

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyflawnder Cymdeithasol ar gyfer yr ymchwiliad i Gydlyniant Cymdeithasol

This response was submitted to the Equality and Social justice Committee on the inquiry into Social Cohesion

SC 01

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Hil Cymru

Response from: Race Council Cymru

Evidence Deadline: 14 February 2025

We are aware that following an independent review of the Community Cohesion Programme in 2021, the Welsh Government agreed to fund the Programme until 2025-26. To ensure that the programme is informed by those with lived experience of key issues within the community, the Equality and Social Justice Committee is holding an inquiry to explore the issue of social and community cohesion further.

Race Council Cymru (RCC) is delighted to be invited by the Committee to provide evidence to help the committee to consider the wider context for community cohesion following targeted attacks on refugees and asylum seekers in communities across the UK during the summer of 2024.

Please see RCC 's written evidence in response to the terms of reference below that are relevant to our work:

1. The key issues which impact social cohesion in Wales and consider whether interventions need to target specific groups of people, geographical areas or particular key issues.

Social cohesion in Wales can be impacted by a number of factors, including national identity, shared values, and political polarisation. Social cohesion is fundamental to the stability and prosperity of any society, and in Wales, a variety of factors influence the ability of communities to thrive together. Based on our recent findings across the charity sector, some of the key issues impacting social cohesion in Wales, include economic disparities, cultural identity, Racism & hate crime, health inequalities and the role of political representation.

Economic Disparities

One of the most pressing issues affecting social cohesion in Wales is economic inequality. Although Wales has experienced economic growth in recent years, significant disparities remain between different regions. Urban areas, particularly Cardiff, tend to have more opportunities for employment and education compared to rural and post-industrial regions like Merthyr Tydfil and Blaenau Gwent. Socio-economic deprivation is linked to worse educational outcomes in children, as well as negative impacts on physical, emotional, and mental health. There remain high numbers of people in Wales struggling to make ends meet due to low-paid work or insufficient hours. According to WG (Research, Document : *A review of evidence on socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome (summary, 2021)* "Working households in

Wales represent 56 per cent of people living in poverty, compared to 39 per cent measured 20 years ago, and most children living in poverty in Wales live in working households. Low-paid work is a key contributor to in-work poverty". Furthermore, race, gender, and disability pay disparities still exist in Wales and these are evident in evidence around employment with disabled people being less likely to work in high-pay occupations and being twice as likely to be unemployed compared to non-disabled people. Evidence also shows that the pay gap still exists in Wales for women, disabled people and ethnic minorities. These economic divides can foster feelings of resentment and exclusion among those in less prosperous areas, undermining social cohesion.

Cultural Identity and Language

Wales has a rich cultural heritage and a distinct national identity, characterised by the Welsh language. However, tensions can arise around issues of language and cultural representation. While many embrace the Welsh language as a unifying aspect of their identity, others may feel marginalised or overlooked for funding opportunities, over English based organisations. This can create divides within communities, impacting social cohesion. Local businesses may feel lost when it comes to accessing various funding opportunities due to a majority share being allocated to specific larger English organisations. This can create resentment amongst communities and undermine the power of Welsh owned businesses.

Health Inequalities

Health inequalities can exacerbate social tensions, as communities with limited access to healthcare and resources struggle to support their members. The links between health and deprivation are complex and due to a number of interrelated factors. Those living in more deprived areas may have poorer access to sport and be less able to have healthier diets. This can lead to poorer physical outcomes. Living in more deprived areas can also affect mental well-being. Poorer mental well-being being is linked to a range of factors, including economic and work related stress, structural problems around participation and feeling part of a community which can increase loneliness and social isolation or create resentment with those from more affluent areas who may be seen to be more privileged.

There are many examples of the intersectionality between health and factors such as race, socio-economic status, gender and age. Disabled people and those living in rural communities face barriers in access to healthcare, with disabled people also having more unmet care needs due to waiting lists or costs. Black & LGBTQ+ people are more likely to suffer from higher rates of psychological/emotional distress, discrimination, racism and lower levels of satisfaction with health services.

Political Representation and Engagement

Political engagement is another critical factor influencing social cohesion in Wales. Disengagement from political processes, particularly among marginalised groups, can lead to feelings of disenfranchisement and alienation. Ensuring that all voices are heard and represented in decision-making processes is essential for fostering a cohesive society.

People need to be able to participate in civic duties freely. Participation relates to people being involved in making decisions that affect them, and having choices and a voice in public life as well as being involved in communities and having the freedom to access services and interact

with people with autonomy. In general, satisfaction with people's local area is high in Wales. However, those experiencing socio-economic deprivation generally have poorer participation in public life, participating in fewer sport and cultural events. Although the political landscape in Wales is generally fair, women, Ethnic Minority people and disabled people are continuing to be under-represented in senior roles in several areas.

Racism & Hate Crime

Evidence shows that many young people from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds are reluctant to report racist incidents. According to Show Racism the Red Card's 2020 report, 'Racism in Wales? Exploring prejudice in the Welsh Education System', whilst 63% of pupils in Wales say that they or someone they know has been a target of racism, only 25% have actually reported it due to a lack of trust in the justice and policing system which can also exacerbate a lack of social cohesion.

The experiences are reflected in research data -Welsh Govt response to Covid report shows that poverty rates are higher for BAME people in Wales than the White population. According to the 2022 Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) Poverty & Social Exclusion report the employment rate among the Black population in Wales is 56% compared to 74% in the White population. According to the Loneliness Inequalities Evidence Review WCPP in 2021-22, 10% of people in Wales felt that they did not have enough people to rely on and 30% felt 'socially lonely' & that BAME people experience greater loneliness. The Anti-Racist-Wales-Action-Plan evidences many children & young people experiencing racism. There is also widespread belief that UK education ignores Black experiences- 41% of respondents in the Social Exclusion Wales 2022 Report "definitely" believe discrimination to be the main barrier to academic attainment for young Black people.

The total number of police recorded hate crimes in Wales decreased by 4% in 2022/23. However, hate crimes where religion or transgender status was a motivating factor increased by 26% and 22% respectively.

Social cohesion in Wales is impacted by a myriad of issues, including economic disparities, cultural identity, Racism, health inequalities, and political engagement. To effectively address these challenges, interventions should be targeted based on specific groups, geographical areas, and key issues. By focusing on economic regeneration, cultural inclusivity, health equity, Antiracism programs and political engagement, Wales can foster a more cohesive antiracist society where individuals feel valued, connected, and empowered. Ultimately, a collaborative approach that involves community participation in shaping these interventions will be vital for achieving lasting social cohesion

2. Examples of best practice and other interventions/needed to support social cohesion and overcome tensions. This includes understanding the role the third sector plays in supporting social cohesion and what barriers it faces, including funding.

Interventions to improve social cohesion in Wales may need to target specific groups of people, geographical areas, or key issues. Therefore, interventions aimed at economic regeneration in

disadvantaged areas are crucial. Initiatives that focus on job creation, skills training, Social entrepreneurship and investment in infrastructure can help bridge the gap between different regions, promoting a sense of belonging and community. Targeting these interventions towards specific geographical areas facing economic challenges can lead to more effective outcomes. For example, both the statutory and third sector have essential roles to play in respect of Wales' health and social care outcomes. To maximise the health and social care benefits to communities, the third and statutory sectors need an ecosystem in which the third sector can thrive. There needs to be:

- Equitable and strengths-based relationships between the two sectors.
- Co-production, based on long-term sustainable relationships that extend beyond contracting and supply chains.
- Representation: the third sector needs to be appropriately resourced to ensure it can play a full role on strategic and planning forums.
- Funding: Funding needs to be fairly and proportionately distributed to the sector to ensure businesses can promote appropriately for the benefit of their communities.

To address cultural disparities, interventions should promote inclusivity. Educational programs that teach the Welsh language and celebrate Welsh culture, antiracism training and mentoring opportunities can help foster a sense of shared identity. Moreover, initiatives that encourage cultural exchanges and collaborations among diverse communities can strengthen bonds and promote understanding, helping to bridge divides. Smaller businesses should be given a fair opportunity to access government tenders and funding to improve their businesses and build strong communities of service users.

Interventions targeting health disparities are essential for promoting social cohesion. Programs that provide healthcare access, diverse mental health support, and wellness initiatives in underserved areas can help reduce these inequalities. By prioritising health equity, Wales can work towards a healthier, more cohesive society where all individuals can thrive.

Interventions aimed at increasing political engagement among specific groups—such as young people, ethnic minorities, and those in rural areas—are vital. Educational campaigns and mentoring programs about civic responsibilities, as well as outreach programs that encourage participation in local governance, can help empower individuals and communities. By promoting inclusivity in political representation, Wales can strengthen social cohesion and build trust between communities and institutions.

3. What support the Welsh Government provides to community groups and organisations and identify whether there are any opportunities to provide additional support. This includes examining the limitations and barriers which exist given some aspects of support for social cohesion are reserved to the UK Government (for example policing, media and internet regulation), and what action could be taken to overcome these challenges.

The Welsh Government plays a crucial role in fostering community development, social cohesion, and the empowerment of local organisations throughout Wales. By providing financial assistance via funding, bursaries, grants, resources, and policy frameworks, the Welsh

Government can continue to enhance the capacity of community groups to address local issues, promote inclusivity, and strengthen social ties. It is prudent to consider the following in future well-being assessments:

- The status of intangible cultural assets in the community, their role in community well-being, and the ways in which they can be leveraged to increase well-being.
- The rates of participation in arts, culture, heritage and sports and any known inequalities, and how they can be addressed.
- Cross-cutting opportunities to use cultural activities or a cultural well-being 'lens' to drive well-being improvements in other areas such as health or economic development engagement with local community groups is essential.
- Maximising opportunities to foster cultural well-being through participatory activities which develop social capital and a sense of place and togetherness

We are aware that the Welsh Government offers various forms of support to community groups and organisations, primarily through funding programs, strategic initiatives, and policy frameworks aimed at promoting social cohesion. Notable support mechanisms include:

Funding Programs: the Community Facilities and Activities Programme (CFAP) and the People and Communities Fund (PCF). These funds are designed to support projects that enhance community life, promote engagement, and empower local citizens.

Collaboration and Partnership: The Welsh Government encourages collaboration among community groups, local authorities, and other stakeholders. This approach helps to align resources and efforts, fostering a more cohesive community response to local challenges.

Capacity Building: The Welsh Government provides training, resources, and guidance to help organisations develop effective governance structures, financial management practices, and community engagement strategies. The government has established policies aimed at promoting equality and diversity, such as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This encourages community involvement in decision-making processes, thereby enhancing social cohesion.

However, several limitations and barriers exist, particularly due to the devolved nature of certain responsibilities and the reserved powers held by the UK Government.

Reserved Powers: Certain areas crucial for social cohesion, such as policing, media, and internet regulation, remain under the jurisdiction of the UK Government. This division of responsibilities can lead to inconsistencies in policy implementation and support. For instance, community safety initiatives may be undermined if policing is perceived as insufficiently responsive to local needs.

Funding Constraints: While the Welsh Government provides funding, the availability of resources can fluctuate due to economic conditions and competing priorities. Many community groups face challenges in securing long-term funding, leading to project discontinuity and instability.

Geographic Disparities: Support for community groups is not uniformly distributed across Wales. Rural areas, in particular, may face additional challenges in accessing resources and support compared to urban centers, exacerbating social inequalities.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes:

- Enhanced Coordination with the UK Government: The Welsh Government could advocate for greater collaboration with the UK Government to align policies and funding streams that affect social cohesion. By addressing the gaps in reserved powers, a more cohesive approach to issues such as community safety and media literacy could be developed.
- Targeted Funding Initiatives: The Welsh Government could introduce targeted funding initiatives aimed at underrepresented areas and demographics, particularly in rural regions for local community groups, CICs and smaller businesses who have strong ties within their communities. Such initiatives could focus on specific issues like digital inclusion, mental health, racism, sense of Cynefin and community safety.
- Capacity Building Programs: Investing in capacity-building programs that focus on skills development for community leaders and volunteers can enhance the effectiveness of local organisations. This could include training in grant writing, project management, and community engagement techniques.
- The Welsh Government provides essential support to community groups and organisations, fostering social cohesion and local empowerment. However, significant limitations arise from the division of powers and resource constraints. By pursuing greater collaboration with the UK Government, introducing targeted funding initiatives, and enhancing capacity-building efforts, the Welsh Government can overcome these challenges and further strengthen community resilience across Wales. The potential for additional support exists, and by seizing these opportunities, the Welsh Government can create a more inclusive and cohesive society.

4. The Committee will also be considering the wider context for community cohesion following targeted attacks on refugees and asylum seekers in communities across the UK during the summer of 2024.

The summer of 2024 marked a troubling period in the United Kingdom, as targeted attacks on refugees and asylum seekers drew widespread media attention and sparked national outrage. These incidents, often fueled by misinformation and rising anti-immigrant sentiment, have raised critical questions about community cohesion and the social fabric of a nation historically characterised by its diversity and inclusiveness. Understanding the wider context of community cohesion in the aftermath of such violence is essential for fostering a more harmonious society and addressing the underlying issues that contribute to division.

The summer of 2024 saw a resurgence of hostility toward refugees, echoing historical patterns of scapegoating during times of economic or social upheaval. These attacks were not isolated incidents but rather a culmination of growing anti-immigrant rhetoric, exacerbated by economic challenges, political polarisation, and sensationalist media narratives. In the years leading up to these events, political discourse increasingly framed refugees and asylum seekers as burdens

on public services and threats to national security. This rhetoric, often detached from the realities of refugees' experiences, created an environment where violence became more likely.

Incidents of violence and harassment instilled fear among refugee populations, isolating them from local communities and limiting their ability to contribute meaningfully to society. The racist protests in Stradypark Hotel where far right's were seen to be exploiting local communities. There was discontent and the situation was turned into a racially charged and hostile situation. For long-term residents, these attacks created an atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty, leading some to feel justified in their prejudices while pushing others to distance themselves from perceived "others." The polarisation of communities following these attacks emphasises the fragility of social bonds. In areas where tensions escalated, community leaders faced the daunting task of rebuilding trust and fostering dialogue. Grassroots initiatives such as those at RCC aimed at promoting understanding and empathy became increasingly vital, demonstrating that community cohesion is not merely an inherent trait but a continuous process requiring active effort and engagement.

Initiatives focusing on education, storytelling, and community engagement have emerged as powerful tools for promoting understanding. Antiracism training and workshops aimed at dismantling stereotypes, along with platforms for refugees to share their experiences, serve as vital components in re-establishing social bonds.

Additionally, local authorities have a crucial role in addressing the underlying causes of division. Policies that promote inclusivity and equitable access to resources can mitigate feelings of resentment among residents. Ensuring that refugees are integrated into the community fabric, rather than segregated, is essential for fostering a sense of belonging.

The targeted attacks on refugees and asylum seekers during the summer of 2024 serve as a stark reminder of the ongoing challenges to community cohesion in the UK. While the incidents reflected deeper societal tensions, they also spurred significant responses aimed at rebuilding trust and understanding which is reassuring.

Our recommendations

Overall Race Council Cymru (RCC) is delighted to be able to provide evidence to help the committee to ensure that the programme is informed by those with lived experience of key issues within the community such as social and community cohesion.

Race Council Cymru (RCC) is delighted to be invited by the Committee to provide evidence to help the committee to consider the wider context for community cohesion following targeted attacks on refugees and asylum seekers in communities across the UK during the summer of 2024. However it is essential that the voices from within underrepresented groups are heard and action taken as a result. These could look like interventions aimed at increasing political engagement among specific groups—such as young people, ethnic minorities, and those in rural areas. Educational campaigns and mentoring programs about civic responsibilities, as well as outreach programs that encourage participation in local governance as these can help empower individuals and communities to have a voice in key decision making policies for their communities which can strengthen social cohesion and build trust between communities and institutions. Promoting community cohesion is not merely about preventing violence; it is about nurturing a culture of inclusivity, empathy, and mutual respect. By addressing the root causes of division and actively engaging with all members of society, Wales can work towards a more cohesive and harmonious future, honoring its legacy as a diverse and welcoming nation.

Resources:

- Appendix: WALES' THIRD SECTOR: ENRICHING HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE OUTCOMES
- Annual Report on the Third Sector Scheme
- Wales Sanctuary Service - Welsh Refugee Council
- A review of evidence on socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome (summary) [HTML] | GOV.WALES
- Future Trends and Inequalities in Wales
- Wellbeing of Wales, 2024: a Wales of cohesive communities [HTML] | GOV.WALES
- <https://www.ewc.wales/site/index.php/en/documents-eng/fitness-to-practise/good-practice-guides/42-guide-to-good-practice-tackling-racism>
- Racism: Abuse being normalised in Wales' schools - report
- Report into racism in secondary schools: government response | GOV.WALES
- <https://www.ewc.wales/site/index.php/en/documents-eng/fitness-to-practise/good-practice-guides/42-guide-to-good-practice-tackling-racism>
- Family leave Wales after girl faces racism at school - BBC News