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Introduction

Early evidence that emerged on the racial distribution of deaths linked to COVID-19 suggested that ethnic minorities were hit hardest. This was brought to the public attention by reports in the media that the first eleven doctors to die from COVID-19 were all members of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups.¹ These findings were then confirmed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which revealed that death rates for most ethnic minorities were higher than for white ethnic groups.² Further, the analysis performed by the ONS underlined that “even after accounting for where people live and social and economic factors, the gap lessens but is still significant”.³

The pandemic “shocked the UK economy”⁴, but its effects varied among different ethnic groups, magnifying the existing economic racial disparities in the United Kingdom. For instance, higher unemployment rates and greater occupational segregation in low-paid jobs amongst BAME people have widened the economic disparities between white and non-white people.⁵ It is therefore critical to address the reasons for this situation, and more specifically the roles played by racism and discrimination.
Though no consensus has yet been reached on an exact definition of racism, it can be broadly defined as an ideology grounded in “the collection of negative perceptions and behaviours directed at members of groups with different identifiable physical characteristics”. The adverse impact of racism is highly connected to racial discrimination – that is, the exclusion or restriction of a person from the recognition, enjoyment or equal exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in political, economic, social or cultural life. In this regard, Solomos notes that in reality racism and racial discrimination “have been merged to such an extent that in practice they have come to mean the same thing”.

These issues gained acute resonance in the context of COVID-19, which disproportionately affected ethnic minorities, and against the backdrop of the waves of Black Lives Matter protests following the murder of George Floyd at the hands of the police in the United States. Published in 2021 by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, the Sewell Report was commissioned by the government to investigate the state of racial inequalities and racism in a wide range of areas, including education, employment, crime and policing, and health.

The aim of this article is to analyse the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic has widened persistent racial economic disparities in Britain and examine how the Sewell Report analysed these disparities in relation to issues of racism and discrimination in the labour market. The article first provides an account of the disproportionate rates of COVID-19 linked deaths among BAME groups. It then shows that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated persistent racial inequalities, with some ethnic sub-groups experiencing greater economic vulnerability. Finally, it provides an analysis and critique of the employment component of the Sewell Report and its recommendations on this issue. It is here argued the ‘post-racial society’ narrative endorsed in the report is a myth: while Britain’s pragmatism in promoting equality cannot be called into question, evidence shows that experiences of racism and discrimination in the labour market still hold even the best qualified members of ethnic minority groups back from achieving equal opportunities in the labour market.

COVID-19 transmission and mortality amongst BAME groups

Commenting on COVID-19-linked infection rates, The Lancet stressed that “the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 among minority ethnic groups” were present from the beginning of the pandemic, “with Black and Asian patients in the UK being over-represented among those with COVID-19 receiving advanced respiratory support”. This publication also highlighted that the long-standing health disparities affecting ethnic minorities in the UK were exacerbated by the pandemic. Subsequent data analysis from the ONS during the first wave of the pandemic (24 January 2020 to 11 September 2020) showed that deaths from COVID-19 were highest amongst the Black African group (3.7 times higher than for the White British group), followed by the Bangladeshi (3.0 for males, 1.9 for females), Black Caribbean (2.7 for males, 1.8 for females) and Pakistani (2.2 for males, 2.0 for females) groups. Further statistics published by the ONS during the second wave of the pandemic (from 12 September 2020 to 31 March 2021) confirmed this trend, indicating a significant increase in the differences in COVID-19 mortality between these minority ethnic groups and the White
British population, with the Bangladeshi population experiencing the highest mortality rates: 5.0 and 4.1 times greater than for White British males and females, respectively.\textsuperscript{15} A similar trend was observed during the third wave of the pandemic (from 13 June 2021 onwards).\textsuperscript{16} The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) also noticed that death rates were higher among these groups despite the greater prevalence of young people among them – a pattern that could have made these populations less susceptible to infection.\textsuperscript{17}

Several reasons for these differences have been considered in the literature, including higher prevalence of co-morbidities associated with poor COVID-19 outcomes (for instance type 2 diabetes, which is disproportionately common amongst British South Asians), greater social deprivation, large multi-generational households, and delayed access to healthcare, all of which disproportionately affect minority ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{18}

However, differences in occupational risk have also been a key factor. Data on death rate by occupation were made public by the ONS as early as April 2020, when it published a list of ten occupations with high male mortality rates. The analysis showed that BAME men were disproportionately represented in eight of these occupations, with security guards and taxi drivers exhibiting the highest male coronavirus-related mortality rates of the studied occupations.\textsuperscript{19} In addition, analysis by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) indicates that despite accounting for only 12% of all men in employment, 28% of male security guards and 43% of male taxi drivers belong to BAME groups.\textsuperscript{20} The TUC also drew attention to the disproportionate number of BAME people among the key workers working on the frontline during the crisis – nursing the sick in hospitals, looking after the elderly in care homes, keeping public transport going or distributing food – and therefore working in work environments with a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19.\textsuperscript{21} Black African men were seven times more likely than White British men to work as care workers, while more than one in five Black African women of working age were employed in health and social care roles.\textsuperscript{22} These disparities were even more striking among the Indian ethnic group, with Indian men being 150% more likely to work in health or social care roles than their White British counterparts. While the Indian ethnic group makes up 3% of the working-age population of England and Wales, they account for 14% of doctors.\textsuperscript{23}

Significant differences in people’s risk of exposure to COVID-19 were often associated with occupational segregation in low paid jobs, meaning that BAME people were not only hit by a disproportionate death rate but also by unequal exposure to the economic impact of the crisis. The next section focuses on these economic disparities.

**COVID-19 and economic racial disparities**

**BAME occupational segregation in shutdown sectors**

While being overrepresented in jobs with higher risk exposure to COVID-19, BAME people were also found to be disproportionately represented in sectors which were largely shut down, such as the transport, accommodation and food service sectors. Prior to the pandemic, one in three Bangladeshi men worked in catering, restaurants or related businesses compared to around one in a hundred White British men; only one in a hundred White British men worked as taxi drivers, chauffeurs or in related businesses, compared to one in seven Pakistani men.\textsuperscript{24} These sectors were precisely those which were affected by successive shutdowns and announced the most
redundancies. As of July 2020, the transport and storage has announced the highest number of redundancies at 34,000, while the accommodation and food sector has announced 16,000 redundancies. The wholesale and retail industry, which has a roughly proportionate number of BAME workers, also announced 24,000 job losses. The IFS has also provided evidence of significant disparities between ethnic groups, reporting that Black African and Black Caribbean men were both 50% more likely than White British men to work in sectors which were shut down in response to the pandemic. Bangladeshi men were found to be four times more likely to work in these sectors than White British men, while Pakistani men were nearly three times as likely in these sectors than White British men.

Analysis by the TUC also found that the industries that were hardest hit by the pandemic have seen a significant decrease in the number of BAME workers compared to white employees. Thus, between the third quarter of 2019 and the third quarter of 2020, the number of BAME workers in the accommodation and food sector dropped by 23%, compared with 13% for white workers, while the numbers of BAME workers in the wholesale and retail industry and the construction industry have fallen by 16% and 14%, respectively, compared to 1% and 7% for white workers.

Covid-19 and unemployment among BAME people

The over-representation of BAME workers in sectors which were shut down during the pandemic was accompanied by a higher unemployment rate among BAME people. Wider surveys conducted by the ONS have underlined that significant disparities in unemployment rates among different ethnicities have appeared since the start of the pandemic. Between the first quarter of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021, the unemployment rate for BAME people jumped by 41%, from 6.3% to 8.9%. Over the same period, unemployment among white workers increased by 14%, from 3.6% to 4.1%.

Subsequent data published on unemployment highlighted higher unemployment rates among specific groups: unemployment reached 11% for the Bangladeshi and Pakistani ethnic groups in 2022. The crisis also had long-term economic consequences for BAME people, with a significant number falling into unemployment after being furloughed. Analysing the changes in the UK labour market during the first eight months of the crisis, the Health Foundation found that while furlough curbed the rise in unemployment in the early phase of the pandemic, 22% of furloughed workers from minority ethnic groups had lost their job by September 2020, compared to only 9% in the general population.

Historically, periods of recession have exhibited increased economic vulnerability for ethnic minorities, with unemployment rates remaining higher for longer amongst male members of ethnic minorities. Li and Heath have attributed this phenomenon to ‘hypercyclicity’ of non-white employment rates. The authors state that:

Rather than any continuing linear trend towards equalization of unemployment risks, ethnic minorities might have greater risks of unemployment when the labour market is very slack (as in the early 1980s in Britain) and relatively lower risks when the labour market is tight and there is greater demand for labour.

Li and Heath further note that Black Caribbeans working in London Transport and skilled or semi-skilled manual jobs were the “first to go” when unemployment surged. In 1982, while nearly one in every eight white men was unemployed, one in every three
Black Caribbeans was out of work. Similar patterns were observed in the recession of the 1990s with, again, a higher unemployment rate amongst ethnic minorities: while the unemployment rate was 4% for white men, it increased to 27% for Black Africans. Figures published by the ONS from the early 2000s onwards show similar patterns, with noticeably higher levels of unemployment amongst ethnic minorities than the white population over 17 years. This trend was accentuated during the 2008 economic crisis, when the unemployment rate amongst ethnic minorities peaked at nearly 15% – double that of the white population.

Insecure work

The COVID-19 crisis has also exposed changing labour patterns among BAME workers, including an increase in insecure employment. The TUC defines insecure workers as “those on zero-hours contracts, in temporary or seasonable work or are self-employed workers earning less than the minimum wage”. 17.8% of BME workers are in insecure employment compared with only 10.8% of white workers. BAME workers are more likely to be in precarious jobs than white workers, with BAME workers more than twice as likely to be on agency contracts than white workers; one in 24 BAME workers are on zero-hours contracts, compared to one in 42 white workers, and one in 13 BAME workers is in temporary work, compared to one in 19 white workers. As many BAME workers employed in key roles during the pandemic were on insecure contracts this limited their financial ability not to attend work, therefore placing their families under significant financial stress.

In addition, the increase of self-employment amongst BAME workers observed since 2011 contributed to their economic vulnerability during the pandemic. In effect, the industrial decline that began at the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s initiated a significant restructuring of the British labour market. Demand for skilled and highly skilled workers driven by automation, technological change and globalisation increased wage inequalities and widened differences in performance among ethnic minority groups. These changes were accompanied by increased social differentiation within minority communities, with a substantial proportion of South Asian groups, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis becoming self-employed – a situation which Clark and Drinkwater attribute to the UK’s declining productivity and racial discrimination in the labour market, rather than evidence of healthy entrepreneurship.

This work pattern characterises many BAME workers today. In 2018, 20.4% of the combined Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic group were self-employed, compared to only 15.1% of white people. In this regard, the TUC analysis has showed that a third of BAME male workers are in self-employed delivery and driving jobs – a figure which increased from 72,900 in 2011 to 131,500 by 2023, representing an 80% increase.

Earning and income losses in BAME households

The over-representation of BAME people in insecure work and in sectors which were shut down meant that BAME people were more financially vulnerable during the pandemic. Analysis by the Resolution Foundation think tank found that the workers in shut-down sectors bore the brunt of the economic blow in this period as they were the lowest paid, evidencing a pay gap differential of 50% compared to jobs that could be
performed from home (£348 a week compared to £707 a week).\textsuperscript{46} Higher losses of earnings\textsuperscript{47} were observed among workers in minority ethnic groups. The Financial Conduct Authority found that between February and June 2020 the wages of BAME workers dropped by 15% compared to a fall of 5% for white workers.\textsuperscript{48} Despite the introduction of measures such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (JRS) and the Job Support scheme (JSS)\textsuperscript{49}, higher income losses were observed amongst ethnic minorities. The ONS found that 43% of Bangladeshis, 38% of Black Africans and 32% of Pakistanis had experienced a loss of income since the start of the pandemic.\textsuperscript{50} Accounting for these economic disparities, an investigation ordered by the House of Commons and conducted by the Women and Equalities Committee pointed to the adverse impact of the ‘gig economy’.\textsuperscript{51} Specifically, BAME workers were over-concentrated in ‘zero-hours’ contracts and were denied furlough by their employers; instead, their employers reduced their working hours to zero and consequently made them ineligible to receive statutory sick pay.\textsuperscript{52} Insecure employment affected the self-employed, with some BAME groups such as Pakistanis being over-represented in low income self-employment and having to wait for months before they could benefit from the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS), while others were not eligible or received amounts below their recent earnings.\textsuperscript{53} The IFS also pointed to family circumstances to further account for ethnic disparities, underlining that “while 30% of Bangladeshi men work in a shutdown sector and have a partner who is not in paid work, this applies to only 1% of White British men”.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{19} The Resolution Foundation emphasises that the pre-existing wealth gap between ethnic groups also played a key role in shaping the experience of families during the pandemic.\textsuperscript{55} The Foundation notes that families headed by people of Bangladeshi and Pakistani ethnicity were least likely to be able to make ends meet if their main income source failed for a month, while at least half of those with Black African, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean ethnicity had less than £1,000 in family savings “to act as a buffer in case of a fall in their income”.\textsuperscript{56} This vulnerability was also affected by the significant ethnicity pay gap.\textsuperscript{57} While there has been a significant reduction of the hourly median pay gap between all minorities and the White British ethnic group to 2.3%, persistent disparities exist for some ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{58} For instance, in 2020 the Pakistani and the Bangladeshi ethnic groups earned 16% less on average than the White British group and the Black African group 8% less; meanwhile the Indian ethnic group earned 16% more on average than the White British group.\textsuperscript{59}

\section*{COVID-19, racism and racial discrimination in the workplace}

\textsuperscript{20} Economic racial disparities were scrutinised and brought to the government’s attention by major think tanks including the Runnymede Trust, the Resolution Foundation and trade union think tanks. In a report published in 2021, the TUC raised awareness of the effects of institutional racism and structural inequality in the world of work as factors accounting for over half the difference in risk between people from ethnic minorities and the white majority, observing that “racism remains a matter of life and death”.\textsuperscript{60} Drawing on the lived experiences of BAME workers, the report draws attention to the disproportionate numbers of BAME workers working in frontline jobs during the crisis and the levels of in-work poverty characterising BAME communities. The report
describes a situation in which discrimination has trapped these workers in low-wage occupations and in “situations where they are expected to do the hardest and most dangerous work.” For instance, the TUC reveals that one in six of those responding to their call for evidence during the COVID-19 pandemic said that they had been put at increased risk because of their ethnicity. BAME workers reported they were forced to undertake risky tasks and to comply with their employers’ demands for fear of losing their temporary work or their hours being reduced. Other telling narratives include the experience of a BAME nurse who was only allocated to work with coronavirus patients. The nurse reported that her insecure status as an agency worker made her vulnerable: her manager could threaten her to complain to her agency or stop booking her for work.

In its latest report published in 2023, the TUC also points to the increasing number of BAME workers in insecure and low-paid work compared to white workers: while the proportion of white workers in insecure and low-paid employment has only risen from 10.5% to 10.8% over the past decade, it has grown from 7.8% to 12.2% for BAME workers. The report also stresses that the number of BAME workers in insecure work more than doubled between 2011 and 2022, from 360,000 to 836,340, concluding that the “massive and disproportionate concentration of BME workers in insecure work” and the prevalence of zero-hours contracts is evidence of a distortion of the labour market by structural racism.

The report goes on to observe that British economic structures “have exploited and impoverished BME communities nationally and internationally over centuries”, resulting in an estimated total annual cost of pay penalties for black Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers of £3.2 billion per year.

Though access to higher education has improved the situation of the children born to the first generation of immigrants, disadvantages are still observed when comparing members of ethnic minority groups with members of the majority with the same levels of education and labour market experience. According to Heath and McMahon, even with similar training and education to the majority ethnic minorities face barriers when accessing employment, a situation they have captured using the term ‘ethnic penalties’. In their research, Heath and Cheng have highlighted the limited protection offered by education. They showed that all ethnic minorities were more likely than the white majority to be overqualified for their jobs and concluded that low wages were less related to “widespread wage discrimination” than to a concentration of ethnic minority employees in low-paying occupations. The very influential Runnymede Trust think tank showed that when comparing two male graduates, one black and the other white, working in the same region with the same education, the black worker earns 17% less than the white worker. Research published in 2019 illustrates that ethnic minorities face a very high level of discrimination when applying for a job. Though nearly one in four applicants from the majority group (24%) received a positive response (i.e., a call back) from employers, ethnic minorities needed to send 60% more applications in order to receive as many calls back from employers as the majority group, despite having identical qualifications and cover letters.

The Sewell Report and Britain’s post-racial society

The disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ethnic minorities and the massive waves of protests initiated by the Black Lives Matter movement following the
murder of Black American George Floyd in 2020 re-ignited debates on racism and discrimination. These developments led former Prime Minister Boris Johnson to take the lead in addressing the question of discrimination and racism by ordering a report from the Commission on Race and Ethnic Inequalities to investigate Britain’s situation in terms of the fight against inequality and make recommendations with a view to reducing disparities and closing the gap between white and non-white populations in the areas of education, employment, health and criminal justice. The next section focuses on the employment component of the report and its view on the persistence of economic disadvantage for people from ethnic minorities in the workplace in relation to racism and discrimination.

The report’s preliminary section reads as a warning from the Commission suggesting that its findings and conclusions may be “surprising” and “thought-provoking”, as it intended to “speak to a new period”. This conversation, the Commission argued, is only possible if people “acknowledge that the UK has fundamentally shifted since those periods in the past and has become a more open society”. Thus, from the outset the report announces a shift from the racially-constructed analysis of disparities that has served as the dominant paradigm of previous official reports published on inequalities in Britain. The members of the Commission claimed that the debate on racism has been characterised by a misguided use of the term, whereby subjective perceptions have much too often surpassed objectivity.

The report notes that racism is a complex concept with manifestations that can take many forms “from overt hostility and exclusion to unconscious bias and micro aggressions”, suggesting that its meaning has evolved and expanded over time without objective data being used to support these changes. For the commission, achieving racial fairness “becomes harder if people from ethnic minority backgrounds absorb a fatalist narrative that says the deck is permanently stacked against them”, implicitly inviting ethnic minorities to abandon “the culture of victimhood”. The report explains that its aim is rather to dispel some myths and reach a more nuanced view about the interplay of racism with ethnic minorities’ underachievement and economic inequality.

The Commission denies the existence of institutional racism and sees the persistence of racial inequalities as being related to geography, family influence, socio-economic background, culture and religion, which it claims all impact an individual’s opportunities much more than the existence of racism. Therefore, the Commission advises the government to abandon the term ‘Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic’ (BAME). It claims that the acronym depicts, in effect, a “reductionist idea [which] forces us to think that the principle cause of all disparities must be majority versus minority discrimination”, thus suggesting the use of terms like ‘ethnic minority’, ‘ethnic group’ or ‘white ethnic minorities’.

On employment and pay, the report depicts “an overall convergence story” between whites and non-whites. Drawing on statistics published by the ONS, the report observes that the pay gap is at its lowest level since 2012. However, as the Economics Observatory notes, the publication of raw, unadjusted earnings figures gives a biased picture of pay differentials. Geography and occupation are two significant factors: as a large proportion of people from ethnic minorities live in London, their wages are naturally higher. Also, accounting for occupation fails to clarify that the pay differential is caused by an over-representation of ethnic minorities in low-paid jobs. The report also notes that the ethnicity pay gap is today marginal, but the relevance of
this indicator is to be questioned on two grounds at least: as this indicator includes the group defined as “White Irish”, who earn more than 40% above the national average, this gives a biased picture of pay differentials between different ethnic groups. Statistics show that, in reality, some ethnic groups such as Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Black Africans earn 15% less than their White British counterparts. Further, since this indicator does not include those who are self-employed or not in work, it clearly hides the reality of pay disparities.

The ‘convergence story’ argument based on an increasing employment rate among ethnic minorities should also be called into question. As previously shown, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the reality of the vulnerability of the significant proportion of ethnic minority workers in insecure employment. Working in an insecure job means fewer opportunities to achieve job stability. This is an important part of the story that the report fails to describe. The report nevertheless stresses an increase in the representation of ethnic minorities in top professions including civil servants, lawyers and doctors, but fails to highlight the large number of ethnic minorities that are still trapped in low-paid and low-skilled jobs.

Notably, the report fails to propose any concrete or coercive actions to restrain inequalities, like gender pay gap reporting which became mandatory for companies with over 250 employees in 2017. The report’s recommendations for tackling ethnic pay disparities can be summarised in a few lines and announce nothing new. Nor do they expand upon pre-established actions. Instead, the Commission recommends that employers who choose to publish pay figures broken down by ethnicity should accompany this reporting with a diagnosis and an action plan to reduce the gap.

The reception of the Sewell Report and the government’s response

The report’s observations and analysis of racial disparities in the workplace mark a significant backslide and a shift away from the McGregor Review published in 2017. This document acknowledged that “in the UK today, there is a structural, historical bias that favours certain individuals […] overt racism that we associate with the 1970s does still disgracefully occur […] there is discrimination and bias at every stage of an individual’s career, and even before it begins” and this despite the introduction of the 2010 Equality Act, which replaced all previous anti-discrimination laws to form the most comprehensive UK-based law dealing with equality.

The polemical argument brought to the fore by the commission, that Britain was transitioning into a post-racial society in which racism and discrimination were things of the past, sounded very much like a provocation. The report’s denial of structural inequalities was described as “particularly unsettling” in the context of the pandemic and the position taken by the Commission as similar to that of the three wise monkeys – ‘see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil’. The Runnymede Trust explained that this report showed that “the commission had no interest in genuinely discussing racism” underlining that “even the government does not go as far as to say that we are post racial”. The think tank observed that the “commission’s assertion that institutional racism no longer exists is premised on the flimsiest basis” and pointed to a manipulation of data. In the light of the convergence story depicted by the report, the
Joseph Rowntree Foundation therefore asked “why is it that British Bangladeshis continue to have high unemployment rates? Why is the wealth gap between British Bangladeshis and White British so large?”.

Labour MP Marsha De Cordova denounced a “misleading cherry-picking of data to draw ideologically motivated and divisive conclusions”.

The government responded in kind with the publication of a new report called *Inclusive Britain*, comprising 70 action plans to promote trust and fairness in the workplace and eradicate prejudice and discrimination. While the government acknowledged the existence of racism in Britain, it did not discredit the commission’s conclusion that there is no *institutional* racism. The government instead proposed the establishment of “a diverse panel of historians to develop a new knowledge-rich model history curriculum by 2024 to support high-quality teaching of our complex past”. The government also credited the commission’s more nuanced view of British society and announced that the acronym BAME would be abandoned, as it fails to recognise the complexity and heterogeneity of ethnic groups.

**Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic provided new evidence of the greater economic vulnerability of ethnic minorities during recessions. The crisis has shed light on pre-existing and persistent economic racial inequalities that have lasting economic impacts. Three years on, the unemployment rate among ethnic minorities is still higher than it is among the white majority, with the exception of Indians, who have achieved net progress in terms of employment status and wages. Black people, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis remain the most disadvantaged ethnic groups, with persistent occupational segregation and lower wages.

Educational access and achievements have improved, but this has not fully redressed the inequity of the situation, and the role played by racism and discrimination in the ‘ethnic penalty’ remains a highly controversial issue. The UK has certainly developed one of the strongest legislative arsenals in Europe on these issues and has taken major steps in addressing racial disparities and combating discrimination. However, the structural socio-economic exclusion of racial and ethnic minority communities in the UK remains disproportionately high. The post-racial society, as endorsed by the Sewell Report, has therefore not been realised.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur has recommended concrete actions such as the implementation of a unified UK-level policy that lays out a comprehensive strategy to eliminate systemic and systematic unlawful racial disparities and the introduction of a mandatory equality impact assessment prior to the adoption of policies. Theresa May herself once launched the idea of requiring employers to publish their ethnicity statistics, one of the few suggested initiatives that could indeed provide a convincing response to Baroness Ruby McGregor’s statement that “The time for talking is over. Now is the time to act.”
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78. Ibid. p. 8.
80. Ibid. p. 32.
81. Ibid. p. 110
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ABSTRACTS

Studies analysing the economic impact of periods of recession and economic crises in Great Britain through the lens of ethnicity have shown that ethnic minorities are particularly vulnerable to these shocks. The Covid-19 pandemic was another window into deeply rooted racial disparities, in terms of health: a significantly higher death rate has been observed. Economically, the Covid-19 crisis has magnified pre-existing economic inequalities; for instance, the unemployment rate was higher amongst Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people compared to the white population. It was in this specific context, and amidst the Black Lives Matter movement, that the Sewell Report on race and ethnic disparities was published. This article first outlines the unequal impact of COVID-19 on ethnic minorities both in terms of health and economics before addressing the issues of racism and discrimination involved in the persistence of labour market inequalities. Drawing on official data and surveys, it argues that the idea that Britain is transitioning to a post-racial society, as endorsed by the Sewell Report, is a myth.

En Grande-Bretagne, les études menées sur l’impact économique des périodes de récession et de crise économique selon une approche ethnique ont démontré une vulnérabilité plus importante chez les minorités ethniques. La pandémie de Covid-19 a été un miroir grossissant de ces inégalités raciales. Sur le plan sanitaire, un taux significativement plus élevé de décès a été observé. Sur le plan économique, cette crise a mis en exergue et creusé des inégalités économiques préexistantes. Ceci se traduit notamment par un taux de chômage plus élevé chez les populations dites « BAME » (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) que dans la population blanche. C’est dans ce contexte particulier et en marge du mouvement militant ‘Black Lives Matter’ que le rapport Sewell sur les inégalités raciales et ethniques a été publié. Cet article présente d’abord les différents impacts de la pandémie sur les minorités ethniques sur le plan sanitaire et économique, puis interroge le rôle joué par le racisme et la discrimination dans la persistance de ces inégalités sur le marché du travail. En s’appuyant sur les données et enquêtes officielles, il vise à démontrer que l’argument défendu par le rapport Sewell, selon lequel la Grande-Bretagne serait entrée dans une période post raciale, est un leurre.

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**Keywords:** Covid-19, economic inequalities, unemployment, ethnic minorities, racism, discrimination

**Mots-clés:** Covid-19, inégalités économiques, chômage, minorités ethniques, racisme, discrimination

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