

Joint Response by ESEA community groups to the Report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 31/03/2021

The report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities chaired by Tony Sewell has found that there is no evidence of institutional racism in the UK and that Britain is a “beacon” for race relations worldwide.

As a group of East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) community leaders, activists, academics, and migrants in the UK, we know this not to be the case.

In January 2021, we submitted [evidence](#) of racial and ethnic disparities and inequalities as experienced by ESEA communities in the UK to the Commission, which we note has no members of ESEA heritage. Our submission demonstrated that there is a severe lack of representation of ESEA people in positions of power in the private sector, media, politics, and other decision making positions -- amounting to about 0.27%. This is far below the proportion of ESEA people in this country, which is around 1%. However, this is itself a severe under-representation because of deficiencies in reporting ethnic data in the UK. We also found that Filipinos make up to 1 in 4 Covid-19 deaths within the NHS. Despite this and despite being the third largest nationality working for the NHS, only 9 Filipinos have managerial posts with any ability to influence strategy and policy in the NHS.

From the above evidence to the racist Hostile Environment policy's inhumane treatment of migrants, unlawful new plans for the immigration system, and the racist views espoused by our Prime Minister and other public leaders, we are surrounded by overwhelming everyday evidence that racism is embedded throughout and upheld through British policies and institutions.

Acts of racism, discrimination, and hate crimes are the outcomes of racist beliefs and institutions in mainstream British society. The report argues that “geography, family influence, socio-economic background, culture and religion have more significant impact on life chances than the existence of racism”, implying racism has no link to any of these factors and that it can be neatly separated apart from these systems and institutions. This is tantamount to saying racism is not the Government's business. [Research](#) conducted in 2020 by the Runnymede Trust with the universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow demonstrates the pervasiveness and multifaceted nature of structural racism. In 2017, the Scottish Government produced a [report](#) on racial inequalities in the country that clearly identified the effects of institutionalised racism through the awarding gap between white-identifying individuals and ethnic minorities in the education system and employment. In 2016, the Equality and Human Rights Commission released a [report](#) providing comprehensive data and statistics of the same gaps throughout the UK. The EHRC further confirmed that the Home Office broke equalities law with the introduction of the Hostile Environment policy, which exposes the structural racism of the institutions that govern us. The intersections of class, race, and gender, at the very least, exacerbate the consequences of systemic forms of racism for specific demographics in the UK and further marginalises them. This pipeline that disenfranchises particular groups here is evident of the racist underpinnings of the UK that continue to privilege whiteness.

Organisational racism can be seen in action in how British statutory agencies, such as the [Metropolitan Police](#), continue to use terms such as ‘Oriental’ to identify and categorise anyone assumed to be of East and/or Southeast Asian heritage. The deployment of such derogatory terms in official policies and data collection highlights the continued colonial attitude towards

ESEA people by British institutions. The 2021 Census too, fails to collect disaggregated data by ethnicity, using instead the umbrella category "Asian - Other" for non-Chinese ESEA people.

We also have serious concerns about the way in which data is presented and used in the report. In much of the data, there has been little to no attempt made to statistically isolate the effect of institutional racism, to separate it from other forms of discrimination, disadvantage, and other individual factors and hence it is not possible to draw sound conclusions based on the evidence presented. For example, the report (p. 55) cites evidence that "indicates that attainment is closely related to socio-economic status – once this is controlled for, all major ethnic groups perform better than White British pupils". This data is used to dispel institutional racism, but actually cannot prove anything since the statistical study is so poorly designed. For one, it does not control for major individual differences in effort. In this specific case, ethnic minority groups who are cited as performing better than white pupils (after controlling for socioeconomic status) may be doing so because they spend more time studying or are studying more effectively than white pupils. If this were the case then this could point to institutional racism since non-white pupils need to work harder to prove themselves. This lack of statistical rigour damages the evidence presented in the report. A selective and superficial use of data is used to support a certain narrative, something which Tony Sewell [made clear](#) years before taking charge of the Commission.

Furthermore, this report excludes the experiences and outcomes of ESEA people who are not Chinese. This over-representation of the Chinese ethnicity and its use as a proxy for ESEA reinforces the model minority myth of a monolithic high-achieving, successful community -- erasing inequalities and issues within ESEA communities and pitting them against, for example, Black Caribbean and Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities. Perhaps nowhere is this approach better encapsulated than in Recommendation 6, an inherently racist policy. Being stereotyped and further racialised is not the representation that minoritised communities are calling for.

In the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests over the summer of 2020, the Government's recently proposed policing bill, and emerging conversations about Covid-fuelled racism against East and Southeast Asians, this report effectively silences and dismisses concerns and experiences of racialised people in the UK -- washing the Government's hands clean of any responsibility. This is a political act of neglect, which we firmly reject and condemn.

Signed:

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