic (BME) communities to gain their perspective on advice provision for these communities. This chapter presents the findings from these interviews and highlights examples of good practice in advice provision identified by the study.

## Key findings

- Housing providers and community organisations do not fully understand the role of independent housing advice providers and how to enable their own service users to access specialist housing advice.
- Although some housing providers undertake assessments and consultations to establish the needs of BME communities, dialogue with these communities is limited and many housing providers are not sufficiently aware of the housing needs of these communities.
- Housing providers fail to provide information on housing issues and housing options in all necessary community languages, and the availability of interpreters is inadequate, preventing BME communities from accessing services effectively.
- In most areas, the current supply of independent housing advice is insufficient to meet the demand for this advice. Advice providers do not have the resources to provide the level of outreach services, interpreters and information in community languages to reach the needs of many BME communities.

The study consulted housing providers, community organisations and housing advice providers working with BME communities.<sup>23</sup> They were asked about services specifically targeted at BME communities and housing advice services that they offer. The findings for each of the three categories of advice provider consulted in the study are presented separately. Advice providers' observations about the barriers BME communities face when accessing advice are presented together at the end of the chapter.

## Housing providers

The housing providers consulted in the study included large local authorities, arms' length management organisations, and small BME housing associations. Most interviews were held with equality and diversity officers in these organisations.

## Services targeted at BME communities

All the local authorities had undertaken consultations with local BME communities to identify their housing needs. The nature and extent of these consultations and the outcomes from them differed widely between authorities.

Hackney Homes has recently undertaken a community consultation with the major BME communities in the area and has followed this with cultural awareness training for frontline housing staff.

All except one housing provider were making some attempt to fulfil the language needs of BME communities. This was either through providing information in various community languages, staff with relevant community languages, access to interpreters, or access to Language Line. However, some did not cover all the languages needed by local

<sup>23</sup> For a copy of the questionnaire that formed the basis of the interviews call Shelter on 0845 485 4590. Appendix 3 on page 57 provides a list of the advice providers consulted.

communities, which meant that interpreters had to be booked in advance. Only a minority of the housing providers interviewed undertook outreach sessions in BME community organisations; most expected residents to access services through local housing offices.

### **Housing advice**

All but one housing provider believed that they were providing some form of housing advice. Only Bristol City Council acknowledged that as a local authority it was not in a position to provide independent housing advice and that this was rather the role of the advice sector, including organisations such as Shelter. Some housing providers perceived their role as being only to provide basic information and to signpost tenants to where housing advice could be obtained. Some reported referring tenants to Shelter and the local Citizens Advice bureau. Worryingly, some housing providers had little or no understanding of the role of independent housing advice in assisting residents with legal advice and advocacy to address their housing problems.

### **Community organisations**

The voluntary-sector community organisations consulted in the study included those working with specific communities (for example Somali or Bangladeshi communities) and those working with refugees and asylum seekers. The organisations varied from small, volunteer-led organisations to larger community groups providing a wide range of services.

### **Services targeted at BME communities**

The main aim of most of the BME community organisations was to promote the culture of those communities. Most were staffed by people who spoke community languages and therefore were able to provide services in those languages.

### **Housing advice**

All the organisations provided information and advice on housing, debt and benefits, but only some held the Legal Services Commission Quality Mark.<sup>24</sup> The advice and information they provided mainly dealt with registering for accommodation, notifying landlords of repairs that were due, or housing options. Where English was not a first language, for example among older members of the Asian community, the organisations reported playing a significant role in notifying housing providers about repair work that was required, filling in forms, and chasing housing applications on their clients' behalf.

### **Housing advice providers**

All the housing advice providers consulted provided services on a local or regional level. The majority provided housing advice and held the Legal Services Commission Quality Mark at either Specialist level or General Help with Casework level.<sup>25</sup> Most services were city or borough wide, such as Citizens Advice bureaux and Law Centres. Some were regional, such as Shelter in Greater Manchester, Bristol and Kent; two were neighbourhood advice centres; and one was a housing advice service within a BME housing association.

### **Services targeted at BME communities**

Many advice providers reported that a lack of funding and resources prevented them from targeting services at BME communities by undertaking outreach sessions to the communities and providing adequate interpreters and written information in community languages. These providers accepted that this meant these communities had little understanding of housing advice and what specialist housing advice could do.

<sup>24</sup> For an explanation of the Legal Services Commission Quality Mark, see the glossary on page 51.

<sup>25</sup> See [www.legalservices.gov.uk](http://www.legalservices.gov.uk) for more information about the different CLS contract levels.

Where services targeting BME communities had been developed, for example by the Bright Project and St Pauls Advocacy Project in Bristol, such projects often only had short-term funding (for example from the Big Lottery). When funding comes to an end, it is very difficult to find alternative funding to develop the good practice established by such projects into mainstream services.

Monitoring of service users by ethnicity varied among the agencies. While some ensured that every client's ethnicity was recorded, others were less thorough. One Shelter office reported that the client's ethnicity was unknown on 34 per cent of monitoring forms. A lack of funds hindered some agencies from translating their monitoring information for clients, thus preventing them completing the relevant monitoring forms. Another problem reported was monitoring systems not being able to capture the ethnicity of more recently arrived communities – for example many systems do not include Somalis as a separate group distinct from the Black African category. Few systems include the many different EU Accession State communities. Most advice agencies recognised that without this information they could not adequately plan and target services to these communities.

### Barriers to advice faced by BME communities

Advice providers<sup>26</sup> identified a range of barriers that they perceived BME communities face when accessing advice. Many were similar to those highlighted by advice seekers<sup>27</sup> (see page 27). These included:

- language and literacy difficulties: most mainstream advice agencies<sup>28</sup> reported being unable to provide immediate access to interpreters; some use Language Line but reported that the service is expensive

- opening hours: housing advice providers were aware that traditional opening hours offered little access to people in full-time employment or education
- lack of knowledge about legal rights and entitlements, causing people not to seek advice to implement their rights
- lack of awareness of the existence or role of independent advice services
- lack, or perceived lack, of cultural awareness within mainstream advice agencies.

In addition to the issues above, advice providers raised a number of issues that advice seekers had not highlighted. Housing providers and housing advice providers both highlighted limited funding of advice services as a barrier. All but one of the housing advice providers reported that they did not have sufficient resources to meet the demand for their services. Most clients who presented themselves at advice centres would be seen, but many clients would have to wait up to two weeks for follow-up appointments. Many agencies were reluctant to promote their services for fear of generating extra demand that they could not meet. Housing providers noted the issue of long queues and waiting times for services such as Citizens Advice; this also reflects the limited resources of such services.

The Legal Services Commission has not increased the cost of not-for-profit contracts for the last three years so agencies have less money with which to provide the same level of service. Among other changes, there are plans to introduce a new fixed-fee system for all categories of social welfare law, including housing. Advice providers believe this will have an impact on housing cases for people from BME communities. Many of these cases take longer than average or cost more, for example

<sup>26</sup> Hereafter 'advice providers' is used as a generic term to refer to all the organisations consulted in the study. For a full definition, see the glossary on page 51.

<sup>27</sup> 'Advice seekers' is a generic term used to refer to the interviewees from BME communities. For a full definition, see the glossary on page 51.

<sup>28</sup> For a definition of the term 'mainstream advice agencies' as used in this report, see the glossary on page 51.

because the client does not speak English and requires an interpreter; such additional costs may only be allowed if they are seen as exceptional. Many interviewees were concerned that the changes will reduce the time and resources available for such cases even further.

Lack of funding also means that many advice agencies have had to cut back or stop outreach work with local organisations, including BME community organisations. This reduces contact between community organisations and housing advice providers, which can result in a lack of trust and a reluctance to make referrals. A lack of communication between community organisations and housing advice providers also means that organisation staff do not know who or where to refer people on for specialist advice. While some of the larger community organisations reported referring housing advice problems to specialist organisations such as local Law Centres or Shelter, many of the smaller organisations did not appear to do so.

*'We did not know what the CAB [Citizens Advice bureau] or the Law Centre does.'*

Staff member in a community organisation.

A poor understanding of housing law among community organisation staff may also contribute to the lack of referrals. If staff do not understand where legal action can be taken, they will not know when further action with the help of a specialist advice agency would be appropriate.

### **Young people accessing advice**

Most advice providers from all three categories (housing providers, community organisations, and housing advice providers) reported a low level of contact with young people seeking housing advice. Younger members of the family who have English as a first language may help their families by reporting housing repair problems.

The main contact advice providers have with young people among housing providers is with young homeless people. Other research confirms that young people are less likely to seek advice about their legal problems than other people: 18- to 24-year-olds reporting homelessness were 11 times less likely to have obtained advice compared with people over 25 years old.<sup>29</sup> This is in spite of the fact that young people experience high levels of housing problems: 18- to 24-year-olds are four times more likely than the rest of the population to have problems with rented housing and seven times more likely to have problems with homelessness.<sup>30</sup>

Off Centre in Hackney is one of the limited number of specialist information and counselling services aimed at young people. It reported that most young people seek housing advice from agencies such as Off Centre because they do not know about their rights and entitlements, because they have been refused assistance by statutory agencies (such as local authorities), or because they are new migrants who often lack support systems. The agency reported that among the African-Caribbean community young people are expected to be self-reliant and not access external help. People from the Black African community tend to rely on support within their own community and can become marginalised by the community if they seek outside help. The Turkish and Kurdish communities are also reluctant to seek outside help and there is a clash between modern and traditional cultures that militates against seeking advice.

### **Examples of good practice**

The study identified examples of good practice in the delivery of advice services to BME communities in both the voluntary and public sectors.

<sup>29</sup> Kenrick J, *Key findings on housing and homelessness – Legal Services Research Centre data*, Youth Access, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

### **Voluntary sector: the Bright Project, Bristol**

The Bright Project was established in April 2005 with the main goal of improving the ability of BME community organisations to provide legal advice directly to their own communities. The project is led by a consortium of eight organisations that reflect the cultural diversity in Bristol.<sup>31</sup>

As well as working with BME community groups to help them develop advice services for their own communities, the project has worked with many of the advice agencies in Bristol.

*'It is equally important that [BME communities] can access advice from mainstream organisations if they choose to do so, particularly as this advice is often more specialist in nature.'*<sup>32</sup>

The project aims to:

- integrate black-led advice and information services into mainstream advice provision
- improve the quality and quantity of advice services for BME communities
- increase the number of BME agencies that have capacity and resources to offer direct services to BME communities
- address the particular own-language advice needs within BME communities and reduce the need for interpreting services
- address the specific advice needs of refugee communities
- improve the co-ordination of BME agencies working together on advice services

- ensure effective networking and linkage between BME agencies and advice providers in Bristol
- encourage a high standard of provision for BME communities by all advice providers.

The project is also producing a series of reports aimed at improving working practices between BME and mainstream advice organisations.<sup>33</sup>

### **Public sector: Council Turkish Community Support Worker, Hackney, London**

The Homelessness Review and Strategy carried out by Hackney Council in 2002–03 identified the need for the Council to be more proactive in reaching out to its residents, especially those from BME communities.


The Turkish community in Hackney numbers approximately 20,000. There were no Turkish-speaking staff in the Council's Housing Advice Centre and a need was recognised for a bridge between the Council and the Turkish communities in the borough. The Council secured funding from the Government to appoint a Turkish Community Support Worker.

The Community Support Worker has organised surgeries with the Council in 10 Turkish community centres, at which housing staff provided information and casework on housing issues and homelessness. She has also translated a number of the Council's housing information leaflets.

31 Black Cares Project, Sikh Resource Centre, Pakistani Community Welfare Organisation, Bangladeshi Association, Black Development Agency, Refugee Action, St Pauls Advice Centre, and Avon and Bristol Law Centre.

32 The Bright Project: *Client Needs Survey Report 'An in-depth look at advice service delivery in BOME communities from mainstream advice agencies in Bristol'*, April 2006.

33 The first of these was published in April 2006: see footnote 32.



‘Housing advice  
should be more  
promoted by  
small adverts,  
leaflets, in the  
newspapers,  
on TV.’

# Improving access to advice

So far this report has focused on identifying the barriers faced by black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in accessing advice. The findings from the interviews with advice seekers and advice providers<sup>34</sup> have highlighted the key issues with advice provision for BME communities. However, the aim of the study was not simply to identify problems, but also to find solutions. Advice seekers and advice providers were asked to make suggestions for improving access to advice services for BME communities. This chapter discusses these findings.

## Key findings

The main suggestions for improvements to advice services closely reflect the barriers identified earlier in the report.

### Suggestions from advice seekers

- More general information on how the housing system works
- Better information on where to get advice and how it can assist with housing problems
- Better availability and promotion of services in community languages
- Increased provision of bilingual advice staff in areas of high need
- Opening times out of normal office hours to improve accessibility for those who work or study
- Closer working relationships between advice providers and BME communities to understand communities' needs and improve access and referrals between services
- Adequate training in cultural awareness for staff in mainstream advice agencies
- Twenty-four-hour telephone help lines and web-based information

- Home visiting for people who are carers, older or have health problems, or assistance with travel costs where home visiting is not possible

### Suggestions from advice providers

- More services provided in community languages through interpreters, more community staff, and translated materials
- More efficient referral processes to ensure people are directed to specialist advice agencies where necessary
- Early intervention through improved skills and knowledge among frontline staff in community organisations and local authorities
- More strategic approach to planning and delivery of advice services to ensure accessibility to communities that are most in need of advice, including more consultation with BME communities

### Ranking of features of advice services

- When asked to prioritise five features of an advice service, overall advice seekers ranked advice being free and of high quality as most important, and advice being provided locally as least important.

<sup>34</sup> 'Advice seekers' and 'advice providers' are generic terms used to refer to the two groups of interviewees. For more detailed definitions, see the glossary on page 51.

### Suggestions from advice seekers

Although advice seekers were asked to reflect on the changes that they would wish to see made to advice provision, the majority focused instead on improvements to their housing (ie higher quality, more secure and more affordable accommodation), issues that were not the focus of this study. However, comments from interviewees (including both those who had sought advice and those who had not) did provide guidance on the ways in which advice services could be made more accessible and responsive to the needs of BME communities. The findings are discussed below.

#### More information about advice services

The desire for more information about where and how to get advice, and what advice services could do to help, was prevalent across all the communities under study. This reflects the low level of awareness and understanding of the role of advice services among BME communities discussed earlier in this report (see page 29). Many interviewees also highlighted the need for information about the housing and advice system.

This was a key recommendation among refugees and asylum seekers and EU Accession State nationals, as would be expected given that these communities are recent arrivals to the UK and therefore unfamiliar with systems in this country.

*'As a foreigner, I need clearer advice because I don't know the system. Back home in Iraq we just agree with the landlord and pay the rent.'*

Iraqi male, aged 16 to 25.

Interviewees from EU Accession States suggested that services should be advertised through leaflets and advertisements on television and in newspapers.

*'Housing advice should be more promoted – by small adverts, leaflets, in the newspapers, on TV.'*

Polish female, aged 18 to 25.

Similarly, African-Caribbean participants said that it would be useful to have housing information and information about advice services in community newspapers and newsletters.

Participants from this community also suggested that general information on how the housing and advice systems work and their entitlements in the UK should be made available for all migrants on or before arrival in the UK. As discussed on page 28, worker registration would be a good opportunity to provide new arrivals with information. A number of young people from this community suggested advertising advice services to new arrivals through leaflets at the airport.

Some communities highlighted community-specific concerns about advice services that also relate to the need for more and better information about advice services. Asylum seekers and overstayers (not those with refugee status) wanted to know that they were entitled to advice and that seeking advice would not affect their claim for asylum or cause them to be reported to the immigration authorities. EU Accession State nationals were concerned about the reliability of advice services, particularly where those services were free (see page 32). Respondents wanted assurances that the service provided would be professional and trustworthy, as well as being free. They were, however, unable to identify what they would look for to identify a quality service.

#### Services in community languages

Language was highlighted as a major barrier to advice by participants across many of the communities under study (see page 29) and, correspondingly, a number of participants suggested this as an area for improvement for advice services. Those with language problems requested help with filling in forms and making telephone calls. They also wanted advice to be written down for their future reference and to be made to feel that they were being listened to.

The availability of advice in appropriate community languages was of particular importance to the asylum seekers and refugees interviewed because many of them had limited English and, unlike other more established communities, did not have access to English-speaking family members or friends to help them.

Asian elders who had not sought advice highlighted the need for help and advice to be available in community languages. Younger Asians expressed concern about advice agencies' dependence upon younger family members to act as interpreters for their elders because of the loss of community language skills among the second- and third-generation UK residents.

*'For parents where English is not their first language [we need] assistance sometimes as we can't translate in Urdu because we are having problems translating our own language... We are losing it.'*

Bangladeshi male, aged 18 to 25.

### **More flexible opening hours**

The limited opening hours of advice agencies and housing providers makes it difficult for people working full time or with childcare or other caring responsibilities to access their services. Increasing the flexibility of opening times was identified as a means of improving access to advice.

Asylum seekers who were working wanted to see advice services offered in the evening or at weekends. They were also keen that advice services should be in their local neighbourhood near to where they work or live.

Most of the respondents in the EU Accession State group were working and considered increased flexibility in opening hours to be particularly important. They also stressed that services should be local to reduce travel time and cost. Alternative methods of delivery, including 24-hour

telephone help lines and online advice, were also popular with this community.

Some young Asian respondents in Oldham requested that waiting times be reduced and the process through which problems were solved speeded up.

### **Local services**

Interviewees from the asylum seekers and refugees and EU Accession State communities stressed that advice services should be local to where they live or work to be more accessible and reduce travel time and cost.

Some older Asian and African-Caribbean interviewees also stated that they would prefer services to be in their local neighbourhood. This related to the convenience of not having to travel far to reach the advice agency, as well as a preference for advice to come from within their own community.

### **Cultural awareness**

Some interviewees specified that they wanted advice to be delivered by people who respected and understood their religious and cultural needs and differences. This was raised by older interviewees from the Asian and African-Caribbean communities, as well as young Somalis.

A young Somali woman, aged 16 to 17, suggested that advice services working more closely with community organisations would make accessing housing advice easier for communities such as theirs:

*'[An improvement would be] working with the community: if advice-providing agencies work closely with community organisations, it could make life easier for the deprived communities, like Somalis, to access housing advice.'*

### **Other recommendations**

Older people from the African-Caribbean community were particularly keen on fixed appointments and not having to queue for

advice. This community also mentioned that people who were housebound needed help with transport to advice centres or home visits.

The EU Accession State nationals were particularly keen on advice being written down so that they could refer back to it later.

African-Caribbean participants in Hackney emphasised the need for private interviewing space.

A couple of young Somali interviewees in Bristol made an interesting suggestion about better information sharing within communities. They suggested that better communication between members of the community could avoid many people from accessing advice services for the same information. These interviewees suggested that basic information accessed through an advice service should be shared among the community, for example by being posted in a community centre. This would prevent other individuals from the same community from having to approach an advice agency for the same information.

One young interviewee from Hackney raised the issue of the lack of continuity in terms of the adviser or caseworker working on an individual case. The interviewee suggested that all housing services allocate a caseworker or individual housing advisor to each case, who would be the contact for the individual from the beginning of their application to the end of the process.

### **Young people**

Generally the responses from the 16-to-25 age group were similar to those from the study participants overall. However, there was one issue that was raised by a few young people from different communities that the other age groups did not highlight. Many young people, particularly young males, reported feeling misunderstood and looked down upon by advice providers (see page 34). Correspondingly, several said

that advice services could be improved by becoming more approachable and less intimidating. They wanted the advice to come from someone from a similar background who shared their experiences could understand their situation properly. For young EU Accession State nationals the important aspect of this was for the advisor or caseworker to share their experience of arriving in the UK and needing advice; for them ethnic background was not important.

### **Ranking of features of advice services**

In addition to suggesting improvements to services, all advice seekers were asked to rank a list of five key features of advice services in order of importance. The features are listed below according to the combined results for all the participants, with the most important first:

- advice being high quality
- advice being free
- advice being provided in interviewee's community language
- advice being provided by a community organisation
- advice being provided locally.

The ranking results do not reflect closely the suggestions for improvements discussed above. This could be explainable in part by the fact that most respondents' suggestions focused on improvements to their housing, instead of to advice services. This means that the ranking results come from a wider pool of respondents than the suggestions.

The results varied considerably between the different communities and the overall ranking above should not be taken to reflect the priorities of every community under study. For example, in contrast to the overall ranking results above, interviewees from the Turkish and Kurdish communities ranked advice being

provided by a community organisation and locally as most important. Similarly, asylum seekers and refugees, many of whom were also Turkish and Kurdish, ranked advice being provided by a community organisation as most important. It is interesting that this was not ranked more highly overall given that in interviews many advice seekers reported having sought advice through community organisations – often because of needing advice in a community language or because of distrust with seeking advice outside the community.

In line with the overall results above, advice being free and high quality were priority features for many of the communities, with one or the other ranked in the top two by all except the Turkish and Kurdish communities. These features were both ranked in the top two by interviewees from the EU Accession State, Black African and African-Caribbean communities, as well as Bangladeshi interviewees in Oldham.

Language was highlighted as a key barrier to advice by both advice seekers and advice providers in interviews, and yet, somewhat surprisingly, advice being provided in the interviewee's community language was not ranked as a priority feature by most respondents. In fact, it was ranked as least or second least important by all communities apart from the Somali and Asian communities (with the exception of Bangladeshi interviewees in Oldham). Both of these communities ranked the provision of advice in their community language as the most important feature of advice services.

### **Suggestions from advice providers**

Advice providers were asked how advice services could be improved to attract more users from BME communities. Some organisations reported strategies that they were already developing or implementing.

### **Providing services in community languages**

As with advice seekers, providing services in community languages was seen as a key area for improvement for advice services. The Bright Project in Bristol (see page 40) provides staff working in community organisations and advice agencies with community language skills. The project also ensures that staff develop an awareness of the different cultures of the communities they are working with and their culturally specific needs. Funding needs to be secured to develop similar projects and support outreach services and interpreters, and translate information into community languages. A number of projects and agencies were developing training and recruitment programmes to recruit new advisers from within BME communities.

### **Improving referral processes**

To ensure all people can access the level of housing advice they need, more effective 'triage systems' (through which the exact nature and complexity of problems can be identified) and referral processes need to be set up to ensure people are directed to specialist advice agencies where necessary. Early intervention prevents problems escalating into more serious matters. This can often be achieved by frontline staff in community organisations and local authorities being given the skills to help identify the nature of the legal problem, and the knowledge to refer the client to the appropriate organisation.

### **Identifying the needs of BME communities**

Many advice providers acknowledged the need for a more strategic approach to the planning and delivery of advice services to ensure that they are accessible to the communities most in need of advice. This includes advice providers working with BME communities to identify their needs and help with the planning and delivery of services, and employing monitoring and recording systems to ensure services are reaching the appropriate communities.



‘If advice-providing agencies work closely with community organisations, it could make life easier for the deprived communities, like Somalis, to access housing advice.’

# Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter concludes the report with a summary of the main conclusions from the study, followed by a list of detailed recommendations for how advice providers can improve access to their services for black and minority ethnic (BME) communities.

## Conclusions

Through interviews with advice seekers<sup>35</sup> from various BME communities and consultation with advice providers<sup>36</sup> working with these communities, this study has provided an insight into advice provision for BME communities. Research shows that people from BME communities face a disproportionate volume of problems with their housing, and yet the findings of this study show that these same people are severely hindered and deterred from accessing advice to help with their housing problems. Moreover, use and awareness of independent housing advice services among these communities is close to non-existent. This report has highlighted the numerous barriers faced by these communities in accessing and seeking advice.

## Key findings

- People from BME communities access advice through informal and formal sources<sup>37</sup>, often seeking help from both, approaching family and friends first and then seeking further advice from a formal source.
- Use of independent advice services is very limited among most BME communities. Most people from these communities are unaware that such services exist or how they can help.
- Where formal advice is sought by people from BME communities, it is usually from non-independent sources such as local authorities, or non-expert (but independent) sources such as community organisations.
- Many people from BME communities feel a strong sense of trust in their local community-specific services (community organisations) and prefer to access advice and assistance through that source.
- Young people's awareness of advice services is low and current mainstream advice services are little used by them. Young people feel existing services do not understand their needs or treat them with respect.
- There is a lack of understanding about how the social housing system works among all BME communities, and especially among recent EU Accession State migrants.
- For people without good English skills, the availability of advice in appropriate community languages is seen as very important, but current provision is inadequate and involves long waits for interpreters.
- Face-to-face advice is the preferred method of advice provision, but there are problems with the way this is currently provided, particularly in relation to the opening hours of services. Some people would like to be able to access support by telephone or via the Internet.
- Older people and those with restricted mobility, ill health or caring responsibilities found themselves excluded by current methods of service delivery – that is, both the location of services and their opening hours.
- Housing providers and some community organisations have little understanding of the role of independent advice and what it can achieve.
- The volume of independent housing advice does not meet current demand, meaning that many who need advice and assistance cannot access them.

<sup>35</sup> 'Advice seekers' is a generic term used to refer to the interviewees from BME communities. See the glossary on page 51 for a full definition.

<sup>36</sup> 'Advice providers' is a generic term used to refer to the organisations consulted in the study. See the glossary on page 51 for a full definition.

<sup>37</sup> For a definition of the terms 'formal' and 'informal advice' as used in this report, see the glossary on page 51.

- Because of the high demand for advice services, there is inadequate targeting of resources by advice providers, which means some harder-to-reach groups, such as BME communities, are not accessing services.
- Many housing advice providers feel disconnected from the BME communities that they should be serving.

There is a lot of work to be done to ensure that BME communities have easy access to appropriate and effective advice and assistance to address their housing problems. The recommendations below identify the steps to achieve this.

## Recommendations

The recommendations draw upon the findings from the interviews with advice seekers and advice providers conducted in the study. The recommendations were tested, along with the study findings, at workshops with stakeholders in each study area at the end of the fieldwork phase of the research.

### Raising awareness

- Local authorities, community organisations and social housing providers should clearly signpost individuals to independent housing advice services, making clear the limitations of their own advice services, the right to challenge decisions and the free assistance that independent advice services can provide in enforcing rights.
- Community legal education about rights and services must involve a diverse range of formal and informal organisations to ensure that all sections of society are aware of their rights and of the free assistance available to help enforce them, and so that they can develop trust in advice agencies to act on their behalf.
- There is a need to develop methods to raise awareness among young people of their rights and the legal advice services that they can access to help them exercise those rights.

- Social housing providers should develop and promote customer-friendly materials, in all the necessary community languages, that clearly explain their policies in relation to housing allocations, repairs and homelessness. The communication of these policies to all communities should be a priority within local housing and homelessness strategies.
- Induction materials in appropriate languages for migrants from EU Accession States should be made available at points of entry into the UK. These should cover their legal rights in relation to housing and other areas, and the sources of support and advice available.
- Refugee integration services and mainstream providers of housing advice should work together more closely to raise awareness of rights and the advice services available to support refugees. Mechanisms should be established to transfer support of failed asylum seekers to other bodies once they are no longer eligible for National Asylum Support Service (NASS) funded advice.

### Planning and development

- Shelter and the other advice networks need to make a much stronger case for advice, highlighting what it can do, the contribution this makes to individuals in terms of social justice, and its cost-effectiveness in terms of avoiding other costly interventions (such as eviction or rehousing), as well as the broader benefits to society.
- Substantial work needs to be undertaken to increase the volume of housing advice provision available. Shelter should work with local, regional and central Government to promote the role of independent advice services and ensure future strategies for the delivery and planning of social welfare law do not reduce the level and diversity of current suppliers. The model for the expansion of debt-related advice promoted by HM Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry through the Financial Inclusion Fund may provide a model for this.

- Advice providers need to be more proactive in targeting services to those most in need of housing advice in their areas. Within existing resources this will mean denying services to some current users in order to provide services to others in greater need. To achieve better targeting, agencies at a local level will need to map need by different communities, monitor service use by relevant categories (current Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) categories may not be adequate<sup>38</sup>) and redesign services (see below) to ensure they are accessible to the new target communities.
- Housing providers such as local authorities need to engage in regular consultation and dialogue with BME communities to ensure their housing and advice needs are taken into account in planning and the allocation of resources.
- Access to specialist advice provision for young people should be developed, including features such as confidentiality and non-judgemental and holistic approaches. Such developments should focus on the work undertaken by the Law Centres Federation and Youth Access in developing models of advice and Law Centres for young people.
- As part of the development of referral networks and capacity building, community organisations should work with specialist advice providers on service redesign to ensure that the services of these providers meet the needs of their community and reflect any cultural requirements of that community (for example female advisers for clients where necessary).
- In developing plans to provide services to specific communities, budgets for translation and interpreters must be adequate to meet communities' needs. Again, arrangements with community organisations may provide some of the capacity in this regard, but additional resources will still be required.
- Individual agencies should review their current methods of delivering of advice and assess which groups are being encouraged to use their services and which are being discouraged. In particular, provision of advice outside normal opening hours is essential to meet the needs of those in employment or studying, as well as those with childcare responsibilities.
- In examining their methods of delivery of advice, providers need to include an assessment of the impact on older people and those with needs that may exclude them from accessing high-street services. As a minimum, services should review their capacity to meet some of these needs by implementing outreach surgeries in settings used by older people (community centres, GP practices etc), and/or by home visiting or providing free transport to advice centres. Telephone and Internet services should also play a role.
- Specialist housing advice agencies need to examine the ways in which they can work with youth services so that they can provide the specialist support required by young people in settings that are accessible for young people.

### Providing advice

- Existing specialist housing advice providers and local community organisations need to work together more closely to build the capacity of community organisations to provide early advice and support to the local communities they serve, recognise the limits of their competence in relation to housing law, and have arrangements in place for referring clients on to other specialist agencies as required. The Bright Project provides an example of how this might work (see page 40).

<sup>38</sup> CRE requires statutory bodies to monitor ethnicity against a limited number of categories. While these provide a starting point, they may not be adequate for all areas. For example, use of these categories would not produce information on service use by Somalis or those from EU Accession States.

# Glossary

This glossary provides definitions of some key terms, as used in the context of this report.

**Advice** refers to housing advice unless specified otherwise (see page 13 for a detailed definition of housing advice).

**Advice providers** is a generic term used to refer to the organisations and advice providers interviewed as part of the study. This includes specialist and non-specialist advice agencies; housing providers such as local authorities; and community organisations.

**Advice seekers** is a generic term used to refer to the people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities who were interviewed for the study. All had experienced housing problems and were therefore potential advice seekers, but a small proportion had not actually sought any advice with their problems.

**Community Legal Service (CLS) contracts** are one of the means through which statutory funding is provided to voluntary sector advice providers. The contracts define four different levels of advice provision: Assisted Information, General Help, General Help with Casework, and Specialist Help. These levels were correct at time of publication, but the contract system is due to change significantly for voluntary organisations in 2007. For more information see [www.legalservices.gov.uk](http://www.legalservices.gov.uk)

**Community Legal Service Quality Mark** is the quality assurance standard for advice services in England and Wales based on the four different levels of advice activity outlined above.

**European Union (EU) Accession States** refers to the 10 countries that became full members of the EU on 1 May 2004. Nationals from eight new Member States – Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic – became free to come to the UK, but they are required to register with the Home Office under the

new Workers' Registration Scheme as soon as they find work. They will have the same rights to benefits and housing assistance as other EU workers, so long as they are registered. After one year of registered working, they are no longer required to register. Nationals from Malta and Cyprus have also gained full free movement rights, but do not have to obtain a Workers' Registration Certificate.

**Formal sources of advice** refers to housing information and advice services provided by Shelter, independent housing advice centres, Law Centres, Citizens Advice bureaux, local authorities and community support organisations.

**Homelessness** refers to when a person or household has nowhere to live, or has accommodation that it is not reasonable for them to occupy, for example because of severe overcrowding or domestic violence. This includes people who are street homeless or are living in temporary accommodation having been accepted as homeless (or threatened with homelessness) by a local authority or have a decision pending on their application.

**Housing options** refers to the sources of accommodation available to an individual, for example social housing or housing rented from a private landlord.

**Informal sources of advice** refers to information and advice from family, friends and neighbours.

**Independent advice** refers to advice provided free by not-for-profit voluntary organisations.

**Mainstream advice** refers to independent advice services that provide general advice and casework in social welfare law (see page 52), such as Citizens Advice bureaux and Shelter.

**Overcrowding** Shelter uses the ‘bedroom standard’ measure of overcrowding. For example, overcrowded conditions would include situations where children aged 10 or over of different gender have to share a bedroom; where parents have to share a bedroom with a child or children; where there are more than two children in a bedroom; and where rooms such as kitchens and living rooms are used as bedrooms.

**Overstayer** refers to a person who was granted limited leave to enter or remain in the UK and who has remained in the UK longer than the time permitted.

**Refugee** refers to a person whose claim for asylum in the UK has been successful and who has thus been given asylum or leave to enter and remain as a person recognised as a refugee under the 1951 Geneva Convention. New successful asylum claimants are given five years’ limited leave.

**Social housing** refers to housing provided for rent by a local authority (council) or registered social landlord.

**Social welfare law** includes the following areas of law: consumer, community care, debt, employment, housing and homelessness, immigration, mental health and welfare benefits.

**Specialist advice** refers to advice from an advice agency with specialist knowledge in housing, specifically one with a Specialist Help CLS contract.

### **Unfitness and poor housing conditions**

The Government describes a decent home as one that is wind and weather tight, warm, and has modern facilities. Unfit or poor conditions are where housing is in need of substantial repairs; is structurally unsafe; is damp, cold, or infested; or is lacking in modern facilities, such as an effective central heating system.



# Appendix 1:

## Study areas

The study was conducted in four locations in England to cover a range of communities and situations. This appendix provides a profile of each of the study areas, including an outline of housing advice provision in each area.<sup>39</sup>

### Oldham

Oldham is an area with a large and settled South Asian community, fairly evenly split between those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin. It is home to small numbers of refugees and asylum seekers and is part of the catchment area for the Home Office's North West Sunrise pilot.<sup>40</sup> There is a history of serious interracial tension between the local white population and local people of Asian heritage. The area is one of the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder areas.

#### Housing advice provision

One not-for-profit agency, Oldham Citizens Advice bureau, provides housing advice under a Specialist Community Legal Service (CLS) contract, as do two private practice solicitors. Oldham is also covered by Shelter's Greater Manchester Housing Aid telephone advice.

### Dover and the south east of England

Dover and the south east of England is a coastal area and Dover is a key port of entry into the UK for both asylum seekers and EU Accession State migrants. The area is almost exclusively white British and semi-rural. Although EU migrants enter at Dover, they move throughout the south east of England and beyond. Similarly, asylum seekers are dispersed from the area by the Home Office within three weeks of arrival, unless there are family connections. The study area was widened from Dover to cover the south east of England to reflect this pattern of dispersal and immigration.

#### Housing advice provision

Two agencies – Dover, Deal and District Citizens Advice bureau and Migrant Helpline – provide housing advice at General Help level.<sup>41</sup> Two private practice solicitors hold CLS contracts to provide specialist housing advice in the area.

### London Borough of Hackney

Hackney is set to become a 'majority-minority' area – that is, where people from BME communities will make up the majority of the population – within the next 10 to 15 years. At present people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities make up more than 40 per cent of the population. There is a large, established black community (23 per cent) and significant numbers of new arrivals, including 'subsistence only' incomers<sup>42</sup> and failed asylum seekers.

#### Housing advice provision

Hackney Community Law Centre is the sole not-for-profit agency in the borough providing housing advice under a Specialist CLS contract. Up to 12 private practice solicitors in the borough have a Specialist contract to provide housing advice. Four agencies provide advice at General Help with Casework level and six at General Help level.

### Bristol

The City of Bristol is an urban area in south west England and is predominantly white, although the profile has changed dramatically in recent years with a 60 per cent increase in the number of people from BME communities. There are significant Asian and African-Caribbean populations and the city now holds one of the largest Somali communities in the UK.

#### Housing advice provision

One private practice solicitor has a Specialist contract to provide housing advice, as do two not-for-profit agencies – Avon and Bristol Community Law Centre and Shelter. Seven not-for-profit agencies provide advice at General Help with Casework level and five at General Help level.

<sup>39</sup> Information on housing advice provision was sourced from the Community Legal Service Direct website ([www.clsdirect.co.uk](http://www.clsdirect.co.uk)) and Bristol office of the Legal Services Commission.

<sup>40</sup> Sunrise is the Strategic Uplift of National Refugee Integration Services, the flagship initiative within the Government's *Integration matters* policy published in 2005. It aims to provide intensive casework support to individuals on a range of matters, including housing, during the first 12 months after they receive a positive decision on their asylum application.

<sup>41</sup> See [www.legalservices.gov.uk](http://www.legalservices.gov.uk) for more information about CLS contract levels.

<sup>42</sup> Subsistence-only support is available to asylum seekers who make their own accommodation arrangements.

## Appendix 2:

### Advice seekers

This appendix explains how advice seekers from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities were selected for interview in the study. The sample frame in Table 2 provides full details of the numbers of interviewees from each community and age group. Tables 3 to 7 provide information about the interviewees' accommodation type, employment, language, health and immigration status.

The criteria for the selection of interviewees were that they had faced a housing problem within the last two years, preferably within the last year; that they lived in one of the relevant geographical areas; and that they identified themselves as being from one of the relevant ethnic groups in the sample frame. The target, which was exceeded, was to interview a total of 150 people.<sup>43</sup>

The interviewees were recruited through a number of methods. Publicity material was developed and translated into relevant community languages. A large number of interviewees were recruited by the community researchers through their personal contacts. Advice providers participating in the study also helped by distributing publicity information and allowing community researchers to recruit interviewees at their drop-in sessions.

Publicity materials were also sent to community and refugee organisations in each area.

The process of recruiting interviewees was challenging. Accessing hard-to-reach communities such as new EU Accession State migrants was one difficulty, and consultation fatigue among BME communities presented a further problem. Many BME community organisations reported that their service users had participated in many consultations and research projects and yet felt that little had been achieved. They were therefore reluctant to participate. In addition, some of the smaller community organisations did not have the staff or resources to be able to assist in the recruitment of interviewees. Young people, who were a major focus of the research sample frame, proved difficult to access, as anticipated.



<sup>43</sup> For a copy of the questionnaire that formed the basis of the interviews call Shelter on 0845 485 4590.

**Table 2: The full research sample frame**

	City of Bristol			Dover	London Borough of Hackney			Oldham		SE England	
	Asian (Pakistani (1), Bangladeshi (10), Indian (5))	Somali	African-Caribbean	Refugees and asylum seekers (mainly Turkish and Kurdish)	African-Caribbean	Black African	Turkish and Kurdish	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	EU Accession State nationals (Czech (1), Estonian(1), Hungarian (1) Latvian(10), Polish (15))	Total
<b>Young people</b> (aged 16 to 25)	6	9	6	11	5	10	6	3	7	20	83
<b>Families</b> (aged 25 to 59)	7	3	5	0	4	4	6	11	5	4	49
<b>Older people</b> (aged 60 and over)	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	0	13
<b>Unassigned</b> (single, aged 25 to 59)	0	0	3	5	7	0	7	1	0	4	27
<b>Total interviews conducted</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>172</b>

**Table 3: Accommodation type of interviewees**

Accommodation type	Number of interviewees	Percentage
Rented private	54	31
Rented social or local authority housing	49	29
Staying with family	18	10
Staying with friends	14	8
Family home, not a tenant and no mortgage	9	5
Home owner – mortgage	9	5
Home owner – no mortgage	3	2
Part share/shared mortgage	0	0
Hostel	5	3
Temporary accommodation	5	3
No accommodation – homeless	3	2
Local authority care (16- and 17-year-olds only)	0	0
No response	3	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 4: Employment status of interviewees**

Employment status	Number of interviewees	Percentage
Not in paid employment	43	25
Employed full time	35	21
Employed part time	23	13
Self-employed	6	3
Volunteer worker	6	3
Student (full time or part time)	32	20
Retired	9	5
Family/child carer	9	5
Long-term illness	7	4
No response	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 5: Health of interviewees**

Do you have health problems?	Number of interviewees	Percentage
Yes	61	36
No	108	63
No response	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Of those 61 with health problems</b>		
Health problems during the previous six months	49	80
Depression	41	67
Unable to work because of health problems	30	49
Problems with mobility caused by health problems	22	36
Receiving DLA, AA, IB <sup>44</sup>	20	33

**Table 6: Languages spoken by interviewees**

Language	Number of interviewees	Percentage	Interview in English?
English	115	67	N/A
Afghani	1	<1	No
Bangla	6	3	3 Yes, 2 No, 1 n/a
Czech	1	<1	No
Iranian	1	<1	No
Kurdish	2	1	1 Yes, 1 No
Latvian	2	1	2 No
Punjab	2	1	2 No
Pushto	3	2	2 No, 1 n/a
Russian	1	<1	1 Yes
Somali	13	8	1 Yes, 12 No
Turkish	13	8	1 Yes, 11 No, 1 n/a
Urdu	10	6	1 Yes, 4 No, 5 n/a
No response	2	1	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>100</b>	

**Table 7: Immigration status of interviewees**

Immigration status	Number of interviewees	Percentage
UK Citizen	54	31
Refugee	12	7
Asylum seeker	9	5
Overstayer	5	3
Asylum seeker – indefinite leave to remain	3	2
Special leave to remain	12	7
Former asylum seeker	1	<1
No response	40	23
Other	36	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>44</sup> Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Incapacity Benefit.

# Appendix 3:

## Advice providers and workshop attendees

This appendix lists the advice providers who were consulted as part of the study.<sup>45</sup> It also lists the stakeholders who attended the co-operative enquiry workshops.

### Advice providers

#### Oldham

Contour Housing Association  
Coppice Community Centre  
First Choice Homes Oldham  
Oldham Citizens Advice bureau  
Oldham Law Centre  
Pakistani Community Centre

#### Dover and the south east of England

Dover and District Citizens Advice bureau  
Dover District Council  
Kent Housing Aid Centre (Shelter Housing Aid Centre)  
Kent Multicultural Community Association  
Kent Refugee Action Network  
Kent Refugee Support Group  
Migrant Helpline  
Southern Housing Group

#### London Borough of Hackney

Hackney London Borough Council/Hackney Homes  
Imece Turkish Speaking Women's Group  
KUSH Housing Association  
London Borough of Hackney Housing Advice Centre  
Off Centre Young People's Counselling Service

#### Bristol

Aashyana Housing Association  
Bangladesh Association  
Bristol City Council  
Dhek Bhal  
Shelter  
Somali Association  
South West Somali Community Association  
St Pauls Advice Centre

### Workshop attendees

#### Oldham

Oldham Interfaith Group  
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council  
Oldham Citizens Advice bureau

#### London, Dover and south east of England

Off Centre  
Migrant Helpline  
Kent Refugee Action Network  
Advice Services Alliance  
Advocacy Team Leader  
Shelter  
Gabriel London Borough of Hackney

#### City of Bristol

Aashyana Housing Association  
Bristol City Council  
Shelter  
South West Somali Community Association  
Catholic Housing Aid Society  
Refugee Action  
South West Law  
Places for People  
Support for Racist Incidents

<sup>45</sup> For a copy of the questionnaire that formed the basis of the interviews call Shelter on 0845 485 4590.

## Appendix 4: Community researchers

This appendix explains the recruitment and training of the community researchers who conducted the interviews within the communities.

The community researchers were recruited via an open selection process through adverts placed in local community organisations and advice agencies, as well as refugee organisations and relevant websites. A training and induction day was held in London, at which the context and background to the research and the research process were explained, and the interview schedule tested. At the end of the research, a follow-up debriefing day was held for all researchers. The provisional key findings of the research were tested against their views and experience, and the process of working with the researchers, their recruitment, training and support were examined to gain feedback for future research projects.

Using community researchers had significant potential gains for the study, but was not without its difficulties. Managing a diverse workforce in four different regions required resources to provide regular (telephone and email) contact and support with the research team. Ongoing motivation and support were necessary to encourage researchers to find interviewees from within their own communities and beyond. All but two of the initially recruited researchers stayed on board throughout the project; the two researchers who resigned half way through the study did so because of personal circumstances.

The community researchers were: Saido Abdi (Somali), Ahmed Osman Mohammed (Somali), Safia Nelson (British Indian), Karuna Mohandas (Indian), Bharat Digpal (Indian), Khalilur Rahim (Pakistani), Makhbule Gunes (Turkish), Marcia Green (African-Caribbean), Violetta Krzaczek (Polish), Ernests Stradzins (Latvian), and Peter Bradley (Irish).





## Bad housing wrecks lives

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We are the fourth richest country in the world, and yet millions of people in Britain wake up every day in housing that is run-down, overcrowded, or dangerous. Many others have lost their home altogether. Bad housing robs us of security, health, and a fair chance in life.

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