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# 'Double Trouble'?

Black, Asian and minority  
ethnic offenders' experiences  
of resettlement

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Coretta Phillips

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**CLiNKs**  
supporting voluntary organisations that  
work with offenders and their families

PRISON  
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# **‘Double Trouble’?**

**Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Offenders’  
experiences of resettlement**

**November 2010**

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and Jessica Jacobson and Coretta Phillips

This report was written by Jessica Jacobson,  
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# Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Summary   | 1         |
| <b>1. Introduction</b>  | <b>6</b>  |
| Background to the study   | 6         |
| Aims and methods of the study   | 7         |
| Understanding resettlement  | 11        |
| <b>2. The context: findings of previous studies</b>                     | <b>13</b> |
| Resettlement and BAME Offenders   | 14        |
| <b>3. Elements of resettlement</b>                                      | <b>16</b> |
| Accommodation   | 16        |
| Employment and finances   | 17        |
| Mental health and management of drug/alcohol problems                   | 18        |
| Family ties   | 19        |
| Focus and motivation  | 20        |
| Social inclusion  | 21        |
| <b>4. Resettlement and ethnicity</b>                                    | <b>22</b> |
| The relationship between ethnicity and resettlement                     | 22        |
| Generic needs   | 23        |
| Discrimination and disadvantage in wider society                        | 24        |
| Discrimination within the criminal justice system                       | 26        |
| Cultural factors  | 27        |
| <b>5. Reflections on resettlement provision</b>                         | <b>30</b> |
| Prisoners' and ex-prisoners' views on resettlement provision            | 30        |
| Barriers to access and engagement                                       | 32        |
| A need for specialist provision?  | 34        |
| <b>6. Conclusions and recommendations</b>                               | <b>36</b> |
| Main findings   | 36        |
| Implications for policy and practice                                    | 37        |
| Recommendations   | 39        |
| References  | 41        |
| <b>APPENDIX A:</b> Reflections on the experience of doing peer research | 44        |
| <b>APPENDIX B:</b> Interview questions for prisoners                    | 46        |
| <b>APPENDIX C:</b> SMART data on Release on Temporary Licence (2008)    | 48        |

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# Summary

## Key findings



Well, as I say, it doesn't make a difference if you are white or you are from whatever background you are . . . you have to look at the individual as a human being... We all need help when we leave prison, whether you are white, black, purple or Asian, African I don't care - the human being need help – that's how it is.

(38-year-old black man in prison, serving a 16-year sentence)

I ask my friends, and community members [for help] ... but when they hear my situation and criminal record they stand back ... Even my community - they feel very embarrassed if anyone goes to prison... they feel great shame ... I made a mistake and had ten times more punishment.

(30-year-old Asian man on licence)



- The BAME prisoners and ex-prisoners<sup>1</sup> interviewed for this study perceived most of their resettlement needs to be generic rather than ethnically-specific.
- The (ex-)prisoners believed that accommodation and employment were the most critical factors for successful resettlement.
- The other main elements of resettlement were said to be access to finances, management of mental health and substance misuse problems, family relationships, focus and motivation, and social inclusion.
- Around three-fifths of the (ex-)prisoners believed there was a relationship between ethnicity and resettlement, while one-third believed that their BAME status did not impact their resettlement needs and experiences.
- The large majority of service providers interviewed for this study believed that the ethnicity of (ex-)prisoners affect their resettlement experiences.
- The (ex-)prisoners and service providers had a range of views on how BAME status impacts resettlement needs and experiences. Various, they focused on:
  - The amplifying effects of racism on the discrimination experienced by all ex-prisoners in wider society;
  - Racial discrimination (or perceptions of discrimination) within the criminal justice system, and its implications for BAME offenders' engagement with services; and
  - The implications for resettlement of differing cultural needs and expectations.
- The (ex-)prisoners largely described existing resettlement provision – especially statutory provision - as highly inadequate.
- Most (ex-)prisoners thought that it was desirable for staff providing resettlement services to be ethnically diverse, but their main concern was that staff - whatever their ethnicity - should display cultural sensitivity and understanding.
- Many service providers voiced broad support for the principle of specialist resettlement provision for BAME offenders, as a means of redressing BAME offenders' disadvantages and ensuring that cultural differences are sensitively dealt with.

<sup>1</sup> In this report, views expressed by both prisoners and ex-prisoners in common will be cited as coming from (ex-)prisoners, rather than the more cumbersome phrase, 'prisoners and ex-prisoners'. When the ex-prisoners' views are distinct from serving prisoners, the reference will not use brackets.

## The study

This research was commissioned by Clinks, and funded by the Tackling Race Inequalities Fund of the Department for Communities and Local Government. The background to the study was the recognition of the critical importance of resettlement provision for offenders, and the evidence of continuing direct and indirect racial discrimination across the criminal justice system as a whole.

The study addressed the following questions:

- 1 What are the major resettlement needs of offenders from BAME groups?
- 2 How do BAME offenders' needs differ from those of non-BAME offenders?
- 3 What are BAME offenders' experiences of resettlement services?
- 4 Should specialist resettlement services be made available for BAME offenders?



I was out for three days – ended up in a crack house and then next thing you know I'm on shoplifting, aggravated TDA [taking and driving away] and shit like that – I had to write a letter to the judge to tell him: 'Bwoy, I know you owe it to society to lock up people like me but you've gotta hear what I gotta say – I come out of prison – I've only been out three days – I had nothing – I'm sleeping in a car – I've got nowhere to live – I've got nowhere to go – and then now - I'm ended up in a crack-house – doing crack! And then look what I'm up for now!' ...

(45-year-old black man; completed sentence)

The study had two elements: first, a literature review and, second, qualitative fieldwork. The fieldwork involved semi-structured interviews and focus groups with a total of 113 BAME individuals, of whom 65 were serving prisoners, 28 were on licence and 20 were no longer on licence but had previously been in prison. In addition we conducted interviews and focus groups with 83 representatives of service providers, including prison and probation staff and staff from community and prison-based voluntary agencies.

## Results of the fieldwork

The prisoners and ex-prisoners who participated in this study predominantly spoke of resettlement needs as generic rather than ethnically specific. Among these needs, accommodation and employment featured as the most crucial, with the issue of finances also being frequently highlighted as critical, but usually linked to employment. Some respondents spoke of the importance of healthcare (specifically in relation to mental health) and the management of drug or alcohol problems. Many respondents talked about the vital part that supportive families, and a commitment to family responsibilities, can play in the resettlement process. Two further significant aspects of resettlement emerged from our discussions with prisoners and ex-prisoners: first, focus and motivation as prerequisites for making a successful transition to life outside prison; and, secondly, social inclusion. These latter two elements of resettlement are not reflected in the 'reducing re-offending pathways' that are the focus of formal criminal justice policy and practice on resettlement.

A majority of the (ex-)prisoner respondents – three-fifths of those who were interviewed – said implicitly or explicitly that BAME status has an impact on the resettlement process. Many observed that racial discrimination within or outside the criminal justice system has repercussions for an individual's capacity to gain employment, get access to support services, or otherwise meet his or her needs on leaving custody. Some respondents spoke of differing cultural needs and expectations – relating, in particular, to family and community dynamics - that influence resettlement needs and experiences.

Among the service provider respondents, most were clearly of the view that BAME status impacts resettlement needs and experiences. Like the (ex-)prisoners, they referred (variously) to discrimination and disadvantage, cultural differences, and barriers to access to services. At the same time, there was a clear recognition that many resettlement needs are generic rather than ethnically-specific.



... I think [BAME offenders] should have more support to overcome the stereotypical view that people have of them ... and not care about what people think about them. Because a lot of people will say they don't mind; they will front; they will stand up to you - but deep down when someone says something, or someone looks at them funny, it burns them. I don't care what you say: it burns them - you can feel it, but they don't show it. You bury that shit because you're trying to be a man.

(21-year-old mixed race man, on licence)

In short, both the (ex-)prisoner and the service provider respondents viewed ethnicity as a factor which – alongside other social, political and economic factors - mediates but does not define individuals' experiences of the resettlement process. But, it seems, ethnicity can mediate resettlement experiences in different ways. BAME status can impact on an individual's degree of need and it can affect the ease or difficulty with which an individual addresses particular needs.

Most (ex-)prisoner respondents said that existing resettlement provision – especially within the prison and probation services – was highly inadequate or entirely lacking. Unsurprisingly, the service providers we spoke with drew a much more positive picture of current services. However, some (particularly voluntary providers) noted that BAME offenders face barriers to accessing and engaging with services. For example, BAME offenders' experiences and perceptions of discrimination can make them mistrustful of services, or convince them that the services have little to offer them. Some BAME offenders – particularly foreign nationals – face practical problems in accessing services. Differing cultural perspectives on offending, mental illness, and substance misuse may also discourage some BAME offenders from seeking the help they need.

The (ex-)prisoner respondents did not call for specialist resettlement provision for BAME offenders, but felt that ethnic diversity and cultural sensitivity among resettlement staff was extremely important. Many of the service providers voiced broad support for the principle of specialist provision for BAME offenders – as a means of redressing the disadvantages faced by BAME offenders, and ensuring that cultural differences in approaches to resettlement are sensitively dealt with. There were also, however, concerns among service providers that specialist provision could be divisive and exclusionary.

## Conclusions

Many divergent views were expressed by the prisoners, ex-prisoners and service providers who participated in the study. Some of these differences in opinion could have been predicted: it was not entirely surprising that while most of the prisoner and ex-prisoner respondents complained that resettlement services were poor or lacking, service providers gave more positive assessments of the quality and range of provision. But it was also notable that among the prisoner and ex-prisoner respondents, and among the service providers, views on the relevance of ethnicity to resettlement needs and provision were mixed – reflecting the multifaceted, contested nature of the subject under study.



I remember going for a job at a sports store - I passed the interview, was offered the job, came back, signed the contract. There was a group of us there, everything was hunky dory. Then just jokingly she asked if anyone had a criminal record; me, being a numpty, said, 'Yeah, I do.' And she took me outside and said, 'Sorry, I can't give you the job,' ripped up the contract, got someone to come and search me as well, and then escorted me off the premises.

(23-year-old black man on licence)

Nevertheless, even taking into account the divergent views, our research findings strongly suggest that most resettlement needs of BAME offenders do not fundamentally differ from the needs of other offenders. In other words, there is more that BAME and non-BAME offenders leaving custody have in common than separates them. It follows from this that there is not a great call for separate provision of resettlement services for BAME offenders in order to meet their generic needs. However, specialist services may be needed to address the problems of groups of offenders with specific needs – such as foreign nationals with uncertain immigration status, or offenders from Traveller/Roma/Gypsy backgrounds – or to help some BAME offenders to engage with services which they would otherwise mistrust.

The strongest argument to emerge from our research findings is that existing (generic) provision should be reformed to make it more relevant and accessible to BAME offenders. This is all the more important at a time when services across most of the public sector are about to be hit by severe and far-reaching spending cuts; cuts which could, moreover, have a disproportionate impact on the most marginalised groups of service users.



There would seem to be three main aspects to ensuring the relevance and accessibility of resettlement support for BAME offenders:

- First, services must redress the existing racial inequalities in criminal justice practices that impact on resettlement provision.
- Second, they must recognise and address the impact of perceptions of discrimination and stereotyping within the criminal justice system and wider society – particularly the impact on BAME offenders’ willingness and motivation to engage with services.
- Third, they must display understanding of, and sensitivity towards, cultural differences in expectations and experiences of resettlement.

Another key theme to emerge from our research findings is the highly individualised nature of resettlement needs, strengths and experiences. An interesting dimension of this is that many respondents stressed that successful resettlement depends, to a large extent, on the individual’s personal commitment and determination to make it a success. They spoke also of the enormous challenges of maintaining focus and motivation during the period immediately after leaving custody – when the structured prison environment is exchanged for the much more chaotic outside world. What this suggests is that resettlement provision which is alert to, feeds into and bolsters internal processes of self-change – especially during the critical post-custodial period – may have the most to offer.

Respondents’ emphasis on self-change – along with their references to social inclusion – also show that, for each individual, resettlement is an ongoing process which is integrally bound up with, rather than separate from, all other aspects of life. Policy and practice which primarily treats resettlement as a matter of addressing a series of discrete needs is, thus, liable to be less effective than an approach which recognises these broader and more personal dimensions.

## Recommendations

### Recommendations for policy-making and commissioning

Resettlement policy and commissioning arrangements should conceptualise resettlement as a process encompassing all aspects of an individual’s life, rather than as a matter of addressing a series of discrete needs.

Thus, resettlement policy and provision should focus not only on meeting practical needs (particularly housing and employment) but also on devising and implementing methods for supporting internal processes of self-change and social inclusion. Awareness of the less tangible but equally critical elements of resettlement – such as social inclusion and self-change – is all the more important in a policy context in which ‘commissioning by results’ will increasingly take precedence.

Views of the direct users of resettlement services should be sought and taken into account in devising resettlement policy and establishing commissioning arrangements.

Commissioning arrangements should acknowledge the unique capacity of the voluntary sector – including small-scale voluntary agencies – to deliver personalised services that are tailored to the needs and circumstances of offenders as individuals and as members of minority ethnic groups.

### Recommendations for improving provision

Prison-based resettlement support should not be limited to the last few months or weeks of a sentence.

Prison-based provision should take the form of drop-in support, provided by designated members of staff in established locations where information is available and regularly updated.

The most promising points for intervention should be identified; for example, it should be recognised that it can be particularly difficult for ex-prisoners to maintain focus on their resettlement goals in the immediate period of their release from custody.

Probation Trusts should articulate more clearly their role in supporting resettlement; and, in so doing, should be aware that many prisoners and ex-prisoners are likely to be mistrustful of what they perceive to be Probation’s over-emphasis on enforcement.

Voluntary providers need to promote and co-ordinate their services more effectively, particularly in prison.

And prisons should promote and publicise the voluntary sector more effectively as this would make better use of their resources.

Prisons must seek to engage the family as partners in the resettlement process, given families' potential contribution to resolving practical problems faced by newly released prisoners, and bearing in mind the positive impact that family support and responsibilities can have on offenders' sense of belonging and on their motivation to change. As part of this, prisons should make greater use of ROTL to enable prisoners, where necessary, to rebuild their relationships with family members, and particularly with their children.

Voluntary providers may also have a critical 'bridging' role to play, by helping to engage and providing support to offenders who might be mistrustful of statutory services, including probation.

### **Recommendations for policy and provision for BAME offenders**

Most resettlement needs of BAME offenders can be effectively met through generic rather than ethnically-specific provision, provided that:

- a) The provision is informed by a commitment to equality of access and outcomes, which will require comprehensive ethnic monitoring by both statutory and non-statutory providers;
- b) The provision displays cultural sensitivity and understanding.

In developing and providing generic services, statutory and non-statutory agencies should take into account the ways in which BAME offenders' experiences and perceptions of racial discrimination and stereotyping (both within and beyond the criminal justice system) can impact on their willingness and motivation to engage with services.

Providers should be aware that differing cultural responses to offenders and offending behaviour can impact on BAME offenders' resettlement needs, and their willingness and capacity to engage with services. In taking these cultural differences into account, providers should recognise that there is diversity within as well as between different communities and avoid assumptions about 'typical' responses within particular groups.

Cultural sensitivity training for all staff is crucial for the effective delivery of resettlement services that are relevant and accessible to BAME offenders. The recruitment and appropriate deployment of ethnically diverse staff should also be carefully considered.

Where specific resettlement needs among BAME offenders are identified, some separate resettlement provision may be appropriate. This might include, for example, specialist services for the most socially and economically marginalised groups, such as foreign national prisoners with disputed immigration status, and those from Traveller/Roma/Gypsy backgrounds. There may also be a need for specialist work to tackle cultural resistance to engaging with services within some minority ethnic communities.

To the extent that BAME-specific provision is made available, it should be closely tied in, wherever possible, with generic provision and should take into account diversity within as well as between minority groups.

Voluntary agencies are particularly well-placed to offer (generic or specialist) resettlement services to BAME offenders, because they tend to have greater scope than statutory providers to:

- a) Engage BAME offenders whose experiences or perceptions of racial discrimination make them particularly mistrustful of statutory services;
- b) Deliver culturally sensitive provision;
- c) Deliver personalised services that are tailored to the needs and circumstances of offenders as individuals and as members of minority ethnic groups.

Recognition of the 'bridging' role of voluntary agencies with respect to BAME offenders – as well as offenders from non-BAME backgrounds - should be structured into commissioning arrangements, to ensure that smaller voluntary organisations are not marginalised.

Policy-makers and commissioners should ensure that spending cuts do not disproportionately impact BAME offenders, and other marginalised groups within the offending population.

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# Introduction

# 1

This report sets out the findings of research into the resettlement needs and experiences of black, Asian and minority ethnic (henceforth BAME) prisoners and ex-prisoners.

## Background to the study

This study was commissioned by Clinks, and funded by the Tackling Race Inequalities Fund of the Department for Communities and Local Government. The background to the study was the recognition of the critical importance of resettlement provision for offenders, and the evidence of continuing direct and indirect racial discrimination across the criminal justice system as a whole.

The term 'resettlement' is broad. It is defined by the Prison Service as 'the release of prisoners back to the community without further offending' (HMPS, 2001). Maruna *et al* (2004) note that resettlement can be usefully understood as referring to both an *event* and a *process*. The *event* is the physical release from custody and the *process* represents the longer-term pre- and post-release support, interventions, and services which aim to help offenders re-integrate into an offending-free lifestyle. For the purposes of this report, the term 'resettlement' is generally used to refer to the process.

A linked concept, re-integration, also implies that the released prisoner builds an offending-free lifestyle. But re-integration is complicated by the implication that the reformed offender will be accepted back into the community as a full member of society. Many offenders have experienced social and economic disadvantage which amounts to exclusion. It is reasonable to ask whether someone can be re-integrated if they were not included in society prior to their criminal conviction.

Society gains from successful resettlement, not only through reduced reoffending but also through the contributions a reformed offender can make. Therefore, the development and implementation of effective resettlement services has been a key priority within criminal justice policy under both the previous Labour and the current Coalition government.

Some BAME groups, particularly those of black origin, are over-represented at key stages of the criminal justice process. Compared to the general population, for example, black people of British nationality were nearly four times (11% of the prison population) as likely to be imprisoned in 2008/9 than might be expected based on their representation of 3% in the general population of England and Wales (MOJ 2010). This over-representation is likely to be partly because some BAME groups are disproportionately responsible for certain offences, which may be linked to their experiences of social exclusion in housing, education, and employment (Phillips and Bowling 2007).

There is also convincing evidence that BAME groups encounter direct and indirect racial discrimination in the criminal justice process. In 2008, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Race Review (2008) reported significant progress towards implementing and monitoring race equality in prisons, but found that in 'almost all aspects of prison life, the perceptions of BME prisoners are still more negative than those of their white counterparts' (see also Cheliotis and Liebling 2006). In particular, there was continuing evidence that black prisoners were more likely to be on the basic regime, subject to disciplinary action in segregation units, and to have force used against them, than prisoners from other ethnic groups (see also HMIP 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009). This report barely mentions resettlement: a sign that NOMS' work on equality has not been fully integrated with resettlement and vice versa. A project by the Prison Reform Trust found that a majority of 71 BAME prisoners interviewed had experienced subtle and covert racism, for example, in stereotyping, the misuse of discretion, and a lack of cultural awareness (PRT 2009).

NOMS regime monitoring data for 2008 (MOJ 2009) show that white British and Asian prisoners were slightly more likely than average to be granted release on temporary licence (ROTL), while all other minority ethnic groups were less likely to receive ROTL (see Appendix C for data). Release on temporary licence can promote successful resettlement, enabling the prisoner to find work in the community, rebuild family ties, and undertake training. Hence, ROTL should be equally accessible for all eligible prisoners.

There is evidence also of racial inequalities in the work of the probation service. HM Inspectorate of Probation (2000) documented inadequate monitoring systems and poorer quality pre-sentence reports (PSRs) on black offenders. A joint inspection by HM Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation (2001) found that probation officers may be less focused on the offence-related needs of BAME offenders: 46% of BAME offenders received a home visit following release, compared to 71% of white offenders. Risk assessments of harm to self and others were also of a higher quality for white offenders compared with BAME offenders. A follow-up inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation in 2004 reported progress in work with BAME offenders although there were still concerns about unequal probation practice, particularly in the preparation of pre-sentence reports (HMIP 2004).

The available evidence on racial discrimination across the criminal justice system suggests that BAME offenders might not have equal access to resettlement advice and other support services, and that the provision they receive might be of poorer quality than that received by other offenders. An allied concern is whether there are aspects of the backgrounds and cultures of some BAME groups which render certain forms of provision more relevant than others, in which case uniform provision across all (BAME and non-BAME) offenders inadvertently disadvantages some. However, the existing research literature provides little insight into these matters; and the present study was commissioned for the purpose of filling this substantial knowledge gap, specifically in relation to resettlement provision.

It is hoped that the information gathered by this study will contribute to more informed policy decisions with respect to resettlement provision for BAME offenders and, ultimately, to better outcomes for these individuals and the communities to which they belong. The importance of identifying and understanding resettlement needs is all the greater at a time when far-reaching cuts to public spending are beginning to impact on all aspects of service provision within the criminal justice system and beyond. One of the risks associated with the spending cuts is that they will make it ever more difficult to ensure that services are sensitive and responsive to the differing needs of offenders, and particularly those who may be most vulnerable or marginalised. In this challenging economic climate, the more that is known about resettlement needs, the greater the chances of effective provision.

## Aims and methods of the study

The main questions addressed by this study were the following:

- 1 What are the major resettlement needs of offenders from BAME groups?
- 2 To what extent and in what ways do the resettlement needs of BAME offenders differ from those of non-BAME offenders?
- 3 What are BAME offenders' experiences of resettlement services, and do they encounter particular barriers to accessing services?
- 4 Should specialist resettlement services be made available for BAME offenders and, if so, of what kinds?

There were two main components to the research we undertook to tackle the above questions: first, a literature review; secondly, an empirical, qualitative study.

The literature review covered the range of existing research that (directly or indirectly) considers the resettlement needs of and provision for BAME offenders. It established that, to date, very few studies had addressed this topic in any depth, at least in the United Kingdom. A full report on the literature review is available (Phillips *et al.* 2010). Chapter two of this report comprises a summary of the key issues to emerge from the review, and thus sets out the broader context of our own research findings.

Our empirical study took the form of an investigation of the experiences and views of, first, BAME prisoners and ex-prisoners<sup>2</sup> and, secondly, statutory and non-statutory providers of resettlement services.<sup>3</sup> A qualitative methodology, whereby we explored respondents' perspectives and reflections on their direct experiences, primarily through semi-structured interviews, seemed most appropriate for a study seeking to uncover differing needs and expectations of individuals and the possible means of responding to these.

2 In this report, views expressed by both prisoners and ex-prisoners in common will be cited as coming from (ex-)prisoners, rather than the more cumbersome phrase, 'prisoners and ex-prisoners'. When the ex-prisoners' views are distinct from serving prisoners, the reference will not use brackets.

3 It was originally intended that we would, in addition, interview family members of prisoners and ex-prisoners. However, we had insufficient time to complete this element of the fieldwork.

## Interviews and focus groups with BAME prisoners and ex-prisoners

Our sample of BAME prisoners and ex-prisoners was recruited via prisons, probation offices and community-based service providers. The total sample comprised 113 individuals, as follows:

- 40 serving prisoners; interviewed on a one-to-one basis
- 25 serving prisoners; interviewed in focus groups
- 28 ex-prisoners currently on licence, following completion of custodial terms; interviewed on a one-to-one basis
- 20 ex-prisoners no longer on licence; interviewed on a one-to-one basis.

In each prison, a description of the project was circulated to BAME prisoners and the prison was asked to recruit people for interviews. In conducting the interviews, the research team made checks to ensure that different minority groups were represented. All the focus groups with serving prisoners, and all but three of the one-to-one interviews with serving prisoners, were held at five prisons, located in four different regions of England. The prisons were:

- One women's prison
- Two men's category B prisons (one of which is privately run)
- One men's category C prison
- One men's category D prison.<sup>4</sup>

The remaining three serving prisoners were interviewed at the office of a community-based service provider, which they were attending while on release on temporary licence (ROTL). The ex-prisoners (those who were on licence and those who had completed their sentences) were interviewed at three probation offices and at the offices of ten community-based service providers.

**Table 1.1** provides the gender, age, ethnicity and religion breakdown of the 88 prisoner and ex-prisoner respondents who were interviewed one-to-one (we did not collect data on age and ethnicity of the focus group respondents). As the table shows, around three-quarters of these respondents were male, and around two-fifths in the 30 to 39 age bracket. Just over half were black, while 18 were Asian and 15 from mixed backgrounds. Of four respondents who identified themselves as 'Travellers', three stated that they were 'Irish Travellers' and one that he was an 'English Traveller'. In terms of religion, the largest category was Christian (33 respondents), followed by Muslim (23).

Determining the number of respondents who were of foreign nationality was not straightforward, since there is no single definition of nationality, and the immigration status of several of the respondents was uncertain or contested. On the basis of how they described themselves, at least 18 respondents were foreign nationals, of whom six were from African countries, five from the Caribbean, three from the Middle-East, and the remaining four from elsewhere.

**Table 1.1: Characteristics of BAME prisoner and ex-prisoner respondents** (interviews only; n=88)

| Gender |    | Age   |    | Ethnicity |    | Religion      |    |
|--------|----|-------|----|-----------|----|---------------|----|
| Male   | 67 | 18-21 | 6  | Black     | 46 | Christian     | 33 |
| Female | 21 | 22-29 | 19 | Asian     | 18 | Muslim        | 23 |
|        |    | 30-39 | 36 | Mixed     | 15 | None          | 17 |
|        |    | 40-49 | 23 | Traveller | 4  | Rastafarian   | 4  |
|        |    | 50+   | 4  | Other     | 5  | Hindu         | 3  |
|        |    |       |    |           |    | Sikh          | 3  |
|        |    |       |    |           |    | Other/unknown | 5  |

<sup>4</sup> The category of a prison is based on its security level. The sample included a range of functions. The category B establishments were training prisons, which hold sentenced adult males, and generally offer better facilities for rehabilitation. The category C prison was a local prison, whose functions include serving the courts by holding remanded prisoners. These also tend to have a higher turnover of prisoners than category B prisons. The category D prison was an open prison, or resettlement prison, where the emphasis is on preparing people for release back into the community.

A breakdown of the lengths of current sentence (for those in prison and on licence) is shown in **Table 1.2**. Here we can see that the large majority of these respondents were serving sentences of two years or more.

**Table 1.2: Lengths of current sentence**

| Sentence length                                    | Prisoners | On licence |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Under 1 year                                       | 0         | 0          |
| 1 year - <2 years                                  | 3         | 8          |
| 2 years - <5 yearsw                                | 10        | 9          |
| 5 years - <10 years                                | 13        | 6          |
| 10 years+  | 11        | 1          |
| IPP (indeterminate sentence for public protection) | 0         | 1          |
| Life   | 2         | 1          |
| Unknown  | 1         | 2          |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>40</b> | <b>28</b>  |

The interviews and focus groups with prisoners and ex-prisoners were guided by a schedule largely comprising open-ended questions about the respondents' perceived needs on leaving custody; the extent to which they had or expected to receive help – from any source – to meet these needs and the strengths and weaknesses of such help; and their views on prisoners' resettlement needs more generally, and the relevance of ethnicity to needs and provision (see Appendix B).

### Interviews and focus groups with service providers

The interviews and focus groups with service providers involved a diverse mix of respondents, including practitioners, managers and senior managers; the agencies included the prison service, the probation service, and both prison-based and community-based non-statutory service providers. The total number of service providers who participated in the study (through interviews or focus groups) was 83; the following were the different components of this part of the research:

- 10 one-to-one interviews with probation staff
- 12 one-to-one interviews with prison staff
- 4 focus groups with a mix of prison staff and staff of prison-based non-statutory service providers, involving a total of 26 participants
- 31 one-to-one interviews with representatives of non-statutory service providers (all but one of which were community-based), including 10 organisations specifically oriented to minority ethnic individuals and communities
- 4 one-to-one interviews with senior NOMS officials.

The prison-based interviews and focus groups were conducted in a total of six prisons, one of which was in Wales and the others in four regions of England. The probation respondents were from two probation trusts.

The non-statutory service providers were wide-ranging. They included both national and local agencies, providing services such as housing, support for foreign nationals, and employment and training services; of these, many centred their activities on meeting the needs of offenders and ex-offenders. Ten of these agencies were specialist providers for BAME groups. More than half of the providers were based in London, while the remainder were in five other regions of England.

Like the interviews with prisoners and ex-prisoners, those with service providers were guided by an interview schedule. This focused on the resettlement and related provision offered by the respondent's own agency and any special provision made available for BAME offenders; the respondent's experiences of working with BAME offenders; and the respondent's views on the relationship between ethnicity and resettlement needs and the potential benefits (if any) of specialist provision for BAME offenders (see Appendix B).

An innovative aspect of the methodology was the use of peer researchers to conduct interviews. Six research assistants were contracted to the project, four of whom were from a minority ethnic background and five of whom had served prison sentences. The peer researchers were trained and supervised by Sylvia Chenery. They provided input into the project from design to the drafting of the report. Some of the researchers' reflections on their experiences of peer research are presented in Appendix A.



## Scope and limitations of the research

The original project brief specified that the research should focus on four main areas of resettlement provision: namely, education and employment; accommodation; mental health services; and family services. While the literature review maintained a focus on these themes, we decided to broaden the empirical study beyond them, since we wished respondents to identify for themselves the main areas of need, and felt that if we restricted the areas of enquiry we would not gain insight into the full range of relevant issues, or the inter-connections between different aspects of resettlement. Moreover, whilst it is acknowledged in both the policy and research literature that employment, education, accommodation and family relationships are major needs in resettlement, there is now a consensus that prisoners and offenders often have additional, inter-related needs which must be tackled in a comprehensive and holistic fashion – including concerns relating to physical and mental health, drug and alcohol misuse, financial difficulties, and attitudinal and motivational challenges (Lewis *et al.* 2003; Hedderman 2007; O'Shea *et al.* 2003).

As an empirical study involving a qualitative methodology, there are clear limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn from it. The views expressed in the interviews and focus groups cannot be claimed to be necessarily representative of all BAME offenders and service providers. Nevertheless, we were able to speak to sufficient numbers of individuals from diverse backgrounds to reflect a wide range of experiences of preparation for release. We believe that the value of this study lies in its ability to explore the attitudes and personal experiences of relatively small samples of prisoners, ex-prisoners and service-providers – including their concerns regarding discrimination that they may have suffered. Given the complexities of establishing whether different forms of racism and discrimination (direct, indirect, individual, institutional and structural) have occurred, such insights provide an essential lens through which to understand incarceration and broader experiences of resettlement.<sup>5</sup> It is also important to note that in focusing on respondents' perceptions and personal experiences, we have not sought to quantify the extent of discrimination faced by BAME offenders nor to assess other perceived barriers to accessing services; nor has the work involved any mapping of existing service provision.

An interesting aspect of the study findings, as will be discussed over the course of this report, is that many differences of opinion emerged from the interviews and focus groups. Some of these could have been predicted: it was, perhaps, not entirely surprising that while most of the prisoner and ex-prisoner respondents complained that resettlement provision from statutory services had been minimal or lacking, representatives of these services tended to give positive assessments of the quality and range of provision. But it was also notable that among the prisoner and ex-prisoner respondents (as well as among service providers), views on the relevance of ethnicity to resettlement needs and provision were mixed – reflecting the multifaceted, contested nature of the subject under study. In presenting the findings of the research, below, we will seek to identify the areas of agreement and recurring themes in the empirical evidence, while also highlighting the areas in which there was the greatest variety of opinion and reported experience.

The views of prisoners and ex-prisoners, rather than service providers, will form the core of the discussion of our research findings. We believe that the one-to-one interviews we conducted with (ex-)prisoners were the richest source of data for this study, as they provided detailed first-hand accounts – usually very articulate and thoughtful – of what it means to deal with the transition from life in custody to life outside. The focus groups with prisoners also provided some similar data, although – by their nature – the group discussions offered less scope than the interviews to explore the respondents' views and experiences in close detail. Over the course of this report, we will also draw on the views of service providers, as these were expressed in interviews and focus groups, to supplement our discussion of the (ex-)prisoners' accounts.

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<sup>5</sup> An attempt is made at 'analytical generalisation' through a thematic analysis rather than the statistical generalisation associated with quantitative research using large, random samples.

## Understanding resettlement

The HM Prison Service website describes resettlement as follows:

Resettlement is where prisoners and their families receive assistance and support from the Prison and Probation Services, and voluntary agencies to help them prepare for life after prison. This includes advice about their entitlement to state benefits, training, education, work experience and preparation for release. The objective is to help prisoners return to normal life, get a job and home, and cope with life without re-offending. There are a number of initiatives that help us achieve this objective.<sup>6</sup>

Resettlement provision in England and Wales tends to be oriented around seven 'reducing re-offending pathways', which are set out in the NOMS *Reducing Re-offending National Action Plan* (Home Office 2004)<sup>7</sup> These are:

- 1 Accommodation
- 2 Education, training and employment
- 3 Mental and physical health
- 4 Drugs and alcohol
- 5 Finance, benefits and debt
- 6 Children and families of offenders
- 7 Attitudes, thinking and behaviour.

Prisons are required, by *Prison Service Order 2800: Resettlement* (HM Prison Service 2001), to consult with statutory, private or voluntary sector agencies that can assist prisoners: for example, the employment service, benefits agency, and probation service. Each prison must have a business plan for the delivery of resettlement support, which sets out the aims of resettlement and agrees on tasks assigned to the agencies involved. Thirty prisons are designated in the resettlement estate, and these provide a range of programmes and opportunities, including help with housing and both paid and voluntary work, specifically to promote resettlement.

The seven pathways were reflected, to a large extent, in what respondents – particularly the prisoners and ex-prisoners - had to say about resettlement needs. Specifically, most of the (ex-)prisoners said that accommodation and/or employment are most critical to effective resettlement. The issue of finances was also raised by many respondents, but tended to be linked to employment. Healthcare (specifically in relation to mental health) and the management of drug or alcohol problems were less frequently mentioned, but their centrality to the resettlement of

some individuals was made clear. Many respondents stressed that supportive families, and a commitment to family responsibilities, can play a vital part in the resettlement process.

The seventh official 'pathway' is 'attitudes, thinking and behaviour'. Certainly, a great many respondents stressed that attitudinal change was a necessary part of successful resettlement. But whereas the seventh 'pathway' is concerned with offending behaviour work and associated cognitive change, the respondents spoke of attitudinal change in a more personal sense. Their emphasis was on the focus and motivation that is a prerequisite for meaningful, positive change in the way one lives one's life. Finally, an additional - eighth - element of resettlement emerged from our research: namely, the need to feel included within a local community and/or broader society.<sup>8</sup>

On the basis of our research findings, then, we can talk about eight core elements of resettlement – six of which reflect the first six official 'pathways', while the seventh can be defined as 'focus and motivation' and the eighth as 'social inclusion'. Different respondents accorded weight to differing combinations of these elements (with accommodation and employment being most frequently cited as important); but they were highly consistent in referring to them as *generic* rather than *ethnically specific*. In other words, the main elements of resettlement were seen as potentially important to all prisoners, irrespective of ethnicity and other forms of social identity. At the same time, respondents stressed that these generic elements are individually experienced: that is, a given offender's needs or strengths in relation to any of them is in large part dependent on his or her individual circumstances.

However, it was also made clear in our interviews - with (ex-)prisoners and service providers alike - that resettlement needs and strengths are mediated by social, economic and political factors. For example, a well-qualified ex-prisoner seeking employment will struggle if potential employers discriminate against people with criminal records, or if there is simply no work available; conversely, an efficient local employment service for ex-offenders might help him find work. The respondents differed markedly in their views on the extent to which, and ways in which, factors relating to ethnicity – including perceptions of racial discrimination within or outside the criminal justice system, and cultural differences between ethnic groups - mediate resettlement needs and strengths. We will look at the differing conceptions of the interplay between generic, individual, BAME-specific and other factors in our discussion of the research findings in the chapters that follow.

6 <http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/adviceandsupport/beforeafterrelease/resettlement/>

7 See also the NOMS *National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan* (2005)

8 It is noted in much of the criminological research on desistance from offending that an integral part of this process is the development of a sense of social inclusion, or what Uggen et al (2004) describe as 'civic reintegration'.



### **Structure of the report**

This report comprises six chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter Two provides a summary of the literature review to contextualise the discussion of our empirical study which follows. It also notes the gaps in existing knowledge about the resettlement needs of BAME offenders.

Chapters Three to Five set out the main findings of our interviews and focus groups with BAME prisoners and ex-prisoners, and with statutory and non-statutory providers of resettlement services. The first of these chapters looks at what we have defined as the eight core elements of resettlement. This is followed, in Chapter Four, by a discussion of the ways in which BAME status potentially impacts on resettlement needs and experiences. In Chapter Five, the focus shifts to the provision of resettlement services; here, we consider the respondents' accounts of the services currently available, any barriers to access to or engagement with these service, and whether there is a need for specialist provision for BAME offenders.

Finally, Chapter Six concludes the report by highlighting the key issues to emerge from our research, and considering the implications of these for the development of policy on resettlement.

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# The context: findings of previous studies

# 2

## Resettlement and Social Exclusion

Offender resettlement is a complex issue, not least because many offenders have experienced significant social and economic disadvantages before their imprisonment. As the Social Exclusion Unit (2002) report *Reducing Re-Offending by Ex-Prisoners* clearly demonstrated, prisoners are a severely excluded group in society. Prisoners are more likely than the general population to have been in care, to have had a family member convicted of an offence, to have weak family ties, to have suffered family and relationship breakdown as adults, to be young fathers, or in the case of women, lone parents. Prisoners have typically suffered disruption in their educational careers as a result of truancy, exclusion, or having left school at the earliest opportunity, leaving them often with few or no educational qualifications or skills. A survey of 1457 newly sentenced prisoners from 49 prisons conducted in 2005/6, for example, found that 58% had regularly truanted from school, 40% had been permanently excluded, and 46% had no qualifications at all (Stewart 2008).

Irregular or low quality employment is another disadvantage which many prisoners have faced. In Stewart's (2008) study of newly sentenced prisoners, 13% had never had a job, and only 33% were in employment in the four weeks before their custody began. Unemployment was eight times higher among people entering prison than in the general population. For those undertaking casual cash-in-hand work, wages were typically low. There is also some indication that homelessness disproportionately affects prisoners compared to the general population: Stewart (2008) reported 8% of newly sentenced prisoners were homeless or sleeping rough prior to their imprisonment. Physical health is markedly worse for prisoners; they are more likely to suffer a long-standing illness or disability (27% in Stewart's 2008 study), to be affected by HIV, hepatitis, and to be smokers, than the general population as a whole (see also Plugge *et al.* 2006). Prisoners have far higher rates of mental, neurotic, psychotic or personality

disorders, and have reported higher levels of alcohol or drug misuse compared with the population as a whole (SEU 2002; Stewart 2008).

These dimensions of disadvantage and social exclusion disproportionately affect people of BAME origin (SEU 2000). Black Caribbean, black African, and mixed race children are over-represented among looked-after children (DCSF 2009a). Rates of lone parenthood, which is associated with household and child poverty (McKnight 2009), are highest for the black and mixed ethnic origin groups compared with the majority white ethnic group, and those of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin (ONS 2003). Education outcomes (attainment and school exclusion) are poorer for some BAME groups, particularly those of Gypsy/Roma and Irish Traveller origin, and also those of Pakistani, black Caribbean and mixed-white/black Caribbean heritage (DCSF 2009b, c). Similarly, employment disadvantage can be seen in unemployment rates for those of minority ethnic origin (excluding Indian, Chinese and Other Asians) being double that of the white majority ethnic group (Hills *et al.* 2010).

Levels of statutory homelessness are higher among the BAME population compared with the majority white population (Gervais and Rehman 2005), as are rates of obesity, self-reported diabetes, and high blood pressure (Sassi 2009).

The *Count Me In* (Care Quality Commission 2010) survey of inpatients in mental health and learning disability hospitals found an over-representation of BAME patients – 10% were of black or mixed black/white ethnicity, 4% were of other white ethnicity, 3% were Asian, 2% were white Irish, 3% were Chinese/Other and 76% were white British (Care Quality Commission 2010). The criminal justice referral route was most marked for minority ethnic individuals, particularly those of mixed white/black African and mixed white/black Caribbean women, black African women, black Caribbean women, black African men, black Caribbean men, and mixed other men (Care Quality Commission 2010).

Frank Keating has described the influence of mutual distrust between mental health services and black communities as circles of fear. Commenting on evidence that black men tend to receive harsher services, including seclusion and restraint, he writes, "African and Caribbean men have negative perceptions of mental health services and therefore delay seeking help. This means that more coercive methods are used to engage them with mental health services," (Keating, 2009; see further, Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, 2002). Keating concludes that changes are needed to build trust between mental health practitioners and black male clients.

Overall, then, some BAME groups are disproportionately disadvantaged in education, employment, housing and health. This continuing social and economic disadvantage among BAME communities is likely to compound BAME offenders' attempts to reintegrate into their communities when they are released from prison or whilst they are serving community sentences. The ways in which social disadvantages can combine to reinforce and mediate any impact of ethnicity has been described as amplification: an escalation of cumulative effects that rules out a simplistic one-to-one link between race and resettlement outcomes, such as accommodation, employment, or desistance.

## Resettlement and BAME Offenders

Recent research by May *et al.* (2008) with a representative sample of 4,898 prisoners who had received various resettlement services whilst in prison, found that not having a job or accommodation arranged on release increased the odds of reoffending after one year by 1.43 times; having no visits in prison from family members increased the risk of reoffending 1.39 times; and having a drug problem prior to imprisonment increased the odds by 1.87 times.

The literature that is more specifically focused on resettlement and BAME offenders is relatively sparse (Phillips *et al.* 2010), but given BAME over-representation in the prison system, longer sentence lengths, and experiences of social exclusion, marginalisation, and racism in the criminal justice system, it seems likely that resettlement difficulties will be compounded for BAME offenders (NACRO, 2002; Williams *et al.* 2007).

Whilst access rates to resettlement services by ethnic origin are not available because of the absence of ethnic monitoring of referrals (Her Majesty's Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation 2001), there is some suggestion that BAME prisoners' *perceptions*

of access to resettlement advice in prison may be poorer than others. In HMIP's (2005) inspection of race equality, *Parallel Worlds*, BAME prisoners felt they were less able to access people and facilities in prison which facilitated successful resettlement (see also NACRO 2002; 2008; HMIP 2009). Similarly, in NACRO's (2008) survey of prisoner perceptions, while 14% of white prisoners reported being dissatisfied with their access to education in prison, the survey found that 19% of mixed race and Chinese/Other prisoners were dissatisfied with access, and this increased to 22% of Asian prisoners and 28% of black prisoners (see also Hassan and Thiara 2000).

Similarly, a recent scoping study of Muslim prisoners by NACRO and EMTEP (2009) found that resettlement advice was viewed by prisoners as a weak or non-existent aspect of the prison regime. There was little or no contact with personal and probation officers, and many reported dormant rather than active sentence plans. There was also a lack of awareness of supportive services that could assist Muslim prisoners on release. These sentiments contrasted with Category C prison officers' views on resettlement which pointed to comprehensive education and training options for prisoners, as well as resettlement advice.

There has long been a concern about the extent to which BAME prisoners are disadvantaged in work allocations whilst in prison (Genders and Player, 1989; Edgar and Martin, 2004; Cheliotis and Liebling 2006; NACRO 2008), although in the recent NOMS Race Review ethnic monitoring did not always provide evidence of differential treatment in this regard (NOMS 2008). NACRO's (2008) survey of prisoner perceptions found that whereas 28% of white prisoners and 27% of Asian prisoners were dissatisfied with their access to work, 40% of black prisoners, 35% of Chinese/Other prisoners, and 33% of mixed race prisoners reported being dissatisfied. Using focus groups of Gypsy, Traveller and Romany prisoners, NACRO (2009) similarly found that these prisoners perceived unequal access to work as a result of racial prejudice. High value was placed, therefore, on learning a trade, self-employment and business start-up advice to assist future nomadic resettlement. In research examining women's resettlement needs, Hamlyn and Lewis (2000) noted that BAME women reported less choice (58%) than white women (67%) in the work that they did in prison. The former were also less likely than their white counterparts to believe that prison work gave prisoners new skills which could help them on release, and were more likely to consider that prison work might be used as a form of punishment. The Prison Service *Women and Young People's Group* found that BAME female prisoners were more often employed in contract workshops whereas white women were more likely to be employed in jobs offering learning and skills

training with vocational qualifications attached (see also NACRO 2001). This may hinder BAME women offenders in their resettlement efforts, particularly as such skills may increase confidence and self-esteem which are essential in attempts to re-enter the labour market. Among foreign national prisoners, the need to earn money to send home to dependants may outweigh any personal benefit from enhanced skills (HM Prison Service 2006).

In the only empirical study of BAME resettlement in the West Midlands, Sharp *et al.* (2006) found that community organisations identified BAME ex-offenders' needs as resulting from their societal experiences linked to deprivation, participation in gangs, community stigma from offending, and language or cultural barriers, but also their mistrust of mainstream 'authoritarian' organisations (see also Curry 2008). This may be particularly the case in mental health care; where an individual's previous contact with statutory services has been experienced as coercive, they may have good reason for being suspicious of their involvement in his or her future treatment. Thus, as NACRO (2007) have observed, the high use of psychiatric remands and transfers to secure mental health environments has left many BAME communities and mental health groups concerned about the transfer of individuals from one potentially discriminatory institutional setting to another (see also Keating, 2009).

In Sharp *et al.*'s study there was a consensus that faith-based services could assist in responding to BAME offenders' resettlement needs, particularly because of their flexible, non-judgmental and forgiving approach. However, it is also worth noting that there might also be particular circumstances in which the offenders' faith group reinforces their social exclusion and stigma. Moreover, as Sharp *et al.* note, such organisations tended to be vulnerable to disruptions in service delivery because of their short-term funding; they also often struggled with bureaucracy and confidentiality issues in relation to the sharing of information about offenders. Moreover, in one probation area studied by Sharp *et al.*, resettlement was regarded as a generic issue rather than one that had specific implications for BAME offenders.

Sharp *et al.* (2006) also interviewed 72 male and female BAME offenders (36 black, 20 Asian, 12 mixed race and four from other ethnic origins), many of whom were aged 21-30 years and had been on short sentences. The majority had had no contact with resettlement services and were typically unaware of resettlement provision. Accommodation was cited as the single most important concern for these offenders. Problematic drug users noted the need for continuity of provision on release, but more generally BAME offenders appeared to be unaware

of the community and voluntary sector services available to them as these were seemingly rarely identified to them by prison or probation staff (see also Hassan and Thiara 2000). Importantly, racism and racial discrimination were not mentioned as exacerbating resettlement difficulties by the majority of BAME offenders in the study. Sharp *et al.* therefore conclude that resettlement needs are generic and not ethnically-specific.

Linked to these issues, the question also arises as to whether service providers should attempt to match their clients/users, perhaps to cope with the difficulties of accessing and engaging BAME groups (Fox *et al.* 2005; see also NACRO 2010). Little research has been conducted in this area, but Calverley *et al.*'s (2004) study of black and Asian offenders on probation found that only one-third wanted to be supervised by a same-ethnicity officer and 5% wanted BAME-only programmes. Powis and Walmsley's (2002) review of probation provision for black and Asian offenders found some limited support for separate and specialist programmes with signs of their success in reducing reconviction rates. Hassan and Thiara's (2000) research with black prisoners found strong support for rehabilitative programmes targeted at black prisoners and run by independent black officers or outside agencies.

Resettlement problems facing foreign national prisoners tend to be more acute among BAME foreign national prisoners (Prison Reform Trust, 2004; NACRO 2005; HMIP 2006; 2007). Asylum status, language barriers, and the frequent absence of family contact present particularly difficult issues in relation to the resettlement of foreign national prisoners, many of whom are of minority ethnic origin.

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# Elements of resettlement

# 3

Our interviews with prisoners and ex-prisoners included a number of general questions about the resettlement process. For example, we asked them about what, if anything, they had found or expected to find difficult on leaving custody, and the kinds of resettlement help they would have most welcomed (see Appendix B). From these discussions, we identified eight core elements of resettlement – six of which reflect the ‘reducing re-offending pathways’ set out in national policy on resettlement. The eight elements are as follows:

- 1 Accommodation
- 2 Employment
- 3 Finances
- 4 Mental health
- 5 Management of drug/alcohol problems
- 6 Family ties
- 7 Focus and motivation
- 8 Social inclusion.

Overwhelmingly, the prisoner and ex-prisoner respondents perceived the needs arising in these elements of resettlement as generic rather than related to ethnicity or other forms of social identity. In this chapter, we will look in some detail at how the respondents spoke about each of the elements, and particularly at the prisoners’ and ex-prisoners’ perceptions of their own individual needs and strengths in relation to them.

Rather than dealing with each of the eight elements separately, we will address the issues of ‘employment’ and ‘finances’ together, as respondents tended to merge them; likewise we will look at ‘mental health’ and ‘management of drug/alcohol problems’ jointly, as discussions of both subjects tended to raise similar concerns. This chapter does not incorporate data from the service provider interviews, as these interviews did not include the same general questions about the resettlement process as were posed to the

prisoners/ex-prisoners. However, it should be noted that much of what was said by the service providers broadly supported the comments of the prisoners and ex-prisoners about the main aspects of resettlement.

## Accommodation

Frequently, the prisoners and ex-prisoners said in interviews that having stable, suitable accommodation after leaving prison was their first and most essential requirement. Without a place to live, they said, they had no chance of making any kind of progress in other spheres of their lives. For example, claiming benefits, or just starting the process of looking for work, is very challenging for someone who does not know where he will be from one day to another.

Many respondents spoke of being fortunate enough to have family with whom they could live on leaving custody; others, however, had evidently struggled in the past, or anticipated struggling in the future, to find a home. Some were required to stay initially in hostel accommodation, as part of their conditions of release, but complained of the particular difficulties that this could cause; for example:



The hostel wasn’t a good thing and I don’t think I had the support of the probation staff there. In fact I was begging my probation officer to let me leave ASAP, because it was causing me to be more depressed and I started to get my cravings back again, because I was surrounded by drug and alcohol users, so the bail hostel was the worst thing for me.

(35-year-old black woman, on licence)

Some individuals have a pressing need to be housed away from their old neighbourhoods when they leave custody. One, a 21-year-old mixed race woman who was coming to the end of the custodial term of a seven-year sentence, repeatedly spoke of her desire to live ‘in a different area’, where she would be away from her ‘old circle of friends’ and be able to ‘make a fresh start’. Her story illustrates the overlap between the pathway of housing and motivation. Another

prisoner, a 30-year-old black man serving a 12-year-sentence, said if he was not able to relocate to a new city he would be under direct threat from gang members who would be looking for him.

Some respondents described experiences of homelessness on leaving prison, and explicitly linked this to continued offending:



I was out for three days – ended up in a crack house and then next thing you know I’m on shoplifting, aggravated TDA [taking and driving away] and shit like that – I had to write a letter to the judge to tell him: ‘Bwoy, I know you owe it to society to lock up people like me but you’ve gotta hear what I gotta say – I come out of prison – I’ve only been out three days – I had nothing – I’m sleeping in a car – I’ve got nowhere to live – I’ve got nowhere to go – and then now - I’m ended up in a crack-house – doing crack! And then look what I’m up for now!’ ...

(45-year-old black man; completed sentence)

The risk of homelessness, and its associated problems, is perhaps highest for foreign nationals leaving prison, and particularly those with uncertain immigration status. One respondent was a 31-year-old black African woman, who had recently completed a short sentence. She described herself as a ‘long-stayer’, as she had lived in the UK since she was 13, without having regularised her status. She spoke at some length about the difficulties of taking care of herself and her young child when she had no legal right to work or to claim benefits. She described being homeless and having to move from one place to another; and her fear that Social Services were going to take her baby from her. In such a situation, she said, ‘obviously you turn to crime, isn’t it’; although what she wanted was ‘the chance to prove ... that I can actually be good’.

The irony of leaving custody, some pointed out, is that you lose the stability and structure that you had while inside. A 31-year-old mixed race woman who had completed her sentence described leaving prison with £90 in her pocket and nowhere to live, having been ‘chucked back into the world - everything’s really fast; you don’t know where anything is’. Another respondent said:



Until you’ve got [stable accommodation], you may as well probably be in prison. Cause then you’ve got a stable base! It sounds crazy, but you’ve got a stable base while you’ve been in there. Then all of a sudden people have kind of pulled the rug from under you ...

(30-year-old mixed race man, on licence)

## Employment and finances

Like accommodation, gaining employment was often described as a fundamental step which, once achieved, would then enable the individual to make other positive developments. Many respondents emphasised that they had eagerly undertaken education or training while in prison, or since leaving prison, as part of a concerted effort to improve their chances of employment. Few, however, underestimated the difficulties of finding work, especially if one has a criminal record (the issue of discrimination towards ex-prisoners will be discussed in the next chapter).

Again as applies also to accommodation, *lack* of employment was explicitly described by many respondents as a potential cause of re-offending. Often the main concern was simply with getting enough money to live on, rather than employment per se:



How am I going to get a job with a criminal record...? I was done for robbery, I’ve got no money, I am going to have to go back to crime...

(21-year-old mixed race man in prison, serving a 3.5-year sentence)



I just want a second chance, to do my job as a security guard and to continue with my life... because when you have some money you don’t do harm to anyone...

(44-year-old black man, on licence)

For others, employment was important, not only to meet financial needs but also to keep oneself busy and thus out of trouble:



The first thing [you need when leaving prison] is money. Cause if I ended up back in Crown Court right now for any offence, it would be something to do with money.... Just a matter of getting occupied .... You’re occupied, that way you can’t commit a crime; number two, you’re getting paid ....

(23-year-old black man; completed sentence)



The emotional impact of unemployment was also evident. For those who had always worked prior to entering prison, and now found themselves in a highly precarious work and financial situation, the blow to self-esteem could be immense. A 30-year-old Asian man, currently on licence, had been imprisoned for a violent offence: he had been involved in a fight with a drunken customer while working as a taxi driver. He spoke of how difficult it was to find work with a criminal record for violence, and told us:



I am good person, family member....responsible person...been in this country 8 years, and never sit down one day at home...always work. Finding a hard time...can't now find a job....am looking every day. I made mistake and it seems I'm a bad person, which I'm not....I have lot of experience in other types of work. Very responsible person, never smoked, never drunk...family person.

For some respondents, employment was not a realistic option, and the financial pressures could be immense. Among those who faced the most difficult circumstances were some foreign nationals:



Once I come back to the community, even I haven't got a penny to spend. I applied for job seeker's allowance; they said ok, but because of many other things, for example my status and my leave to remain in the country, for nearly two months I didn't have a penny to spend - I relied on friends, relatives - I am shameful to go to see them because I haven't got the money to pay them back.

(Asian man in his 50s, recently released on a life licence after serving 13 years in custody)

## Mental health and management of drug/alcohol problems

The majority of prisoner and ex-prisoner respondents said that they did not have significant needs relating to mental health or to misuse of drugs or alcohol. On the other hand, those who did indicate that they had mental health or substance misuse problems made it clear that there was little or no chance of successful resettlement unless these needs were effectively addressed.

A stark example of this was provided by a 28-year-old Irish Traveller interviewed in custody, who had been recalled during the licence period of her three-year sentence. The recall, she explained, followed a failure to attend probation appointments which was, she said, due to her serious mental health problems (paranoid schizophrenia): 'My Mum tried to tell them that I needed sectioning at the time, but they weren't listening.' Now that she was in custody again, she was satisfied with the healthcare she was receiving, and was also relieved to have been told that the care would continue after her release. On previous occasions, she said, she had been released from custody 'just with £40, nowhere to go, no help or advice – nothing.'

A 47-year-old black British man described being told by a prison officer, as he left prison, 'I will see you next week'. He explained:



I knew why he said that, because I was on class A drugs and everything so the money I got [the discharge grant], I thought: this ain't going nowhere, I might as well go and get a draw and go and stay in a squat, and I couldn't stay with my family because I had no money to bring in...

Ultimately, however, he received the help he needed and coped with life outside; he said of his current situation: 'I'm back in society, I'm getting respected.'

Another respondent, a 41-year-old black British man with mental health problems, had a similar story to tell about leaving prison (many years ago):



When I got discharged, the screw said to me, 'I'll see you next week,' and he put his thumbs up to me, and I looked at him and said, 'I'm not coming back here.' But they discharged me with no medication and when I got discharged if it wasn't for my sister, I'd be back in prison the same day.

But three weeks later, he said, he was in hospital, having been sectioned; and thereafter continued to offend. In another interview, we were told that the very experience of leaving prison without support can exacerbate mental health problems:



When I came out of prison to be honest I didn't get any help really because I'm having immigration problems so that made my situation more difficult. I wasn't myself again. I felt so bad, mentally I've never in my life felt suicidal - I experienced it for the first time: no home, no job, immigration problem going on as well.

This respondent, a 45-year-old black man, explained that he then went to a GP, was referred to a psychiatrist, and subsequently spent 40 days in hospital; today he continues to have mental health problems, but is receiving consistent healthcare.

## Family ties

Many respondents spoke of having strong, positive relationships with family members. A number said that they had lived with, or would be able to live with parents, siblings or partners on release from prison – whether on a temporary or permanent basis. Family members offered other kinds of help and support also; this included, in some cases, jobs within family businesses.

Thus it was clear that family support was often critical to the success of the resettlement process. However, there may also have been a degree of romanticism – or perhaps defensiveness – in what some respondents said about family. For respondents currently in custody, it was possible that the reality of what families offered after release would not live up to the high expectations. A 19-year-old mixed race young man, who was currently on licence and had had so many previous custodial sentences that he had 'lost count' of them, told us firmly, 'My relationship with my family's perfect.'

Some of the men we interviewed emphasised they were motivated to make a success of resettlement by their children: they wanted to be able to provide for their children, and to be a positive example for them. 'What's keeping me strong is my kids,' said a 38-year-old black man, who had just completed his licence. He elaborated: 'I'm still struggling – but at the end of the day, I'm not gonna go out there, commit no crime again – I'm done with that. I got kids and that, to think about.'

Many of the women we spoke to had young children, for whom they had been the primary carers before they entered custody; and they tended to see parenting as a more complex matter. One such respondent, a 35-year-old mixed race woman now on licence, talked about the great distress her children had suffered because she was serving an indeterminate sentence for public protection (IPP):



It's incredibly hard with the IPP because I stopped phoning home and speaking to my kids because they wanted to know when I was coming home and I couldn't give them a date - all I could say was, 'I don't know, I don't know, I don't know when I'm coming home.' And it's punishment for me, but it's also punishment for them, and if they've got nothing to look forward to then it's mind-blowing and damaging to them, and I reckon that the way my son's turned out is due to the fact that I went to prison and I couldn't explain to him, because we had a very, very close relationship and he plummeted when I got locked up.

For the mothers we interviewed, the gradual rebuilding of relationships with their children was an integral and fundamental element of the resettlement process. Release on temporary licence (ROTL) was often seen as playing a vital part in this. The following exchange about ROTL took place during a focus group with eight women prisoners:

- R1: Maintain family ties just be able to go and see my children every now and again, that's what ROTL's about and what's the point in saying ... if you're well behaved you can earn it and then they don't let you do it ...
- R2: That is a form of resettlement - maintaining family ties ...
- R3: I think it's also important just for them to get used to having their mum back; you know, maybe just a few months before to give them that extra town visit because it's a shock to the system - because mum's been gone for a year, then all of a sudden she's back.
- R2: I've got a three and a five-year old and I've always been with them; I've never spent a night away from them and so when I came to jail in April – it's been five months now and I'm due to be out in December on HDC [home detention curfew]. So surely I should be able to start building up getting my children used to seeing me again.



## Focus and motivation

A recurring theme in many of the comments about resettlement was that the success of the process depends, above all else, on the individual's commitment and determination to *make* it a success. While the practical difficulties relating, for example, to finding accommodation and work could be great, it was stressed that much could be achieved if the individual was focused on these goals and highly motivated to achieve them. A 21-year-old black woman described the range of business courses, including some distance learning courses, she had completed during the four years she had so far spent in custody, and said that her studies 'keep me [from] thinking about my incarceration, and I know that with my qualifications, the sky's the limit'. (She was to return to her home country on her release, where she hoped to get a job in human resource management.)

Among the respondents who were no longer in prison, several spoke of their personal achievements since leaving custody:



I've kept myself focused in jail, and I had things to focus on, but when I got out, I've just tried to stick to that, really ... Focusing on getting a job, passing my driving test, getting my flat. Just things to help me out myself, really. ... It's been going really good, apart from the job front, at the minute. But ... the next phase is the job, really. I should be able to get a job though, cause I've done a lot of courses since I've been out. ... If I apply myself a lot more now I've passed my test ... I know I'll definitely get a job within the next month or two, even if it's agency.

(30-year-old mixed race man, on licence)

A 44-year-old black woman who had spent six years in prison, and was now on licence, spoke with some pride about her experiences of working as a volunteer for the voluntary organisation with which she now has a paid job:



It was hard you know [working as a volunteer], they give you your travelling expenses - yes it was hard to survive on £30.00. At the end of the day, if I didn't put in the effort in the job, I wouldn't be where I am now, so sometimes it is hard, you've got to sacrifice and bite your teeth and just do it.

Many respondents recognised that while it is challenging enough to be motivated and focused while in custody, it is harder still to maintain that positive outlook when one leaves the structured prison environment and confronts the multiple challenges of building a new life outside.

A 21-year-old mixed race woman, currently in prison on a seven-year sentence, spoke with great energy and enthusiasm about her plans for her future. In prison, she said, she had learnt that 'You have to be strong, you have to be positive, you have to get up in the morning, get in the shower, and do what you have to do – you have to go out there.' She had completed a media course, got fit, and started reading and writing a lot. She was determined, on leaving custody, to get a good job, make new friends in a new area, be independent and 'feel good'. And yet she admitted also that she was 'still battling with a lot of things' and would ask herself: 'Is it all going to go according to plan? Am I going to end up living in a different area, am I going to end up getting a good paid job?'

Other respondents described their struggles to maintain their self-belief and focus when they left the security and structure of prison life:



When you're in prison, it's easy to think of what you want to do. When you come back out, and it's just the same thing you left before, your brain just goes – vvvvvv- - it rewinds back, and sometimes you do certain things without even realising that you've done that before in the past...

(23-year-old black man; completed sentence)



Prison isn't real life ... I had gate fright when I knew I was coming out after 4 years, because I didn't want to go home. I thought, I really don't want to go out there because I don't know what's out there anymore. I was OK for the first week but in the second week it sort of hit me that I wanted to go back to prison.

(35-year-old mixed race woman; on licence)

Another, a 21-year-old black man, talked of feeling 'lost, very lost' after he had left custody, and said that he had seen 'people who've done a lot longer than myself come out and not know which way to turn'. A 33-year-old black woman, who was still in prison, spoke of her sense of fear when she left the prison for the first time on ROTL: 'I don't wanna go outside. I'm stuck at the gate – I'm like, I wanna go back in.'

## Social inclusion

Some respondents spoke of resettlement as being, in part, a matter of developing a sense of belonging to a local community and/or to wider society. Clearly, social inclusion has both practical and emotional aspects. The former practical dimension includes issues we have already discussed such as accommodation and employment; it also encompasses seemingly more minor issues such as obtaining a bank account, having a National Insurance number, or registering with a GP.

The emotional aspects of social inclusion were discussed by a number of respondents as posing particular difficulties for them. They talked about the engrained mistrust of ex-prisoners, across society as a whole or within particular communities: people are reluctant to give ex-prisoners a second chance, or to believe they are as capable as anyone else of contributing to society. We will consider the issues of discrimination towards offenders and differing cultural attitudes to them in the next chapter of this report. Here, we will briefly look at some other emotional aspects of social inclusion, as articulated by our respondents.

Some respondents said that they had never felt part of a community before they entered prison, let alone after leaving prison. Others anticipated that it would be difficult, after leaving prison, to engage in 'normal' social interaction with people around them. This was a particular concern for some who were serving relatively long sentences. Thus, for example, a 25-year-old Asian man serving a seven-year sentence said that he felt he would need help, on release, with 'socialising with people – getting used to that again'. A 27-year-old Chinese man, also serving a seven year sentence, commented: 'I've been isolated from society for three years so I don't know if I will settle in the community'.

Some said that they wanted to be able to reintegrate gradually into the social world they had left many years before. A 39-year-old Irish Traveller, who had been recalled to custody after an initial four years in prison, said he should have been helped -



...to get back into society slowly. Like, I've done four years and they just release me. I didn't know what was coming to me, what was happening. I've got out there seen people, got on drugs, and come straight back. Where if they had let me out for a couple days at a time first, and slowly feed me back into the community, I think it would have been better.

A 31-year-old black man who had completed his sentence described the problems of social reintegration. Here we also see an echo of the comments cited above about the difficulty of maintaining a focus and motivation to change when one leaves prison for the more chaotic, disordered world outside:



I found it hard, and I was sent away for a long period of time, to integrate back into society. I found it hard: it was a big shock to the system and I think that, for a lot of people, it automatically can push them back into a way of living, even when they've got the best intentions, it can push them back into a way that they don't want to be living anymore. It's a comfort zone; to back to the drugs or go back to the old area, ... So I think that integrating someone back into society somehow - I haven't got the answers, but trying to slowly integrate the people back into society would be a good way forward. Especially for a lot of the long-termers.

An Asian man in his 50s, currently on licence, complained of the failure of the criminal justice system to reintegrate ex-prisoners in a meaningful way, meaning that they are even, in a sense, denied their humanity: 'They don't resettle you; they don't give you a personality to say I am a human being and I believe in community as anyone else in society.' The system leaves people with 'feelings of being unfit to be in society' said another respondent, a 44-year-old black man who had completed his sentence. And yet some respondents spoke of their success in rejoining and playing a full part in society, despite the struggles that this had entailed; among them was the 47-year-old black man we quoted above as someone who had successfully dealt with his class A drug problem, and now saw himself as 'back in society ... getting respected'.

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# Resettlement and ethnicity

# 4

As the material presented in the previous chapter illustrates, the prisoners and ex-prisoners interviewed for this study predominantly talked about their own and others' resettlement needs without reference to ethnicity. In response to general questions which did not prompt them to consider ethnicity, they spoke of resettlement as a process oriented around basic, human wants and needs (relating to accommodation, employment, family and the other matters discussed above) that are individually expressed and experienced. However, when prompted to talk about ethnicity, many of the respondents spoke of this issue as having relevance to resettlement needs and experiences.

## The relationship between ethnicity and resettlement

When we specifically asked the prisoner and ex-prisoner respondents if they felt that members of BAME groups tend to have different resettlement needs to white people, the responses were mixed. Of the sample of 88 prisoners and ex-prisoners whom we interviewed on a one-to-one basis,<sup>9</sup> around one-third unambiguously stated that they believed resettlement needs did not vary by ethnicity.

In contrast, one-fifth of the respondents denied a link between BAME status and resettlement needs, but added the important caveat that BAME offenders experience discrimination within and/or outside the criminal justice system which (they implied) potentially has repercussions for resettlement. A further two-fifths, or 40% of the sample, said that there is a relationship between ethnicity and resettlement needs; although they had a range of views on the nature of this relationship.<sup>10</sup> They referred, variously, to discrimination and general disadvantage; differing cultural needs and expectations; and barriers to

accessing services which – singly, or in combination – make resettlement a different and (usually but not inevitably) more difficult process for BAME offenders compared to white, British offenders. In total, then, we can say that around three-fifths of the (ex-) prisoner respondents implicitly or explicitly referred to the impact of BAME status on the resettlement process.

A large majority of service providers believed that ethnicity was relevant to the resettlement process. They tended to talk about this relationship in similar terms to the (ex-)prisoners: that is, they referred to discrimination and disadvantage, cultural differences, and barriers to access. They were not saying that resettlement needs are determined by ethnic status, as they, too, perceived needs to be generic. However, they seemed to view ethnicity as a factor which, potentially, *mediates* offenders' experiences of resettlement in a variety of ways. BAME status can, for example, help to shape a resettlement need, or it can impact on an individual's degree of need in relation to aspects of resettlement. And it can affect the ease or difficulty with which an individual addresses particular needs.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will look in some detail at the comments on ethnicity and resettlement. We will start by considering what was said about the generic nature of most resettlement needs. We will move on to look at how respondents viewed the impact of discrimination on the resettlement processes of BAME offenders: first, discrimination in wider society and, then, discrimination within the criminal justice system. We will conclude the chapter by looking at cultural factors which were said to be relevant to resettlement. (We will leave the subject of barriers to accessing services for the next chapter, which will focus on provision.) For the most part, this chapter will draw on the material we gathered from the interviews with prisoners and ex-prisoners, but we will supplement this with data from the service provider interviews.

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<sup>9</sup> We have not included the focus group participants in this analysis, as clear views tended not to emerge from the group discussions.

<sup>10</sup> No clear view on the impact of BAME status on resettlement emerged from the interviews with the remaining respondents.

## Generic needs

We have noted, above, that a majority of the (ex-)prisoner respondents felt that BAME status has some kind of impact on resettlement. Nevertheless, the immediate responses of many of the (ex-)prisoners, when asked whether resettlement needs vary by ethnicity, was to assert that everyone who is leaving prison has the same kind of needs. 'We're all equal,' said a 22-year-old Asian man, serving a 2.5-year prison sentence. A 44-year-old black man on licence commented: 'White or black, if you are in prison we are the same, we are the same thing...there is no difference...everyone has the same situation.'

Often, respondents gave strongly principled answers to questions about resettlement needs and ethnicity, pointing to the common humanity of all offenders:



Well, as I say, it doesn't make a difference if you are white or you are from whatever background you are . . . you have to look at the individual as a human being...We all need help when we leave prison, whether you are white, black, purple or Asian, African I don't care - the human being need help – that's how it is.

(38-year-old black man in prison, serving a 16-year sentence)



I think we're all the same, we're humans, humans. . . . They have basic needs. People are the same, we all have basic needs regardless of the colour or the race or the ethnicity basically.

(31-year-old black woman; completed sentence)



We're all brothers and sisters, no matter what colour we are.

(23-year-old black man; completed sentence)

Some went on to argue that it is wrong and counter-productive to talk about different needs among people from different backgrounds. A 43-year-old mixed race man, serving a 12-year prison sentence, commented: 'People are too quick to put a division there. Everyone is the same.' A participant in a focus group in a men's prison challenged the assumptions that seemed to be underlying our questions: 'It's people like you, asking the question, that make things difficult. Why would you assume the needs would be any different?'

While many emphasised the commonalities in resettlement needs, others stressed that it is at the individual level that these needs are shaped:



It depends on the individual, regardless of ethnicity or religion.

(37-year-old black man in prison, serving a 7-year sentence)



I would say it wouldn't really matter what background or culture you come from, I think it would depend on the individual and their needs, because this guy might be able to read and this guy might not, and this guy might have skills that are transferable and this guy might not; he might have a family or he might not.

(45-year-old Irish Traveller in prison, serving a 12-year sentence)



I think [needs are] all the same...it's just how every individual acts or reacts.

(42 Asian man; on licence)

The service providers we interviewed tended to talk in less emphatic terms than many of the (ex-)prisoners about the generic nature of resettlement needs. However, many did refer to offenders' common needs, and particularly to their shared experiences of disadvantage: 'If a young man comes from a disadvantaged background, then he's going to have to fight that, whatever colour he is' (voluntary provider). The importance of focusing provision on individual rather than group-level needs was also emphasised by several of these respondents: 'Every individual needs their specific needs identifying, irrespective of their background or race' (prison staff).

A minority of the service providers were somewhat defensive or even, possibly, slightly hostile to questions about the relationship between ethnicity and resettlement. Some prison staff commented that they believed ethnicity to be irrelevant to the resettlement process, since no prisoner had ever brought their attention to the issue. A resettlement officer in one prison, for example, commented: 'We have lots of women from different ethnic groups on the resettlement unit ... no one has ever said that they have particular resettlement needs.' A housing officer from the same prison said that she deliberately avoided asking prisoners if they had any particular housing needs related to their ethnicity: 'I wouldn't want to ask them in case they got offended by it, you know. So if they ask, then it's fine - I can look into that.'

A representative of a voluntary sector housing provider commented:



It's difficult because I don't see why BAME groups would require anything different to anybody else with regards to resettling back into the community, to date - we have a mixture of races we've housed; there hasn't been any specific needs any different kind of section of people.

## Discrimination and disadvantage in wider society

As made clear in Chapter Two of this report, the resettlement of all offenders is made more difficult by the social and economic exclusion they have typically experienced prior to their imprisonment. Such exclusionary experiences may be particularly entrenched in the case of BAME offenders, and racial discrimination may play a part in this disadvantage. Each specific problem - whether it be a lack of skills, high levels of debt, family tensions, or mental health, to list a few factors - amplifies the impact of the others.

For the purposes of this study, we are interested in the impact of racial discrimination on BAME offenders' chances of successful resettlement after leaving custody. The existing research evidence strongly indicates that former prisoners and people from BAME backgrounds make up two sectors of society which experience discrimination in relation to employment, housing, health services and other community facilities and services, and that BAME offenders experience particularly high levels of discrimination (see Chapter 2). It is, however, beyond the scope of this study – as a qualitative piece of research exploring the attitudes and personal experiences of relatively small samples of prisoners, ex-prisoners and service-providers – to quantify any such dual discrimination. We have focused on the experiences of offenders from BAME groups because their perspectives shed light on the subtle impacts of minority ethnic status on offenders' attempts to resettle. (The issue of engagement with services will be addressed in the next chapter.)

Discrimination against people with criminal records, and particularly those who have spent time in prison – irrespective of ethnicity – was widely recognised as a significant problem by the prisoner and ex-prisoner respondents. This discrimination, they argued, can hinder their efforts to obtain employment. Some also spoke of the impact of discrimination on the more intangible resettlement goal of social inclusion. Two respondents recounted experiences which vividly illustrate the difficulty of finding work when one has a criminal record:



I found out the hard way ... I try to avoid jobs where there is an application form. It's different in an interview - it rarely comes up - but on an application form you have to kind of do a giant tick to cover both boxes ... But [in an interview] I was sat down and the women said, 'Oh, you haven't got a criminal record, have you?' and I don't know what happened - my brain just said, 'Say no,' so I just said, 'No,' and she said, 'Oh, that's good, because technically by law we are supposed to treat everyone the same but they just get filed at the bottom of the pile.' I was just, like, 'Ha ha, OK, bye.' ... And then it got me thinking how many other places that I have [applied to] and admitted [to a criminal record] and have just gone - - [*screws up a piece of paper in his hand*].

(29-year-old black man; completed sentence)



Even when I was going for jobs, I remember going for a job at a sports store - I passed the interview, was offered the job, came back, signed the contract. There was a group of us there, everything was hunky dory. Then just jokingly she asked if anyone had a criminal record; me, being a numpty, said, 'Yeah, I do.' And she took me outside and said, 'Sorry, I can't give you the job,' ripped up the contract, got someone to come and search me as well, and then escorted me off the premises.

(23-year-old black man; on licence)

The prisoner and ex-prisoner respondents varied widely in the extent to which they regarded BAME status as a factor that amplifies the discrimination experienced by all offenders in mainstream society. Many respondents did not mention racial discrimination, while a few referred to it only for the purpose of denying its significance. Others, in contrast, spoke of their own direct or indirect experiences of racial discrimination, but in so doing referred primarily to discrimination within rather than beyond the criminal justice system (see below). Yet others – a substantial minority of the (ex-)prisoner respondents – talked about racism in wider society and its impact on the resettlement process; an impact that is heightened by the dual nature of the



discrimination faced by BAME offenders (referred to as 'double trouble' by one respondent). This latter group of respondents largely comprised black and mixed race men, whose complaints of discrimination tended to focus on stereotyping:



I'd say for a white man, it would be easier for him to cut his hair, dress in a suit, speak a bit differently and he'd be looked upon differently, unlike me ... No matter how I do or how I dress, speak or present myself, there's still a stereotype that come with being somebody from an ethnic background.

(31-year-old black man; completed sentence)



I think it is a lot more harder for [minority ethnic offenders] to resettle than it would be for someone from a white background ... I think they should have more support to overcome the stereotypical view that people have of them ... and not care about what people think about them. Because a lot of people will say they don't mind; they will front; they will stand up to you - but deep down when someone says something, or someone looks at them funny, it burns them. I don't care what you say: it burns them - you can feel it, but they don't show it. You bury that shit because you're trying to be a man.

(21-year-old mixed race man, on licence)

In some of these comments about discrimination, there was a suggestion that stereotypes are internalised, and thereby do greater harm to individuals:



Black people need more help with jobs because it is stereotyped that black people are lazy and some of them believe the hype and don't want to get a job; they live this life where they believe they won't get a fucking job, but if you try and help someone get a job, they will get a job.

(31-year-old black man in prison, serving a 15-year sentence)



Sometimes they see a black person and they will think more negatively of them than they would a white person ... I think they have got more of a bad 'name', but I think it is just getting rid of that stereotype really. It is difficult, though ... You see a black person – and then some of them don't help themselves; they will walk round with – you know – a bit of attitude – and what they're wearing ...

(27-year-old mixed race man on licence)

The service providers mentioned general discrimination against BAME offenders less often. Some, however, saw it as – in itself – a significant factor in the resettlement process. For example, a member of staff from a women's prison commented that the problems faced by all offenders when they leave custody are 'compounded' for those who are from minority ethnic groups, because society as a whole is 'racist'. In particular, he argued, BAME offenders can struggle to gain access to accommodation and to mental health services because – compared to white offenders – they suffer an additional layer of discrimination. Similarly, a representative of a voluntary organisation talked about the impact of the 'double discrimination' faced by BAME offenders. It was also suggested that discriminatory attitudes can make it difficult for BAME ex-prisoners who are housed in predominantly white areas – where they will have to 'fight harder to settle in' (prison staff).

A representative from a BAME-focused community organisation used the example of a white offender who seeks to relocate to a new community to avoid re-establishing offending networks. Such an offender is likely to have wider options than his BAME counterparts: 'A white prisoner can hide. They can go anywhere in the UK and start a new life'; whereas, in contrast, a BAME prisoner 'seeks out the familiar' rather than relocate, particularly if the new community is perceived to be hostile to BAME individuals. This difference has implications for the prison estate.

Those service providers who spoke about discrimination tended to refer to it as one of several interlocking factors which can hinder resettlement. Thus, for example, several spoke about the combined effects of poverty, discrimination and feelings of social exclusion. The impact of labelling and stereotyping, including the tendency of some BAME offenders to internalise negative stereotypes was commented upon explicitly by some. The interplay between minority ethnicity and gender was mentioned by two service providers – one of whom talked about the particular vulnerability of some black women, who are more susceptible than white women to exploitation by men; this, she said, is one of the main routes into offending by black women.

## Discrimination within the criminal justice system

As is true of racial discrimination within wider society, there is research evidence of discrimination within the criminal justice system, including in prisons; and the fact of unequal treatment in aspects of criminal justice (and, indeed, in mental health services) forms part of the backdrop to this study<sup>11</sup>.

With some exceptions, the service providers interviewed did not express serious concerns about discrimination in the criminal justice system. In contrast, several prisoner and ex-prisoner respondents spoke forcefully about the issue – although they had a variety of perspectives on it. Some complained, in quite general terms, about white offenders receiving more help with resettlement than their BAME counterparts:



There is a lot more stuff set up to help white offenders than those from the BAME community... Especially when it comes to medical, place to live, stuff like that - they are more focused on a white guy; over time they will help the white guy quicker than the black guy.

(47-year-old black man; completed sentence)



A white offender come out of prison and him get all of the help what him need. The Asian and the black - and like I says this is not in no offensive way or whatever - the Asian and the black, they come out and they get less care; they get less looked about. And that is just the reality about it. I don't take sides.

(28-year-old black man; completed sentence)

Some respondents cited specific examples of discriminatory practices within the prison service. For example, a respondent in an open prison said that it seemed to be much harder for BAME than for white prisoners to reach open conditions; while another respondent in the same prison said that among those who make it to open conditions, white prisoners have more opportunities to work outside prison in paid employment.

Open prisons typically have restrictions on the distance prisoners can travel for work in the community. Many open prisons are located in rural areas, and prisoners from cities are not normally allowed to seek work in their home areas. Prisoners who wish to work outside on ROTL need to find opportunities in towns near to the open prisons, i.e., with high concentrations of white British people. This may partly explain the lower

rates of ROTL for black and other minority ethnic prisoners (see Appendix C for data). However, the restrictions on working out do not seem to reduce the proportion of Asian prisoners who gain ROTL. Thus it appears that there are other factors, apart from the travel restrictions, which may lead to different impacts on different minority ethnic groups.

Just as some respondents talked about harmful stereotypes in wider society, others spoke of the stereotypes that have currency within the criminal justice system; for example, a 46-year-old black male prisoner, serving a life sentence, said of prison officers:



They see a stereotype where they see it on TV. Black gangs and everything else. And if there's about two or three black geezers together: 'It's a gang.' ... But if they see a few white geezers in the corner: 'Oh, they must be on heroin.'

A 31 year-old Asian man, serving a nine-year sentence, also talked about racial stereotypes of prisoners, and added: 'What they say here is, if your face fits, you get it; if your face doesn't fit, you're not getting nothing.' Resettlement provision, said a 30-year-old black prisoner on a 12-year-sentence, will only be improved if the people working in the relevant agencies get rid of 'that stereotypical nonsense' which leads them to assume that 'if [someone is] black, he's a gang member, probably running around shooting other black guys'.

A small number of respondents complained of overt racism in the criminal justice system; one of them was a 23-year-old Nigerian man who spoke of having been verbally abused by prison officers. He also commented that it was being non-British, rather than black, which made one most susceptible to prejudice and abuse (both from other prisoners and from prison staff). Perhaps the most impassioned account of overt discrimination was that of an Irish Traveller we interviewed: a 28-year-old woman who had been recalled to custody while on licence, and who had had several previous custodial sentences. She told us that there is 'so much racism towards Travelling people' in the prison; that Travellers receive much less help with resettlement than others because it is assumed that 'you're going to go out and live in a caravan'; and that they are always blamed if there is trouble in the prison because 'they always say, Travelling people are so bad ... And you're the one that's the liar, and you're the one that don't get believed.' Prison and probation staff need to learn, she said, that

<sup>11</sup> See for example NOMS Race Review 2008; Phillips and Bowling 2007 and Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health 2002.



We're the same as the next person. That it's important to treat us the same as the next person. ... I mean, we're all human at the end of the day. If you got cut you'd bleed; if I got cut I'd bleed, just the same way. We're human beings ... We feel helpless and hopeless, because we're in prison at the end of the day. We're not being believed. We're not being listened to. And we feel powerless because there's nothing we can do. We are here, right, in custody – and the people that are in here – the officers, and the members of staff, are authority over us. ....

This respondent also vehemently complained that black women in prison receive better treatment than people like her, because



Straight away they throw the racist card, and they say, oh, we're getting picked on because we're black African or black Jamaican or black Nigerian or something like that. But for us it's completely different ... And there's more in place for the coloured people, shall I say ... and it will be noticed so much quicker and it will be dealt with. Whereas us – it's just ... it does go on, it really does go on.

She was not alone in saying that some BAME prisoners play the 'race card' in an effort to secure preferential treatment. Others who used this phrase – thereby voicing their general scepticism about the validity of other prisoners' perceptions of discrimination – included a 43-year-old black male prisoner serving a 10-year sentence. He said: 'You do get the odd ignorant person with attitude who uses the race card – many Muslim and black prisoners pull the race card.'<sup>12</sup>

## Cultural factors

To what extent are the differing cultural features of BAME groups reflected in the resettlement needs of BAME offenders? There are, it appears, some aspects of cultural difference that have direct, practical implications for the resettlement process. The most obvious of these is language: individuals who cannot speak English are likely to face particular difficulties in meeting their resettlement needs and accessing services that could help them with the process. These individuals are most likely to be foreign nationals, for whom linguistic problems may be overlaid by other barriers to resettlement such as uncertain immigration status.

Some respondents mentioned cultural factors such as dietary preferences and requirements for religious practice as relevant to resettlement. However, it was not suggested that these aspects of culture determine the extent of resettlement needs. Rather, respondents wanted them to be acknowledged or, at most, taken into account in resettlement provision. Thus, by way of an example, an Asian (Muslim) prisoner said that a practising Muslim should not be housed above a pub, on leaving custody; another said that curfew arrangements should take into account wishes to attend a mosque several times a day.

In other words, respondents appeared to be calling for *cultural sensitivity and understanding* in provision, rather than provision tailored to specific cultural practices. Of course, concerns with culture do not exist in isolation. The following lengthy extract from an interview illustrates how concerns with culture can coalesce with experiences of different kinds of prejudice: clearly, the analytic distinction we have made in this chapter between 'overt discrimination' and 'cultural factors' is often blurred in the messy realities of everyday life.



I think, speaking as a black male, it's like they should take your ethnicity into consideration as well when finding you suitable accommodation ... For instance, I [was accommodated in a dry hostel] ... and from the time that I walked into the place there was – ooh - and I knew that was because of my colour: it's not something I'm imagining ... Because I was told that C- was a very multi-cultural area so I thought let me come to C-, and where [the hostel was located], it's predominantly white orientated, and the attitude that I got was from the staff. ... And I asked one of them, the woman in charge ... 'Where can I get some hard food, some West Indian food?' 'Oh,' she said, 'You'd have to go on the other side of town but you want to avoid there because it's not a good area.' And as soon as I came here, I thought: hello, I'm home - and she said it was not a nice area, when it's the area I feel safest in. Because when I'm up there [where the hostel is], every minute even if I crossed the road, they're locking their car doors - and you're thinking: yeah, I don't want your car.

(40-year-old black man on licence)

### Differing responses to offenders and offending

Cultural difference in responses to offenders was the cultural factor cited most often – by the (ex-)prisoner and particularly the service provider respondents - as relevant to resettlement. This broad theme was elaborated in contradictory ways, although usually with reference to the dynamics of BAME communities and families. For some respondents, these cultural

<sup>12</sup> See also Phillips and Earle (forthcoming).



factors potentially make the resettlement process easier for offenders from some BAME backgrounds; while other respondents perceived these factors as barriers to effective resettlement. The following is a summary of the main points that were made:

- BAME – and especially Asian - families and communities tend to be close-knit and offer strong support to ex-prisoners;
- BAME – and especially Asian – families and communities tend to ostracise ex-prisoners because of the shame associated with offending;
- BAME offenders, and the families and communities to which they belong, are often reluctant to acknowledge and address problems associated with offending, such as mental health and drug problems.

The first of the above arguments, according to which the resettlement process is aided by the strong relationships within some BAME groups, was voiced by several (ex-)prisoner respondents (most of whom were Asian) and a small number of the service providers:



I still speak to people in the community, and I know that all mosques will support you. The imams will welcome you with open arms. Most of the Muslim community are supporting my family and my wife says that she's being supported by the Muslim community.  
(44-year-old Asian man, serving a 4-year sentence)



In my experience, Asian prisoners have stronger family links, and they seem to get more help with their resettlement needs from their families outside.  
(prison staff)

In sharp contrast, a few of the (ex-)prisoner respondents spoke of ostracism and shame within some BAME communities – particularly, but not exclusively, Asian and Muslim communities – which makes the resettlement process much tougher; and among many of the service providers we interviewed, this issue was a particular and abiding concern:



I ask my friends, and community members ... but when they hear my situation and criminal record they stand back ... Even my community - they feel very embarrassed if anyone goes to prison...they feel great shame ... I made a mistake and had ten times more punishment.

(30-year-old Asian man on licence)



Crime and offending behaviour is frowned upon, especially from particular ethnic backgrounds ... [For example] in the Asian culture, the shame on the family and knock-on effect it has: to save face the family dissociate themselves from the offender, leaving him ostracised from his community...

(voluntary provider)



I think there is a deeper kind of humiliation that takes place within black families when someone goes to prison particularly if you are a woman

(voluntary provider)

The contradictory perceptions of minority cultures as supportive and unsupportive point to the obvious conclusion that families and local communities – include those that share a cultural or religious identity – differ widely in their responses to offenders and offending. Moreover, as one service provider observed, communities are changing over time in their attitudes and expectation. It is also highly possible that a family or community that offers support to an ex-prisoner in certain respects may, for cultural reasons, deny other forms of help. A number of the service providers said that within some BAME communities there is a general reluctance to confront problems such as drug misuse and mental health, which are often associated with offending:



You wouldn't expect high numbers of Asian prisoners to take up CARAT services [prison-based drug services], because it's a discredit on the community if a person is taking substances - very taboo subject still. So there's the embarrassment, to themselves, their families and community.

(prison staff)



Some cultures refuse to recognise mental health issues, and there needs to be an understanding of cultural differences in order to respond to specific needs.

(voluntary provider)

On prisoner, a 27-year-old Asian man serving a four-year sentence, spoke in stark terms about the stigma associated with mental illness:



In my experience, especially in my community, no one really knows about mental health problems. There's no awareness, and if you do have any mental health problems it's considered like a sin, or you're damaged.

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# Reflections on resettlement provision

# 5

In the interviews with prisoners and ex-prisoners, we asked if they felt supported and actively helped with resettlement by the prison service, probation and voluntary agencies. As we will demonstrate in the first part of this chapter, the large majority said that help from prisons and probation was severely lacking, although their views on voluntary sector provision were more mixed. For the most part, they did not relate their experiences of resettlement services to their BAME status, but spoke of poor provision as if it is a general fact of life within the criminal justice system.

The scope of our interviews with service providers was too limited for us to establish whether the prisoners'/ ex-prisoners' accounts accurately reflect the quality and availability of resettlement services. Thus we were unable to document objectively the extent and nature of individuals' access to resettlement services. However, the providers' comments provide some insight into possible barriers to BAME offenders' access to and engagement with provision – barriers which may partly explain the latter's reports of poor provision. The second part of this chapter will focus on these barriers to access and engagement. We will then, in the final part of the chapter, move on to consider the case for specialist resettlement provision for BAME offenders, as viewed by all respondents.

## Prisoners' and ex-prisoners' views on resettlement provision

### Help in prisons

Many respondents reported that while in custody they were receiving, or had received, no help whatsoever with resettlement:



I'd just like to state that the prison system is itself a complete failure. I am a testament to that, I've been in for eight years, I've seen next to nobody and I'm about to be released and I've seen nobody basically you know. If I'm supposed to be rehabilitated you're having a fucking laugh, they haven't done anything to rehabilitate me, they've just put me in a cell, give me a PlayStation and left me alone basically so I don't see how I have been rehabilitated - they've not worked with me in any way to change my characteristics (30-year-old black man in prison, serving 12-year sentence; due for release in 5 months)

Others complained that they had supposedly received assistance, but this was minimal, and often came much too close to the time of release to have any meaningful effect:



Most prisons simply pay lip service to resettlement needs. The people allocating housing go through the motions and tick the boxes. They will not do anything special for a prisoner. (Focus group participant in men's prison)



Someone from resettlement came to see me, and just asked me to sign this piece of paper – I signed it and then he went. Not very resettling, is it!

(19-year-old mixed race man, on licence)

Some acknowledged that resettlement help is available in prisons, but it can be difficult to find out about it – ‘it’s all hearsay, really, between prisoners,’ said a 30-year-old mixed race woman in prison. Very often, therefore, only the prisoners who are willing and able to be proactive will access help – such as the 23-year-old black woman, serving a 6.5-year prison sentence, who said: ‘You have to go looking for them. They don’t come and look for you. But sometimes you don’t know what to do or where to go to get it.’

In contrast, a number of respondents spoke positively about the resettlement support they had received in prison. Several who had had experiences of ROTL spoke of its importance; and a few had evidently greatly welcomed the opportunities provided by prison education services:



The education department...the teacher, J- - she was a good teacher. I will never forget that teacher. When I went inside I couldn’t spell my name...I don’t want to talk about it ‘cause every time I talk about it I feel like I want to cry...and when I come out now I can spell my name.

(36-year-old black man, on licence)

### Help from probation

Strong criticisms of probation were voiced by prisoners and (ex-)prisoners. They complained that the service was overly concerned with monitoring and enforcement, with the result that the supervision provided by probation officers offered little or nothing of value:



People are getting recalled for the silliest things as well, and then they’re wondering – why the prisons are so overflowing. ... It’s so much easier for a probation officer just to recall you back to prison. Then that’s it for her, you see. She doesn’t have to do no work – she doesn’t have to contact mental health, drug teams or counselling or housing or your benefits.

(28-year-old Irish Traveller, in prison on recall during the licence period of her 3-year sentence)



The only thing I know what probation do is put you back inside.

(27-year-old Asian man, in prison serving 4-year sentence)



[Probation should] just help. Instead of dictating: you can’t do this you can’t do that, or you will be penalised and blah blah blah. Just help, you know! A lot of these people want a chance to be able to get on some kind of course and turn their lives around.

(31-year-old black man; completed sentence)

Typically, the general attitude of probation officers towards their clients was said to be harsh and unsupportive. A 21-year-old mixed race woman in prison, serving a seven-year sentence, complained that the view of most probation officers was that ‘You’ve committed a crime and you deserve to be punished’. In the words of another respondent, a 38 black woman on licence:



Even though they are there to monitor you, keeping an eye on you, making sure you’re not a danger to society etcetera, they are very cold and I think they need to learn human people skills.

However, a minority of the respondents recounted very positive experiences of probation:



I think probation do a good job in my experience; I am happy with them. They have been supportive and given advice, which is what they should do for people in prison and when released. We shouldn’t expect too much from probation; it’s our own fault we are in prison

(37-year-old black man in prison, serving 7-year sentence)



I think I’m going to big up probation. I think they are good. I mean I heard horror stories in prison, ‘Oh, they won’t help ya.’ ... They got my curfew hours extended for college, so I do rate probation - in fact, when I finish in April ... I’m gonna be quite gutted that I have to stop seeing them.

(27-year-old mixed race man on licence)

## Voluntary sector provision

It is difficult to give an overall assessment of the respondents' experiences of voluntary sector resettlement services, because these cover such a diverse range of provision. An additional difficulty is that most of the ex-prisoners were contacted via, and interviewed at, voluntary agencies; hence this part of the sample was heavily skewed towards those who were currently engaged with (and hence likely to feel positive about) voluntary provision. Nevertheless, there are three main findings that can be drawn from the interviews

First, it was clear that respondents – particularly those who were in prison – were largely unaware of the range and scope of voluntary provision. Many of the respondents appeared to have had no contact with, and no knowledge of, voluntary organisations that were potentially in a position to help them with the resettlement process.

Secondly, those respondents who were in a position to compare voluntary and statutory provision often described staff in voluntary organisations as more understanding and supportive than prison and probation staff:



Voluntary organisations help more and I think that's because the voluntary service – most of the voluntary workers have either been in prison or they've come from some kind of dysfunctional background, and I think they tend to understand the prisoners more than the probation service.

(21-year-old mixed race woman in prison, serving 7-year sentence)



Working for a voluntary organisation myself, I feel that voluntary organisations who are passionate about their work... can identify with people and their problems. I think you tend to get that one-one service where as with the national probation you're just a number.

(42-year-old black man; completed sentence, and currently in paid employment with a voluntary organisation)

Thirdly, some individuals felt that their engagement with voluntary organisations had been of enormous benefit to them, and had enabled them to make fundamental positive changes to the way they lived:



The only help I got was from E--: They have helped me, they've given me good advice, support and advice and it made me feel wanted, it made me feel like someone out here is caring for me, and caring for my needs...

(47-year-old black man; completed sentence)



I've been with them a few years now and I done various courses with them, they really do know their stuff .... They've helped me tremendously - I would be worse than I am now if it wasn't for N-. ...The reason why it was useful, because, they train you, they train the individual, in ways of how to cope with everyday life and individual problems or concerns - they train you how to focus. I'm a positive person now; before I was a very negative person, but I shrug off the negative now... The good points from the voluntary organisations - they are helping you from the heart. ... They're helping you like as if you was their brother or their good friend ...

(43-year-old black man on licence)

## Barriers to access and engagement

This study has not sought to map resettlement provision and thereby to assess whether prisoners'/ ex-prisoners' accounts reflect what is actually available. Although we did ask service providers about the work of their own agencies, these interviews were too few in number to provide a sense of the overall scale and quality of provision.

What we can say, however, is that the relatively small numbers of providers we interviewed from the prison and probation services gave the impression that resettlement provision is much greater in scope than the prisoners and ex-prisoners suggested. This discrepancy is not surprising: it is often in the interest of providers to talk up the work they do, while those in receipt of services which have an unambiguously coercive dimension may be naturally inclined to be critical. It is probably fair to conclude from the divergent accounts that there are significant gaps and failings in provision, but that these gaps and failings are not always as great as the prisoners and ex-prisoners claimed.

Many service provider respondents, while giving the general impression that resettlement provision is better than the (ex-)prisoner accounts allowed, spoke also about various barriers that BAME offenders face to accessing and – maybe more significantly – engaging with resettlement services. These barriers, rather than the lack of provision *per se*, may partially explain the prisoners'/ex-prisoners' insistence that they received inadequate or no help. As we will see below, talk about barriers to access and engagement occurred more in the interviews with providers from the voluntary sector than in our discussions with statutory providers. To the limited extent that prisoner and ex-prisoner respondents spoke about encountering barriers which hindered their receipt of services, they tended to focus on racial discrimination within the criminal justice system as a cause of unequal access (as discussed in the previous chapter).

It is evident that some BAME offenders face practical barriers to accessing services. As was emphasised by many service provider respondents, foreign national offenders with uncertain immigration status are often among those who have the most severe financial and housing needs, and are likely also to have difficulty accessing help from resettlement services to meet those needs because of a lack of knowledge of what is available, language difficulties, and fear of the consequences (for example, deportation) of drawing attention to themselves by approaching statutory or non-statutory agencies. In Chapter 3 of this report, we cited the example of a young woman who described herself as a 'long-stayer' and spoke of her fear that her child would be taken into care if she got in contact with social services. Language barriers and limited awareness - and low expectations - of provision may also hinder the access to services of immigrant offenders whose legal status in this country is secure.

Prisoners from Traveller backgrounds are another sub-group of BAME offenders who potentially face practical barriers to accessing services. Low literacy levels among Travellers (two out of the four Travellers we interviewed for this study indicated that they could not read or write) mean that they can miss out on information about provision; and, more broadly, their marginalised status within broader society can limit their capacity and willingness to request help. A 39-year-old Irish Traveller whom we interviewed in prison, following his recall to custody during the licence period of a seven-year sentence, told us:



I wasn't brought up, I was dragged up. From the age of 12, I had to fend for myself. I never had any schooling or anything like that. ... I've been in prison all me life and there is no one helping me. Travellers were brought up in a caravan. ... I don't even know

my National Insurance number. People who live in a house, they know it off by heart. I don't know none of these things. When I got out last time I couldn't get benefits, because I couldn't get a National Insurance number. Probation couldn't help me. No one could help me so I got back into crime. I was out of prison six weeks and I was committing crime again. I had to survive.

Several of the service provider respondents recognised that BAME offenders' perceptions of discrimination within the criminal justice system have repercussions for their willingness to engage with services. Hence, for example, if an individual has had negative experiences in prison, he may form the view that all services are counter-productive and will not even attempt to access them. Representatives of several BAME-focused organisations told us that BAME offenders may be generally reluctant to talk and disclose their needs to (statutory or non-statutory) services, partly out of a sense of shame and embarrassment, but also because they simply have little belief in the capacity of the services to provide them with real help. 'Being in prison fills you with a lack of trust,' said one such service provider.

The representative of a voluntary housing provider (not BAME-specific) commented on the difficulty of promoting their services to BAME offenders. He noted that these individuals may perceive the organisation as one of 'the authorities' rather than as an agency which is 'on their side'.

We noted above that some prisoners and ex-prisoners said that in order to receive resettlement help, it is necessary to be proactive in finding out about and accessing the available services. This point received support from a prison-based housing officer, who told us that women in the prison need to make an appointment to see her if they are to get help; and that some women 'don't bother' to do so. It follows that prisoners who are mistrustful or cynical about available services – whether because of perceived discrimination or for other reasons – are unlikely to access help, because they will be disinclined actively to seek it out. While from the service provider's perspective, this might be a matter of prisoners not being 'bothered' to make the most of the available resources, from another perspective this could be regarded as a rational response to negative prior experiences.

Their perspective recalls Keating's conclusions about black men's views on mental health services. He described the circle of fear in these terms:



Stereotypical views of black people, racism, cultural ignorance, stigma and anxiety associated with mental



illness often combine to undermine the way in which mental health services assess and respond to the needs of black and minority ethnic communities.

As a result, the circle of fear is set up in which:



Black people do not trust mental health services, and those who work within them fear them, which means there is a lack of engagement on both sides.

(Keating 2009)

In the previous chapter, we discussed the fact that there are cultural differences in responses to offenders and offending. Some of these cultural differences can themselves act as a barrier to accessing and engaging resettlement services: for example, we noted that in some communities there is a particular stigma attached to mental illness and substance misuse, which may make inhibit individuals from tackling these problems. Within some communities, a general reluctance to access services may reflect the prevailing sense that family and community are strong enough to help individuals overcome their problems. Whether this is in fact the case will of course depend on many factors, including the nature and depth of those problems, and the willingness and capacity of individuals to immerse themselves within the informal networks of family and community support. A probation officer spoke of her experiences of being told by offenders that ‘we’ll sort ourselves out’, only to find out that nothing was being done. Pride – which can have strong cultural overtones – may of course be part of this kind of insistence that help is not needed.

Another barrier to access and engagement may be the sense, on the part of some BAME offenders, that they are disconnected from the services on offer. One respondent from a BAME-focused community organisation suggested that existing statutory provision may indirectly exclude BAME offenders because it lacks cultural awareness; in order to engage these offenders, therefore, services need to give a clear message that their experiences will be recognised and taken into account. Another respondent from a similar organisation argued that BAME offenders may regard most services as eurocentric, in the sense that cultural expectations around family and community integration are not fully understood. Yet another respondent spoke, more strongly, of ‘intolerance’ of cultural difference among some white service providers. A simple but telling example of cultural insensitivity was mentioned by a probation officer who spoke of support workers in hostels trying to teach residents to cook dishes such as mashed potato and sausage which they would never normally eat.

A senior probation officer observed that it can be extremely challenging for providers to negotiate issues relating to race and cultural difference in a sensitive manner that is seen to be fair to all. She cited, as a positive example, work conducted among probation staff to develop an understanding of honour-based crimes, for the purpose of providing ‘culturally relevant interventions’. However, she also said of some colleagues: ‘I’ve worked with fine excellent committed officers in my career, but when you talk about race they freeze in their tracks, with definite uncertainty.’

## A need for specialist provision?

We did not explicitly ask the prisoners and ex-prisoners if they felt that there should be specialist resettlement provision for BAME offenders. It was, however, implied in much of what they said about the generic nature of most resettlement needs that they did not see a clear-cut role for specialist providers. We did ask many of the prisoners and ex-prisoners if they believed it was important for BAME staff to be involved in the delivery of resettlement services; and in response to this question, most said that ethnic diversity in staff members was indeed desirable.

The recurring theme in comments about the importance of BAME staff was ‘understanding’: respondents said that staff from similar backgrounds to their own would usually be better able to understand them, their past experiences, and their expectations. ‘You can explain better to your own, and they can understand better,’ said an Asian prisoner; while a prisoner from a mixed race background said of BAME staff: ‘some offenders from the same background can relate to them and have more trust’. A 42-year-old Asian man, serving a 6.5 year prison sentence, expressed this point most vividly:



It is easy to say that we want to integrate [ex-prisoners], but until you know where the person is coming from, you can’t integrate them. ... Not knowing the background, you can’t integrate them... It’s like sending penguins to deserts, you know.

Some respondents stated that the ethnicity of resettlement staff was less important than their capacity to show understanding and cultural sensitivity. An Asian prisoner commented, for example, ‘If they had the right knowledge, then anyone could provide support’; while a 30-year-old black prisoner, serving a 12-year sentence, said:



I don't think [ethnicity is] particularly the be-all and end-all of it - you know, if the person I'm dealing with is not a black person, I'm not going to hold anything against him. But at the same time I do believe that he needs to be of a particular understanding of me, as yourself, who knows where you're coming from.

Some respondents rejected the very idea that BAME prisoners should welcome provision from BAME staff – sometimes as a matter of principle: 'If you was bothered in the first place, it would be you who was racist,' said a participant in a focus group in men's prison; while a few others spoke of the risk that an over-emphasis on the ethnicity of those delivering services can be divisive and unhelpful. It was also suggested – on the basis of personal experience, in a few cases - that staff from one's own ethnic group can act more harshly than others, because they fear being accused of favouritism.

Unlike the (ex-)prisoners, we asked the service providers directly if they believed there should be specialist resettlement provision for BAME offenders. Many voiced their broad agreement with the principle of specialist provision, although often added caveats to this view. Unsurprisingly, some of the strongest support for specialist services came from existing BAME-focused providers. However, these respondents were not always able to articulate the reasons necessitating this specialist provision. Instead, their discussions were typically framed by a more general perspective which recognised that BAME offenders are often profoundly disadvantaged by racial discrimination both within and outside the criminal justice system. In these accounts, BAME-focused service providers also tended to recognise the deep social and economic deprivation which is often present in the lives of BAME offenders.

While representatives of BAME-focused voluntary organisations tended to be strongest in their support for specialist provision, many other respondents from voluntary organisations, and some from statutory services, spoke in similar terms about the importance of specialist provision as a potential means of redressing discriminatory treatment and the other forms of disadvantage faced by BAME offenders. They also talked about the greater scope of specialist providers to respond with sensitivity and understanding to the cultural factors which – as we have discussed in the previous chapter – can help to shape differing expectations of the resettlement process.

Hence, for the most part, specialist provision was not discussed by providers as necessarily involving the delivery of different *kinds* of services to BAME offenders. A general recognition that most individuals who leave prison have broadly similar needs, regardless

of ethnicity, permeated the service providers' reflections on provision. An exception to this, however, was the discussion by several providers of the need for specific services for foreign national offenders with uncertain immigration status, for whom – as we have observed above – the resettlement process can be particularly difficult.

While being generally supportive of the principle of specialist provision, many service providers were cautious in their endorsement of it, and raised some potential pitfalls. In particular, there were some concerns that specialist provision is potentially divisive, and can provoke claims that BAME offenders, or specific groups within the broader BAME population, are being favoured over others. For example, one provider (from a voluntary organisation) commented that there is a fine balance to be struck between, on the one hand, cultural sensitivity and, on the other hand, unequal treatment. He also noted that it can be counter-productive to identify particular ethnic groups as a 'problem' needing to be worked with separately from others. Another respondent, also from a voluntary organisation, noted the risk that over-specialisation would inevitably lead to funding difficulties, especially in the current extremely difficult economic climate.

Concerns about the risks associated with separate provision led some service providers to argue that culturally sensitive and genuinely responsive resettlement support for BAME offenders can best be promoted through the development of ethnically-specific services under an umbrella of mainstream provision. Thus, for example, a senior probation officer stated that there is a need for provision which is not separate but is 'culturally relevant and culturally situated', and thereby tailored to differing needs as shaped not only by ethnicity, but also by gender, ability level and so on - with the overall aim of achieving 'equality of outcomes'.

Other service providers argued, more simply, that the case for specialist provision (whether within or outside mainstream services) had not been made. These respondents – many but not all of whom were prison-based providers – tended to argue that ethnically-specific resettlement needs had not yet been identified, and hence, at present, there were no grounds for ethnically-specific services. It was also suggested that such services, by definition, would not cater for individualised needs, but would treat all individuals as if they necessarily shared certain group characteristics. There were concerns, moreover, that specialist provision would be discriminatory in its practices and impact, and would lead to unnecessary competition between minority ethnic groups for resources. And anything that added to a sense of 'segregation' among BAME offenders, argued a representative of a housing agency, could only be harmful.



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# Conclusions and recommendations

# 5

## Main findings

This study has investigated the resettlement needs of BAME offenders, and their experiences of resettlement services. We have, in particular, considered the extent to which BAME offenders' needs differ from those of other offenders, and the case for ethnically-specific resettlement provision. We addressed the key research questions by means of a literature review and a qualitative study involving interviews and focus groups with BAME prisoners and former prisoners, and with statutory and non-statutory providers of resettlement services.

Predominantly, the prisoners and ex-prisoners spoke of resettlement needs as generic rather than ethnically specific, and largely determined by individual circumstances. Similar findings were reported by Sharp et al. (2006) in the only other study of BAME resettlement needs in the West Midlands. Among these generic needs, accommodation and employment featured as the most important, with the issue of finances also being frequently highlighted as critical, but usually linked to employment. Fewer respondents mentioned healthcare (specifically in relation to mental health) and the management of drug or alcohol problems; but those who did speak of these issues tended to assert their centrality to the resettlement process. Many respondents spoke of the vital part that supportive families, and a commitment to family responsibilities, can play in the resettlement process.

Two further significant aspects of resettlement emerged from our discussions with prisoners and ex-prisoners: first, focus and motivation as prerequisites for making a successful transition to life outside prison; and, secondly, the aspiration for social inclusion. Notwithstanding their evident importance to the respondents, these latter two elements of resettlement are not reflected in the 'pathways' which are the focus of formal criminal justice policy and practice on resettlement.

Although the prisoners and ex-prisoners predominantly talked about resettlement needs as unrelated to ethnicity, most believed that minority status has an impact on the resettlement process. Many observed that racial discrimination within

and/or outside the criminal justice system can have repercussions for an individual's capacity to gain employment, get access to support services, or otherwise meet his or her needs on leaving custody. Some of the respondents spoke of differing cultural needs and expectations – relating, in particular, to family and community dynamics – that can influence the resettlement process.

This recalls the necessary distinction between equality and treating everyone the same. Lord Bhikhu Parekh, chair of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, explained the distinction in the introduction to the Commission's report:



When equality ignores relevant differences and insists on uniformity of treatment, it leads to injustice and inequality; when differences ignore the demands of equality, they result in discrimination. Equality must be defined in a culturally sensitive way and applied in a discriminating but not discriminatory manner. (Runnymede Trust 2000)

The main implication for this study is that while the basic needs are generic, and not determined by ethnicity, responding to practical problems an individual faces in the resettlement process requires an awareness of their ethnicity, of the possible influence of previous experience of discrimination, and a determination not to amplify previous discriminatory or exclusionary experiences by providing solutions that are culturally inappropriate.

Most of the service providers we interviewed were clearly of the view that there is a relationship between ethnicity and resettlement. They tended to talk about this relationship in similar terms to the (ex-)prisoners: that is, they referred variously to discrimination and disadvantage, cultural differences, and barriers to access to services. Nevertheless, like the prisoners and ex-prisoners, they appeared to view most resettlement needs as essentially generic rather than ethnically-specific.

In short, then, both the (ex-)prisoner and the service provider respondents viewed ethnicity as a factor

which – alongside other social, political and economic factors – *mediates* but does not define individuals' experiences of the resettlement process. BAME status might, for example, help to shape certain resettlement needs; it might impact on the extent of an individual's needs in relation to aspects of resettlement; or it might affect the individual's efforts to address particular needs. But these repercussions of BAME status are not inevitable; and nor are they uniformly experienced.

Existing resettlement provision – especially within the prison and probation services – was vehemently criticised by many prisoner and ex-prisoner respondents. For the most part, they did not relate their experiences of resettlement services to their BAME status, but spoke of poor provision as if it is a general fact of life within the criminal justice system. Voluntary sector provision was generally more highly regarded than provision by prisons and probation, although many respondents appeared to lack awareness of voluntary services.

Unsurprisingly, we heard much more positive reports of the available resettlement provision from the providers than from the users of the services. However, many service provider respondents noted that BAME offenders face various barriers to accessing and engaging with these services. For example, BAME offenders' experiences and perceptions of discrimination can make them mistrustful of services, or convince them that the services have little to offer them. Some BAME offenders – particularly those who are foreign nationals, and individuals from Traveller, Roma or Gypsy communities – may face practical problems accessing services. Differing cultural perspectives on offending, mental illness, and problems associated with substance misuse may also discourage some BAME offenders from seeking the help they need.

These barriers to accessing and engaging with provision, rather than the absence of provision *per se*, may help to explain some of the prisoners' and ex-prisoners' accounts of the inadequacy of resettlement services. At the same time, it is likely that the prisoners' and ex-prisoners' accounts point to some real gaps and shortcomings in provision.

There appeared to be little call from the prisoners and ex-prisoners we interviewed for specialist resettlement provision for BAME offenders. Rather, they emphasised the importance of awareness and cultural sensitivity in provision; and most of them strongly advocated ethnic diversity in the staffing of resettlement work. Many of the service providers voiced broad support for the principle of specialist provision for BAME offenders – as a means of redressing the disadvantages faced by BAME offenders, and ensuring that cultural differences in

approaches to resettlement are sensitively dealt with. Service providers also, however, spoke about the possible pitfalls of specialist provision: for example, that it could be divisive and lead to accusations of favouritism, would fail to recognise individual differences within minority groups, or could lead BAME offenders to see themselves as 'the problem'. Some stated that, for these reasons, BAME-focused services should be delivered under an umbrella of mainstream provision; while others were of the view that the case for specialist provision was simply not strong enough.

## Implications for policy and practice

One of the clearest messages to come out of this study is that BAME offenders believe existing provision of resettlement services to be highly inadequate. At a time when services across most of the public sector are about to be hit by severe and far-reaching spending cuts, it will be difficult to make the case for improving and extending resettlement provision. However, the benefits of successful resettlement may contribute to reducing re-offending and the huge associated costs. Furthermore, there is an indisputable need for resettlement provision – for all offenders, and not just those from BAME groups - to be made more relevant and accessible; and, indeed, that its relevance and accessibility is all the more important when the resourcing of services is being squeezed. It is, moreover, vitally important to ensure that spending cuts do not disproportionately impact the most marginalised groups within the offending population – such as offenders from BAME backgrounds.

If the harsh economic climate poses one set of difficulties for drawing out the policy implications of this research, another difficulty is the fact that so many divergent views were expressed by the individuals who participated in the study. There may have been broad agreement among most of the prisoner and ex-prisoner respondents that resettlement provision was generally poor; but they did not agree about the extent to which, and ways in which, BAME status impacted on resettlement needs. Service providers, also, expressed differing views on this issue. Moreover, in thinking about lessons for policy, we are also confronted with the question of how best to interpret respondents' highly personal accounts. Hence, for example, while many of the prisoners and ex-prisoners were insistent that ethnicity had little or no bearing on resettlement, it is possible that some of these assertions were shaped by an attachment to the abstract principle of equality of needs rather than the respondents' lived experiences.

And the fact they tended to regard resettlement provision as severely lacking in all respects may have inclined them towards talking about their general rather than specific needs.

Nevertheless, even taking into account the divergent views and the difficulties of interpretation, our research findings strongly suggest that most resettlement needs of BAME offenders do not fundamentally differ from the needs of other offenders. In other words, there is more that BAME and non-BAME offenders leaving custody have in common than which separates them. It follows from this that there is not a great call for separate provision of resettlement services for BAME offenders. Some specialist services may be merited for groups of offenders who have very specific needs – such as foreign nationals with contested immigration status, or offenders from Traveller/Roma/Gypsy backgrounds – or to help some BAME offenders to engage with services which they would otherwise mistrust. But what is primarily required, it appears, is the development of generic resettlement services (both statutory and non-statutory) which are fully relevant and accessible to BAME offenders.

There would seem to be three main aspects to ensuring the relevance and accessibility of resettlement support for BAME offenders. First, services must ensure that racial inequalities in criminal justice practices that impact on resettlement provision are eliminated where they exist. Secondly, they must recognise and address the impact of *perceptions* of discrimination and stereotyping within the criminal justice system and wider society – particularly the impact on BAME offenders' willingness and motivation to engage with services. Thirdly, they must display understanding of and sensitivity towards cultural differences in expectations and experiences of resettlement. Voluntary organisations can play a particularly important part in the development and delivery of resettlement support that is relevant and accessible to BAME offenders; and ethnic diversity in the staff who deliver such support – within both the statutory and non-statutory sectors – can also help to achieve these aims.

One of the themes to emerge from our research findings is the highly individualised nature of resettlement needs, strengths and experiences. An interesting dimension of this, which has a bearing on the organisation and delivery of resettlement support, is that many respondents stressed that successful resettlement depends, to a large extent, on the individual's personal commitment and determination to *make* it a success. They spoke also of the enormous challenges of maintaining focus and motivation during the period immediately after leaving custody – when the structured prison environment is exchanged for the much more chaotic outside world. What this

suggests is that resettlement provision which is alert to, feeds into and bolsters internal processes of self-change – especially during the critical post-custodial period – may have the most to offer. One woman who was on a life licence spoke of having met, while in custody, many girls who want to change, but they're scared of change, and nobody's listening to that.

Our respondents' emphasis on self-change – along with their references to social inclusion - also remind us that, for each individual, resettlement is an ongoing process which is integrally bound up with, rather than separate from, all other aspects of life. Policy and practice which primarily treats resettlement as a matter of addressing a series of discrete needs is, thus, liable to be less effective than an approach which recognises these broader and more personal dimensions.

Finally, we believe that one of the strengths of this study has been its close focus on the views of people who are or have been in prison and hence can speak about resettlement from direct experience. As the quotations that we have used throughout this report clearly demonstrate, these individuals had much to say about their experiences, and were thoughtful and insightful in their comments. The development and implementation of resettlement services would benefit if the voices of the service users were heard more often.

## Recommendations

The recommendations presented below are divided into three groups. First, we set out a series of general recommendations for policy development and commissioning, which focus in particular on the need to strengthen and broaden understanding of the concept of resettlement. Secondly, we present recommendations aimed at improving statutory and non-statutory resettlement provision for all offenders. The third set of recommendations is concerned, more specifically, with resettlement policy and provision for BAME offenders.

### Recommendations for policy-making and commissioning

Resettlement policy and commissioning arrangements should conceptualise resettlement as a process encompassing all aspects of an individual's life, rather than as a matter of addressing a series of discrete needs.

Thus, resettlement policy and provision should focus not only on meeting practical needs (particularly housing and employment) but also on devising and implementing methods for supporting internal processes of self-change and social inclusion. Awareness of the less tangible but equally critical elements of resettlement – such as social inclusion and self-change – is all the more important in a policy context in which 'commissioning by results' will increasingly take precedence.

Views of the direct users of resettlement services should be sought and taken into account in devising resettlement policy and establishing commissioning arrangements.

Commissioning arrangements should acknowledge the unique capacity of the voluntary sector – including small-scale voluntary agencies – to deliver personalised services that are tailored to the needs and circumstances of offenders as individuals and as members of minority ethnic groups.

### Recommendations for improving provision

Prison-based resettlement support should not be limited to the last few months or weeks of a sentence.

Prison-based provision should take the form of drop-in support, provided by designated members of staff in established locations where information is available and regularly updated.

The most promising points for intervention should be identified; for example, it should be recognised that it can be particularly difficult for ex-prisoners to maintain focus on their resettlement goals in the immediate period of their release from custody.

Probation Trusts should articulate more clearly their role in supporting resettlement; and, in so doing, should be aware that many prisoners and ex-prisoners are likely to be mistrustful of what they perceive to be Probation's over-emphasis on enforcement.

Voluntary providers need to promote and co-ordinate their services more effectively, particularly in prison. And prisons should promote and publicise the voluntary sector more effectively as this would make better use of their resources.

Prisons must seek to engage the family as partners in the resettlement process, given families' potential contribution to resolving practical problems faced by newly released prisoners, and bearing in mind the positive impact that family support and responsibilities can have on offenders' sense of belonging and on their motivation to change. As part of this, prisons should make greater use of ROTL to enable prisoners, where necessary, to rebuild their relationships with family members, and particularly with their children.

Voluntary providers may also have a critical 'bridging' role to play, by helping to engage and providing support to offenders who might be mistrustful of statutory services, including probation.

### Recommendations for policy and provision for BAME offenders

Most resettlement needs of BAME offenders can be effectively met through generic rather than ethnically-specific provision, provided that:

- (a) The provision is informed by a commitment to equality of access and outcomes, which will require comprehensive ethnic monitoring by both statutory and non-statutory providers;
- (b) The provision displays cultural sensitivity and understanding.

In developing and providing generic services, statutory and non-statutory agencies should take into account the ways in which BAME offenders' experiences and perceptions of racial discrimination and stereotyping (both within and beyond the criminal justice system) can impact on their willingness and motivation to engage with services.

Providers should be aware that differing cultural responses to offenders and offending behaviour can impact on BAME offenders' resettlement needs, and their willingness and capacity to engage with services. In taking these cultural differences into account, providers should recognise that there is diversity within as well as between different communities and avoid assumptions about 'typical' responses within particular groups.

Cultural sensitivity training for all staff is crucial for the effective delivery of resettlement services that are relevant and accessible to BAME offenders. The recruitment and appropriate deployment of ethnically diverse staff should also be carefully considered.

Where specific resettlement needs among BAME offenders are identified, some separate resettlement provision may be appropriate. This might include, for example, specialist services for the most socially and economically marginalised groups, such as foreign national prisoners with disputed immigration status, and those from Traveller/Roma/Gypsy backgrounds. There may also be a need for specialist work to tackle cultural resistance to engaging with services within some minority ethnic communities.

To the extent that BAME-specific provision is made available, it should be closely tied in, wherever possible, with generic provision and should take into account diversity within as well as between minority groups.

Voluntary agencies are particularly well-placed to offer (generic or specialist) resettlement services to BAME offenders, because they tend to have greater scope than statutory providers to:

- (a) Engage BAME offenders whose experiences or perceptions of racial discrimination make them particularly mistrustful of statutory services;
- (b) Deliver culturally sensitive provision;
- (c) Deliver personalised services that are tailored to the needs and circumstances of offenders as individuals and as members of minority ethnic groups.

Recognition of the 'bridging' role of voluntary agencies with respect to BAME offenders – as well as offenders from non-BAME backgrounds - should be structured into commissioning arrangements, to ensure that smaller voluntary organisations are not marginalised.

Policy-makers and commissioners should ensure that spending cuts do not disproportionately impact BAME offenders, and other marginalised groups within the offending population.



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## APPENDIX A:

### Reflections on the experience of doing peer research

All the research assistants contributed to all stages of this research - not just by conducting fieldwork, but by regular consultation throughout the process and through feedback on earlier drafts of the report. The research assistants were invited to write down their reflections on the experience of being a peer researcher. Here, we present excerpts from three of them.

One wrote:

I felt an immense amount of pride at being involved in the project and being able to channel the negative experiences of 'ex-prisoner' into something positive. I wanted to prove as a 'peer researcher' that I could do a good job. If somebody has faith in you, you want to show them that their faith in you was appropriate, and I suppose many other 'peer researchers' in the future may feel like that, and thus, should be given the chance. As a 'peer' I could 'feel' what the interviewees were talking about and understood what they meant if they used particular terminologies or jargon, which is a benefit.

I mentioned that I was an ex-offender at the start of my interviews, and I suppose this was in an attempt to get me 'onside' at the start of the interview. I found that some interviewees relaxed when I told them this, but because I mentioned this at the outset, I couldn't have predicted whether they would have been any more forthcoming with their answers had I not told them that I was an ex-prisoner. I also don't believe that you establish 'rapport' just by saying that you're an ex-con. I don't think rapport is developed by your 'status' alone, and so although I think it's a brilliant idea using 'peer researchers', ability to interview, ability to make interviewee feel at ease and subject matter are perhaps as important as 'peer status'.

It's a good idea to use ex-prisoners to carry out the interview because it can give hope to the people that you are interviewing, and may sow a seed that 'if they can do it then why can't I?' I am very grateful to the project, for being given a chance to channel negative experiences into positive ones, and I would thoroughly recommend using peer researchers again.

Another research assistant wrote:

I was struck by the pathways dealing with motivation and social inclusion. It seems to me that there is a place for the teaching of humanities and social

science in that part of the resettlement field - whether for service users or providers: staff; mentors or volunteers. What is it, after all, that people think they are settling or resettling into?

That is an area that I have to declare a double interest in and it is something that could develop along with the new voting rights of prisoners. An understanding of, and a commitment to, the democratic process would surely contribute to a sense of social inclusion as well as social cohesion and is likely to have an even wider range of positive social benefits including desistance.

As already mentioned I have an interest in this particular field but I also have some direct experience of resettlement. In the more than 10 years since I began my journey, 'Up From Prison' - this research position has given me the first work based opportunity I have had that specifically makes BAME exoffenderhood an advantage! I've worked on an employed and self employed basis in an extremely wide variety of jobs but thanks to family and the recommendations of friends I have never had to fill in an application form in which BAME exoffenderhood would have been a disadvantage - in other words I haven't filled in an application form: I have been lucky and I am acutely aware that the 'BAME exoffender Wanted' ad is a rare one down at the job centre.

My studies have been, and continue to be, an indispensable part of my own development and their relevance has been amplified in my mind as a result of this project not least because of the people I have been inspired and privileged to work with: both on the team and in the field. I have gained a level of clarity about my own ambitions and responsibilities as a result of our work which I am determined to develop and continue.

A third research assistant wrote:

The experience of working as a researcher on this particular project has been a positive learning curve. Being an ex-prisoner and coming from a BAME (Muslim) group myself, brought back memories my own prison and resettlement experiences, and from the beginning I soon realised that my own personal experiences, could in turn, bias my own research and understanding of the interviewees own resettlement experiences. Yet this was not the case, and it became apparent that my own prison experiences did not bias the research I undertook. If anything, the whole process was therapeutic whilst allowing me to gain a better insight into the resettlement needs of BAME groups. Still, I was saddened to hear the fear and anguish of serving prisoners and their families and the lack of knowledge on behalf of the prison service in terms of resettlement provision beyond prison walls.

I realised that nothing has really changed for the better, in terms of resettlement for prisoners in general, let alone those from BAME communities.

Whilst interviewing prisoners who were about to be released, a pattern quickly emerged as most, if not all prisoners had the same fears and experiences, (mostly negative) on their resettlement needs being met. It seems that out of the fifteen or so I interviewed, only one had had a positive experience of his needs being met and he had another year to serve. The prisoners who had the shortest time to serve left seemed to be more angry and frustrated, having in some cases served more than ten years in prison, had only been engaged by the resettlement process in the last three months before their release. This was a common theme again and again and even after I interviewed an Offender Manager at the same prison, it became clear that the veracity of prisoner's experiences were unshakable.

My passion for working within the Criminal Justice environment is ever prevalent when my own experiences of being in prison, can help direct others to affect positive change in their lives, and educate those working within the Criminal Justice System.

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## **APPENDIX B:**

### **Interview questions**

Interviews with service users in custody

#### **Background**

Please can you tell me your age? \_\_\_\_ yrs

Gender

How would you describe your ethnicity?

How would you describe your religion (if any)?

How long is your current sentence, and when are you due for release?

#### **Thoughts about release**

Thinking about release from prison, what are you most looking forward to?

What, if anything, do you think you will find most difficult about settling back in the community?

Are there any particular things that you think you will need help with when you are released?

Are you likely to need support with the following, and if so do you know who might be able to help you'?

- a) Sorting out money/benefits?
- b) Finding a place to live?
- c) Your relationships with your family?
- d) Getting a job or a place on a training course or in education?
- e) Getting help with drugs or alcohol?
- f) Getting medical help?
- g) Getting any kinds of counselling/therapy/offending behaviour work?

#### **Provision of help**

Have you received any help with resettlement so far, while in prison?

If YES: what kind of help, and who provided it (prison staff, voluntary organisations etc)?

If YES: how did you find out that this help was available?

If YES: How useful was the help? Please explain why it was/was not useful.

**After you're released**, do you know where (if at all) you'll be able to get help with resettling into the community?

Prompts:

Will any of the help you've already received while in prison continue after you are released?

Do you think that probation will be able to give you the help you would like?

If yes, how; if not, why not?

Will any of the help you've already received while in prison continue after you are released?

Do you think that probation will be able to give you the help you would like? If yes, how; if not, why not?

Do you know any groups or organisations in the community that will be able to help with these things?

Please describe.

Will you have a support network (e.g. family, friends, community/religious group) to give you help?

## **Overview**

What do you think are the most important things that prisons should do to help prepare people for release?

What do you think are the most important things that probation should do to help people after they have been released?

What do you think are the most important things that other organisations – such as voluntary organisations, community groups, religious groups – should do help people after they have been released?

Do you think that white people and people from BAME groups need the same or different kinds of help when they leave prison?

If different, in what ways?

For example: do you think they need different kinds of help with:

- a) Education
- b) Accommodation
- c) Mental Health
- d) Family ties

In your opinion, how important is it for organisations providing help with resettlement (prisons, probation, voluntary organisations) to understand the backgrounds and culture of people from BAME groups?

Please explain.

In your opinion, how important is it for organisations' workers/staff to be from a BAME group?

Do you have anything else you would like to say about the things we have discussed?

**Thank you.**



## APPENDIX C:

### SMART data on Release on Temporary Licence (2008)

**Table: Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) Ethnic Distribution, April to December, 2008<sup>13</sup>**

| <b>Ethnic Group</b>        | <b>Proportion of total prison population</b> | <b>Proportion of days granted on ROTL</b> |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| Asian                      | 7.0%   | 9.7%                                      |
| Black                      | 15.1%  | 13.0%                                     |
| Mixed                      | 3.3%   | 2.7%                                      |
| White Other                | 5.2%   | 4.3%                                      |
| White British              | 67.7%  | 69.5%                                     |
| Other                      | 1.6%   | 0.8%                                      |
| All Minority Ethnic Groups | 32.3%  | 30.5%                                     |

<sup>13</sup> Calculation based on: SMART National Figures, Ministry of Justice (2009) Promoting Equality in Prisons and Probation, The National Offender Management Service Single Equality Scheme, 2009-2012, page 69.

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