

LITERATURE REVIEW

MINORITY ETHNIC WORKERS IN THE UK LABOUR MARKET

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1 SUMMARY

This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how different ethnic groups fare in the labour market. This is part of a broader research piece by the Living Wage Foundation, which looks specifically into the relationship between ethnicity and low pay. However, before analysing the relationship between ethnic groups and low pay, we need to understand and outline the broader imbalances in the labour market among different ethnic groups.

The following review will outline the ethnic divergences within the UK labour market, looking specifically at employment rates, pay and working conditions, and the impact of Covid-19. It will also focus on key drivers of ethnic employment gaps, and the impact of policy interventions designed to address them. The findings of the review will support the research on low pay across different ethnic groups, helping us to assess how far the relationship between ethnicity and low pay is indicative of broader labour market trends seen across the economy as a whole.

We summarise the key findings of the literature review below.

EMPLOYMENT

- In 2021, the employment rate for minority ethnic groups was 68 per cent, compared with 76 per cent for white workers. At 8 percentage points, the ethnicity employment gap is half of what it was in 2001.
- Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers are the two ethnic groups who have driven this, but this is mainly because they had a lower employment rate to begin with.
- The growth of the employment rate among

minority ethnic workers has disproportionately benefited men rather than women. Across all ethnic groups, minority ethnic women still have a lower employment rate than white women – this is not the case for men.

- Key barriers to employment for minority ethnic women include the cost, availability and cultural appropriateness of formal childcare (such as childcare providers not providing halal food), as is reflected in the higher levels of economic inactivity among Pakistani and Bangladeshi women.

PAY AND WORKING CONDITIONS

- Although minority ethnic groups have made gains in overall levels of pay, members of most minority ethnic groups earn less than white workers on average, with only Chinese and Indian workers bucking this trend.
- Male Bangladeshi and Pakistani workers have the lowest hourly rates of men from any ethnic group: £10.55 on average, compared with £12.21 for white male workers. Other low paid racial groups are 'other ethnic groups' (£11.39 per hour on average) and Black African and Black Caribbean people (£11.54).
- In almost all ethnic groups, men continue to out-earn women when it comes to hourly pay.
- Minority ethnic workers are more likely to be in insecure or casualised work: 4.3 per cent of minority ethnic workers are on 'zero-hours contracts', compared with 3 per cent of white workers; minority ethnic

women are twice as likely as white men to be on zero-hours contracts.

WHAT SHAPES ETHNICITY EMPLOYMENT GAPS?

- **Education:** Educational qualifications play a major role in shaping and reducing ethnic employment gaps. Ethnic groups with higher-than-average attainment rates earn more than average, while the reverse is true for those with lower average attainment rates. For example, Indian and Chinese students – typically higher earners – are the highest achievers in the UK in terms of GCSE grades, doing better than their white British peers. On the other hand, Black Caribbean and Pakistani students – typically lower earners – have grades below the national average.
- The wider structural and socioeconomic context is important. Certain ethnic groups – such as Pakistani and Black Caribbean households – are more likely to live in low-income areas, and are also more likely to attend schools with performance below the national average. Further to this, low-income ethnic groups are also more likely to be eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), which is also associated with lower educational attainment.
- **Occupational/sectoral clustering:** There is a high degree of occupational/sectoral clustering among low paid ethnic groups. For example, Bangladeshi men are disproportionately concentrated in catering-related businesses, while Black workers are over-

represented in the care sector: both of these areas of work have higher-than-average levels of low pay.

- **Underemployment:** There is a high degree of under-employment among minority ethnic workers. For example, a much larger proportion of male Pakistani (27 per cent) and Bangladeshi (37 per cent) workers are in part time roles compared with white male workers (11 per cent). Minority ethnic workers are also more likely to work in roles not aligned with their skill level, with 40 per cent of Black African and 39 per cent of Bangladeshi employees feeling over-qualified in their jobs compared with just a quarter of white workers.
- **Structural discrimination:** Minority ethnic workers face significant discrimination in entering and progressing in the workplace. Research shows that they have to submit twice as many CVs as white British applicants, with a similar profile, do before they are contacted by a potential employer, and that applicants with names that appear to be from more 'culturally distant' countries, such as Black Africans and those from Middle Eastern countries, are the most heavily discriminated against.
- This discrimination does not end once minority ethnic workers enter the workforce: 29 per cent of Black Caribbean employees report being overlooked for promotion due to their ethnicity; the same is true for 35 per cent of male Pakistani workers and 33 per cent of male Indian workers.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MINORITY ETHNIC WORKERS

- Throughout the pandemic, minority ethnic workers have faced a greater exposure to the Covid-19 related economic and health risks.
- For instance, minority ethnic workers are more likely to have been in roles where the risk of contracting Covid-19 is higher, and have had a higher death rate from Covid-19 than white workers
- Similarly, minority ethnic workers are also more likely to have worked in 'lockdown-exposed' sectors which most relied on the Job Retention Scheme, such as Transport and Storage, and Accommodation and Food services.
- Minority ethnic workers lost a larger amount of their incomes through the pandemic. In the five-month period between February and June 2020, they faced a 14 per cent loss in gross income on average, compared with just 5 per cent for white workers.

INTERVENTION AND POLICY IN ADDRESSING THE ETHNICITY PAY GAP

- The introduction in 2016 of a National Living Wage disproportionately benefited minority ethnic workers – but mainly because they were more likely to be earning the government minimum already
- In 2018, the Low Pay Commission found that the National Living Wage was paid to a higher proportion of minority ethnic workers than white workers: it covered 13.2 per cent of minority ethnic workers, compared with 9.6 per cent of white workers.

2 UNEMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYMENT AMONG MINORITY ETHNIC WORKERS

EMPLOYMENT LEVELS AMONG MINORITY ETHNIC WORKERS

Minority ethnic groups have made significant strides in the labour market over recent decades. Between 2001 and 2021, the employment rate for minority ethnic groups increased by 10 percentage points, five times higher than the increase for white workers (two percentage points).¹ Consequently, the employment gap between white workers and those from minority ethnic groups has reached its lowest point ever (at the time of writing). It is still a substantial eight percentage points (76 per cent of white workers are employed, 68 per cent minority ethnic workers), but this is half of what it was in 2001.²

These gains have not been shared evenly among all minority ethnic workers over this period. Those with the lowest employment rates at the start of the millennium have typically seen a larger boost in their employment rates: for example, Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers have seen improvements of 17 and 18 percentage points respectively. The outlier here is Indian workers, who already had the second-highest employment rate among minority ethnic workers in 2001 but have still experienced a 15-percentage-point increase in the last 20 years. This is considerably higher than the increase experienced by Chinese (six percentage points), Black

British (six percentage points) and 'other ethnic group' (eight percentage points) workers, all of whom also started with lower rates of employment. Indian workers are the only minority ethnic group with a higher employment rate than white workers, and this has been the case since June 2020, with the gap between white and Indian workers continuing to grow.³

EMPLOYMENT LEVELS AMONG ETHNIC GROUPS BY GENDER

The reduction in the employment gap for minority ethnic workers has largely benefited men rather than women.⁴ Particular beneficiaries have been Pakistani and Bangladeshi men, for whom the raw employment rate (i.e. without discounting economically inactive people) has increased by 20 percentage points since 1991, while a similar but less significant increase has happened for Black Caribbean and Black African men.⁵ In contrast, employment growth for women of Black Caribbean/African or 'mixed' ethnic backgrounds has been slow over the past two decades, at just five and three percentage points respectively.⁶ Consequently, while women from minority ethnic groups have seen some improvement, it is marginal compared with that of men.

As a result, unlike with men, women in all of the minority ethnic groups for which data is available are less likely to be

employed than white women.⁷ Additionally, the differences in employment rates between white workers and those from minority ethnic backgrounds are larger between women than men. This is particularly true when comparing white workers (typically the group with the highest employment rate) to the group with the lowest employment rate (i.e., the range average). For example, 35 per cent of Bangladeshi women are in employment compared with 74 per cent of white women – a range of 39 percentage points. In contrast, 72 per cent of Bangladeshi men are employed compared with 79 per cent of white men, a range of seven percentage points.⁸

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR MINORITY ETHNIC WOMEN

A key driver of this gender difference is caregiving responsibilities, which are performed by minority ethnic women at a higher rate than by minority ethnic men, white women, and white men in particular.⁹ Caregiving for young children or other dependents makes entry in the labour market considerably more difficult, because such responsibilities usually require round-the-clock attention and supervision. Women of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin are particularly impacted by this. An evidence review by the Fawcett Society found that women from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds in Britain were four

times more likely than white British women to be out of paid work because they were looking after their home or family (at 38 per cent and 31 per cent respectively, compared with 7 per cent of white women).¹⁰

This is reflected in the higher levels of economic inactivity seen among women in these groups. The inactivity rates for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are 55 per cent and 62 per cent respectively, compared with 25 per cent for white women.¹¹ Unpaid childcare is a factor in this inactivity that disproportionately affects minority ethnic women – just 14 per cent of economically inactive white women do unpaid care in the home, compared with 49 per cent of Bangladeshi and 47 per cent of Pakistani women.¹²

The provision of childcare in the UK is another impediment which disproportionately impacts Pakistani and Bangladeshi women. Childcare in the UK is the third most expensive of Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries,¹³ and numerous studies have shown the affordability of childcare to be the main reason parents – particularly mothers – fall out of work or reduce hours; this is particularly the case for those on low income.¹⁴ It is not surprising that Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, who have the second- and fourth-lowest average hourly earnings respectively (when data is broken down by ethnicity and gender), are less likely than other groups to use formal childcare. That said, Black women also have lower levels of pay on average, yet still have higher levels of childcare usage and employment rates that are closer to that of white women.¹⁵ This suggests that pay is not the only factor when it comes to childcare take-up. While South Asian women are not

exceptional in being primarily responsible for caregiving (a gendered pattern seen across cultures), they are less reliant on formal childcare services than their white counterparts.¹⁶ Recent studies have, however, indicated a generational shift, with second-generation South Asian women having higher rates of participation in the labour force than previous generations.¹⁷ Key drivers of this rise in participation include a higher likelihood of recognised qualifications, as well as second and third generation South Asian women being more likely to i) have fewer children and ii) have children later in life than their parents. Having been born and raised in Britain, second and third generation South Asian women are also more likely to speak English fluently, whether as a primary or secondary language,¹⁸ thus facing fewer barriers in respect to language proficiency.

STRUCTURAL DISCRIMINATION AND MINORITY ETHNIC WORKERS

For minority ethnic groups, structural and institutional barriers erected by racism remain in place. Research shows that workers from minority ethnic groups may have to submit twice as many CVs as white British peers with equivalent profiles do to get a call-back, and that applicants with names that appear to be from more ‘culturally distant’ countries, such as Black Africans and those from Middle Eastern countries, are the most heavily discriminated against.¹⁹

Unsurprisingly, this discrimination does not end when members of minority ethnic groups find their way into work. In terms of opportunities for progression, 35 per cent of Pakistani, 33 per cent of Indian and 29 per cent of Black Caribbean employees report feeling that they have been overlooked for promotion because

of their ethnicity.²⁰ Employees from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely than those from a white British background to say that experiencing some form of discrimination contributed to their failure to achieve their career expectations (20 per cent versus 11 per cent).²¹ It is important to note that this study did not define the nature of this discrimination, and included discrimination based on faith, gender, age and other factors.

Self-employment is more prevalent among some minority ethnic workers than white workers.²² This may be a reaction to the patterns of discrimination experienced in regular employment.²³ This finding is supported by the higher levels of self-employment among those with lower levels of both employment and pay, such as for Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers. But the relationship is far from causal, with Black African and Black Caribbean workers having lower levels of self-employment than white workers.²⁴ There is evidence that self-employment is not always a successful strategy for escaping low pay, with particular ethnic groups showing occupational clustering in low paid sectors, such as Pakistani and Bangladeshi self-employed workers being concentrated in transport and catering.²⁵

While factors such as caring responsibilities are often cited as key inhibitors to Pakistani and Bangladeshi women accessing the labour market, systemic discrimination (particularly against Muslim women) cannot be ignored as a driver. A research study conducted as part of the Equality Act Review in 2020, which surveyed over 400 Muslim women (predominantly Pakistani and Bangladeshi women) evidenced this discrimination. When asked about challenges in the workplace, 47.2 per cent cited having encountered discrimination and Islamophobia.²⁶ In qualitative interviews with participants, discriminatory workplace practices were cited by numerous participants, namely negative attitudes towards wearing the hijab, mocking non-participation in alcohol-centred work activities

and negative comments about Islamic festivals and practices (i.e. fasting during Ramadan).²⁷ These findings are echoed in research published by the Social Mobility Commission, which looked at social mobility among young Muslims. Again, negative stereotyping, failures to accommodate religious practices and prejudice against those wearing the hijab were cited by the young Muslims interviewed as issues in the workplace.²⁸ In a British attitudes survey conducted in 2021, it was found that 25.9 per cent of the British public felt negatively towards Muslims, and 36.3 per cent agreed that Islam threatens the British way of life.²⁹ Pakistani and Bangladeshi people make up more than half of the Muslim population in Britain; with over one quarter of the British public holding negative views towards Muslims, it is unsurprising that discrimination hinders access to the labour market as well as provides challenges within it, with the level of unemployment amongst Muslims more than double that of the general population.³⁰ Of Muslim women, who face a 'triple penalty' at the intersection of ethnicity, gender and religion, 65 per cent are economically inactive.³¹

3 PAY & WORKING CONDITIONS

PAY

As with rises in employment, certain minority ethnic groups have seen growth in their household income over time. For example, between 2001 and 2016, Bangladeshi and Pakistani household incomes rose by 38 per cent and 28 per cent respectively, compared with 13 per cent in white households over the same period. It is no coincidence that household incomes rose the most for the two ethnic groups with the highest increase in employment over the same period.³² Several ethnic groups are earning more than white workers in some professions, such as in finance, with Chinese and Indian workers over-represented in positions such as corporate managers and directors.³³ Moreover, Chinese and Indian men have the highest average weekly earnings of all ethnic groups, at £745 and £720 respectively.

However, gains in household income have not been shared evenly among different ethnic groups, and most minority ethnic groups have a lower average income than their white peers, with Indian and Chinese workers being the only groups not conforming to this trend. For example, despite seeing the largest increase in household income over the past few decades, Pakistani and Bangladeshi households still have the lowest income across all ethnic groups, with an average annual income discrepancy, compared with white households, of £8,900 and £8,700 respectively.³⁴

These discrepancies persist when looking at median hourly pay rather than household income as a whole, with Bangladeshi and Pakistani men earning some of the lowest hourly rates of any male ethnic group – £10.41 and £11.43 respectively, compared with £13.78 for white British men.³⁵ These major gaps in income levels, both between ethnic groups and in comparison with white workers, go some way to evidencing the ways in which the labour market pressures outlined above manifest in minority ethnic workers' take-home pay.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Disparities are evident between ethnic groups not only in rates of pay but also in the type of work undertaken by minority ethnic workers. Precarious work, where there is little progression and where the prevalence of 'zero-hours contracts' is high, is more commonly undertaken by minority ethnic workers than white workers, even after taking educational and social background into account.³⁶ For example, recent research by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) found that 4.3 per cent of minority ethnic workers are in zero-hours contracts, compared with 3 per cent of white workers; minority ethnic women are twice as likely as white men to be on zero-hours contracts.³⁷

This work, characterised by uncertain hours and a lack of progression opportunities, includes many professions in which minority ethnic workers are over-represented: almost one-

third of Bangladeshi men work in catering-related businesses,³⁸ while Black workers are over-represented in the care sector.³⁹ The prevalence of these low paid roles among minority ethnic communities is a key driver of low pay, with occupational and sectoral clustering being a key factor. Clustering refers to a process in which workers of certain backgrounds are disproportionately concentrated in particular subsections of the labour market.⁴⁰ Minority ethnic workers – particularly the lowest paid racial groups, such as Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers – are often highly clustered in low paid occupations and industries such as hospitality. This leaves them at greater risk of low pay. One factor that drives this is the informal referral process that exists in certain occupations, whereby employees are referred and subsequently hired through a contact within their own 'co-ethnic' social networks.⁴¹ These informal referrals can also be used as a way to avoid discrimination in recruitment processes; while this type of referral into specific occupations can be fruitful, the jobs are often low paid and offer little security for the employee.

While occupational clustering is more prevalent among working men than women,⁴² minority ethnic female workers are often subject to a double disadvantage when it comes to pay. These workers carry the dual economic cost of being both women and from a minority ethnic group, both of which carry a disproportionate risk of suffering from low pay. This is reflected in average

income: women from Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black African groups are all out-earned by white British women and minority ethnic men. The difference in income between Black African men and women is notable, with men earning an average hourly rate of £12.13 compared with an average of £10.92 for women.⁴³ Pakistani women earn an average of £10.10 per hour, compared with £11.43 for Pakistani men. Bangladeshi workers, both male and female, are among the lowest paid of all ethnic minority groups; while women in this group do out-earn men on an hourly basis, the difference is marginal, at £0.19.⁴⁴ These gulfs in income between men and women from the same ethnic group go some way to evidencing the double disadvantage often faced by women at the intersection of ethnic and gender discrimination in the labour market.

The gap between men and women is also evident in better paid ethnic groups. For example, Chinese men and women are both among the highest earners among minority ethnic workers but their pay disparity is stark, with Chinese men earning an hourly rate of £18.05 compared with £14.16 for Chinese women.⁴⁵ The gap between Indian men and women – a high-earning group – is substantial, with Indian men out-earning women by £4.10 per hour.⁴⁶

Under-employment is another issue that disproportionately affects minority ethnic workers, with a larger proportion of male Pakistani (27 per cent) and Bangladeshi (37 per cent) workers in part time roles compared with white male workers (11 per cent).⁴⁷ This disparity in hours worked is a major reason that Pakistani and Bangladeshi households are in the bottom fifth of incomes.⁴⁸

4 WHAT SHAPES THE ETHNICITY EMPLOYMENT GAPS?

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Educational qualifications play a major role in shaping and reducing ethnic employment gaps. Rather unsurprisingly, evidence shows that ethnic groups with higher-than-average attainment rates earn higher wages than average, while the reverse is true for those with lower average attainment rates. The link between academic success and higher earnings tracks through to higher education; Chinese and Indian employees are two groups that are among the most likely to hold a degree or equivalent, with 75 per cent and 57.5 per cent of workers achieving this qualification, compared with 34.2 per cent of white British workers, and are also the highest earners.

Indian and Chinese students are similarly the highest achievers in the UK in terms of their GCSE grades, surpassing their white British peers. Conversely, Black Caribbean and Pakistani students – who typically go on to be lower earners – have grades below the national average.⁴⁹ Socioeconomic factors are important here: Pakistani and Black Caribbean households are more likely to live in low-income areas, and they are also more likely to attend schools with below-average educational attainment rates.⁵⁰ The relationship between socioeconomic area and school quality is strong and well established: those attending lower-performing schools and with lower household incomes

consistently show lower-than-average levels of educational attainment.⁵¹ That Black Caribbean and Pakistani students fall behind is therefore emblematic of the deeply ingrained structural inequalities in the education system, which disproportionately impact minority ethnic students. The ethnic groups with the lowest attainment scores are Gypsy/Roma students and Irish Traveller students, with Attainment 8 scores (measuring 8 GCSE-level qualifications) of 22.7 and 30.7 respectively. The national average is 50.9. However, the relationship between school attainment levels and future pay rates cannot be tracked through for this group, as the Labour Force Survey does not account for Gypsy/Roma and Irish Traveller workers separately. While Gypsy/Roma and Irish Traveller groups are accounted for in education data, they are often omitted as distinct groups in analyses on pay (excluding census data, of which the latest was not available at the time of review). This omission means that they are not as visible within this report as other groups, though they are evidently disadvantaged in the sphere of education.

That being said, irrespective of the key drivers, there does appear to be a fairly robust correlation between higher educational attainment and improved employment outcomes, particularly with Chinese and Indian workers going on to pursue highly paid careers following academic success. However, this

does not paint the full picture: white British students are outperformed by Bangladeshi students at school, with white British students' results falling below the national average and Bangladeshi students exceeding it.⁵² However, Bangladeshi workers are the third lowest paid in the UK while white British workers are among the highest.⁵³ Though both Bangladeshi and Pakistani workers are more likely to hold degrees or equivalent qualifications than white British workers, they still generally experience lower wages. This can be partially attributed to the 'degree awarding gap' – the gap between white and minority ethnic workers earning a 2:1 or above in their undergraduate degree.⁵⁴ This provides yet more evidence of the institutional barriers faced by minority ethnic students in education.

All that said, there is some evidence of ethnic pay gaps among those with fewer educational qualifications, although the gaps tend to be smaller for than the population as a whole. For instance, white non-graduates earn on average 7-9 per cent more than Black non-graduates with a similar educational and professional profile.⁵⁵ These figures demonstrate that educational attainment is only part of the picture.

SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

Socioeconomic factors need to be considered when discussing

the relationship between ethnicity, educational attainment and labour market outcomes. Recent evidence has found that white students who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) have the lowest average GCSE scores and are less likely to go to university than those from any other group, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds who are also FSM-eligible.⁵⁶ However, it is unclear whether these poorer educational outcomes manifest in the labour market, because most continuous labour market surveys such as the Labour Force Survey do not collect data on whether respondents were FSM-eligible.

That said, recent Office for National Statistics (ONS) analysis found that less than a quarter (23 per cent) of those who were FSM-eligible earned above the real Living Wage by the time they were 25, compared with 44 per cent of those who were not FSM-eligible. However, this wasn't broken down by ethnicity, so we are unable to assess whether white FSM-eligible workers outperform minority ethnic FSM-eligible workers despite having worse educational outcomes. Assuming a linear trajectory between education performance and labour market outcomes, you might expect white workers who are FSM-eligible to be the lowest-performing group in the labour market too. But given that educational performance does not always translate into the labour market for minority ethnic workers – with certain racial groups being out-earned by white workers despite better educational performance – there is no guarantee that this would be the case. With this in mind, the underperformance of white FSM-eligible students should not be used as a tool to undermine anti-racist initiatives within the education system, as has been the case previously.⁵⁷ Rather, it

is important that more-holistic solutions are found that account for the significant barriers in education erected by racism *and* broader socioeconomic factors.

AGE

There is a clear generational distinction between pay for younger minority ethnic workers and that of older workers. White workers aged 30 and over earn a higher hourly wage than almost every other ethnic group, with the exception of Indian workers, who are the sole outliers.⁵⁸ In fact, white employees in the 30–55 age bracket out-earn their minority ethnic peers on a 2:1 basis.⁵⁹ The picture is reversed, however, when looking at the younger bracket of workers aged 16–29. In this group, white British workers out-earn only Pakistani workers, receiving lower hourly median earnings than Indian, Bangladeshi, Black African and Black Caribbean workers of the same age. Despite this downward turn in wages for younger white British workers, when looking at lifetime earnings, white British men earn double the income of minority ethnic men on average.⁶⁰ Minority ethnic women face a similar ethnic penalty in terms of their lifetime earnings, albeit at a lower rate.⁶¹ However, lifetime earnings are based on the current generation of older workers and retirees, and therefore do not serve as evidence that the younger generation of white workers will mimic this pattern of higher lifetime earnings compared with minority ethnic peers.

While young minority ethnic workers out-earn their white peers when in employment, they are still disproportionately affected by unemployment. Minority ethnic young people aged 16–24 are the group facing the highest rate of unemployment, at 22 per cent, compared with 11 per cent of

white people of the same age.⁶² While not as stark, this negative correlation continues with age, with minority ethnic workers aged 25–49 unemployed at a rate of 5.2 per cent compared with 3.1 per cent for white people. The trend continues once workers reach 50, with white workers unemployed at a rate of 2.7 per cent in contrast with 4.5 per cent of their minority ethnic peers.⁶³

GEOGRAPHY AND WIDER FACTORS

Other factors, including geography and proficiency in English, are sometimes cited as key drivers of pay and employment gaps between white and minority ethnic workers. Such factors (geography and English language proficiency) are also recognised as drivers of occupational clustering in low paid sectors, and/or high unemployment in certain locations. Black African people are particularly over-represented in unemployment statistics in urban areas. For this group, the unemployed population is concentrated in major urban areas such as across London and parts of the North West of England to a larger extent than for other ethnic groups,⁶⁴ despite the number of job opportunities that these metropolitan areas tend to hold. This suggests that job availability in certain sectors does not necessarily translate to roles that are accessible to certain communities. Occupational clustering is more likely to occur when the population of the affected ethnic group is low in one particular area,⁶⁵ suggesting that restricted social and professional networks can lead to a higher rate of clustering, often in low paid employment. Another factor is proficiency in English language; Pakistani and Bangladeshi adults are the least likely minority ethnic group to be able to speak English well, or at all,⁶⁶ with this having

been historically cited as a key factor in lower levels of labour market participation particularly for women.⁶⁷ However, the picture majorly shifts once age groups are controlled for: of adults aged 65 and over, 50.4 per cent of Bangladeshis and 34.9 per cent of Pakistanis could not speak English.⁶⁸ In the 25-44 age range however, this shifts to just 3.7% per cent of Bangladeshis and 2 per cent of Pakistanis unable to speak English.⁶⁹ As these figures are taken from the 2011 census, with trends over time these figures are likely to have shrunk further. It is unlikely therefore that language proficiency directly affects labour market participation for those of an age range who are more likely to be economically inactive (i.e. those aged 65 and over).

MIGRATION STATUS

Minority ethnic workers face a disadvantage based not only on where they live but also where they were born. Workers born outside of the UK are more likely to be in low-skilled work.⁷⁰ This disadvantage exists despite workers born overseas will often hold similar qualifications and have educational backgrounds similar to those of workers born in the UK. In this respect, workers face a recruitment process in which their qualifications are not recognised despite being largely equivalent. Access to work is further limited by either a real or a perceived lack of English language skill, where accented English can be seen as signalling a lower aptitude in the language.⁷¹ Being born and raised overseas also means that many workers either lack the networks that long-term residents have built, particularly in labour markets, or have networks that are clustered in low paid professions, adding a further barrier to accessing work for people who have emigrated to the UK.⁷²

MIGRATION PATTERNS

Migration patterns are an important part of the context behind the modern position of different groups and workers within the UK, particularly for those occupying the highest-earning positions. Indian migration occurred largely in two waves, the first in the period following the Second World War, with many emigrating from India (principally the Punjab region) to work in manual labour in order to fill shortages in the UK.⁷³ The second wave in the 1960s and 1970s saw Indians leaving East Africa following the success of newly independent regimes, most notably in Uganda. Many of these Indians possessed wealth, English language skills, and professional backgrounds and qualifications that the previous wave had lacked.⁷⁴ This second wave of Indian migrants is widely regarded as having prospered,⁷⁵ with David Cameron referring to Ugandan Indians in the UK as being 'one of the most successful groups of migrants anywhere in the history of the world'.⁷⁶

The UK has also seen distinct waves of immigration from China and Hong Kong. In the 1950s, a wave of people emigrated from Hong Kong to the UK, establishing and working principally in the Chinese restaurant trade.⁷⁷ The second wave of immigration was distinct from the first, characterised by a shift from so-called 'unskilled' migration to 'highly skilled' migration from the Chinese mainland.⁷⁸ Tier-based entry requirements implemented in 2011 meant that entrants from China to the UK had to prove their economic value to the UK, in terms of either their anticipated income or their investment/entrepreneurial potential. As such, from 2011 onwards, the UK has seen an increase in Chinese migrants in elite professions,

in direct contrast with the first wave of migration in the post-war period.⁷⁹ Chinese migrants who have arrived since 2005 now outnumber those who settled in previous waves, and they originate from the Chinese mainland rather than from Hong Kong and other regions.⁸⁰

The high earning power of the Chinese and Indian groups can also be linked to their propensity towards studying in the UK. Chinese students make up 35 per cent of non-EU international students in the UK, closely followed by Indian students.⁸¹ With annual international tuition fees costing up to £30,548,⁸² the choice to send children to study in the UK is only available to those with the means to do so. It is therefore no surprise that Chinese and Indian groups, with the highest average earning power of all ethnic groups, have the highest level of take-up of these places.⁸³

The migration status of those born overseas has real implications for their status as workers in the UK, with wide pay gaps among different ethnic groups. First-generation Pakistani men face the widest pay gap that cannot be solely accounted for by factors such as sector of employment, educational background or tendency towards part time work.⁸⁴ Migration status is often linked to low levels of English language skills,⁸⁵ lack of recognisable qualifications and a lack of networks, all of which negatively impact workers who are born overseas. While immigrants to the UK do eventually find an equal footing with UK-born workers, this can take as much as 10 years or more,⁸⁶ meaning the negative impact of an individual's migration status can be felt for a decade after their arrival.

DISCRIMINATION

While barriers such as migration status and lower levels of language skills may help to explain why minority ethnic workers face an ethnic penalty, this literature review suggests that the impact of discrimination cannot be overstated. Minority ethnic workers are held back from progressing in employment: 29 per cent of Black Caribbean employees report that they have been overlooked for promotion due to their ethnicity.⁸⁷ This experience is echoed by both Pakistani and Indian men, with 35 per cent and 33 per cent respectively reporting that they have been passed over for a promotion due to their ethnicity.⁸⁸

As previously noted, this discrimination is also evident when applying for work, with minority ethnic workers having to submit twice as many CVs as white British applicants with a similar profile do before being contacted by a prospective employer.⁸⁹ When minority ethnic workers are in employment, they often find themselves in roles that fall below their skill level, with 40 per cent of African and 39 per cent of Bangladeshi employees feeling overqualified in their jobs compared with a quarter of white workers.⁹⁰ These figures point to a pattern of disadvantage following minority ethnic workers at every stage of the recruitment process, from application through to appraisal.

5 THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON MINORITY ETHNIC WORKERS

The Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing closure of businesses had a major impact on the economy, and particularly on workers whose workplaces were forced to close for an unprecedented length of time. Minority ethnic workers were particularly impacted,⁹¹ with the effects visible in furlough take-up as well as income loss. Workers from minority ethnic groups were at risk not only at an economic level, but also in terms of their health, suffering a higher Covid-19 related death rate than white colleagues⁹² as well as being more likely to work in jobs that held a higher risk of exposure to Covid-19.⁹³ While minority ethnic workers form 12 per cent of the workforce, they represent 15 per cent of workers employed in the sectors most affected by the pandemic.⁹⁴ A parliamentary inquiry on the impact of Covid-19 and minority ethnic workers (the report used the term 'BAME' workers) concluded that:

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, BAME people have been acutely affected by pre-existing inequalities across a huge range of areas, including health, employment, accessing Universal Credit, housing and the no recourse to public funds policy. As the pandemic progressed, many of these underlying inequalities made the impact of the pandemic far more severe for BAME people than their white counterparts.⁹⁵

Workplace closures and the loss of income that followed were felt most keenly by ethnic minority workers, who were consistently more likely than white workers to suffer a loss of income due to the pandemic.⁹⁶ The furlough scheme, in which the government subsidised 80 per cent of wages for employees who were unable to work as a result of the pandemic, had an impact on income for minority ethnic workers in particular. Sectors with an above average number of minority ethnic workers were often those that made greatest use of the furlough scheme, such as Transport and Storage, and Accommodation and Food services.⁹⁷ Reciprocity of the furlough scheme is not the sole measure of income loss during the pandemic, nor of its wider effects on the employment landscape. In the five-month period between February and June 2020, minority ethnic workers faced a 14 per cent loss in gross income on average, compared to a 5 per cent loss for white workers. Asian workers were hit the hardest by this income loss, having lost 20 per cent of their gross income during this time period.⁹⁸ One explanation for this could be the prevalence of self-employment among this group, as the furlough scheme did not extend to self-employed people until a separate scheme was introduced some months after the pandemic began.

Overall, 13 per cent of minority ethnic workers are self-employed, compared with 11 per cent of white workers.⁹⁹ The lack of support for the self-employed may therefore have exacerbated the loss of income for certain ethnic groups in particular, with Pakistani and Bangladeshi men more likely to have worked in industries affected by the pandemic as well as being the groups most likely to be self-employed and thus not in receipt of financial support.¹⁰⁰

Minority ethnic workers are disproportionately more likely to be in precarious employment, and are almost twice as likely as white workers to be on zero-hours contracts.¹⁰¹ Employment rates for white adults of working age were higher than those from ethnic minorities; this can be partly explained by the higher economic inactivity levels among minority ethnic women.¹⁰² Moving into the months where the pandemic began to take effect, the median weekly earnings of minority ethnic workers fell slightly below those of white workers, with a weekly median income of £335 and £345 respectively.¹⁰³ A House of Commons analysis identified significant changes in unemployment rates for minority ethnic workers from 2019 to 2020, which suggests that they were negatively impacted by the pandemic. Minority ethnic workers were also twice as likely as white

workers to leave employment for a variety of reasons, from increased caregiving responsibilities to redundancy: 16 per cent of minority ethnic workers left work, compared to 8 per cent of white workers.¹⁰⁴ While it may be too soon to see the full picture of how the pandemic has affected employment levels for minority ethnic workers, evidence published so far suggests that they are the group most financially disadvantaged as a result of Covid-19.

6 INTERVENTION AND POLICY IN ADDRESSING ETHNICITY PAY GAP

In recent years, successive governments have attempted to address pay inequality among minority ethnic workers, and various non-government initiatives have sought to narrow the ethnicity pay gap. While minority ethnic workers feel the impact of lower pay on an individual level, addressing this inequality would benefit the economy on a larger scale, with government analysis showing that improving the progression and pay rates for minority ethnic workers in low paid employment would enable the economy to grow by £24 billion per year.¹⁰⁵

Previous administrations, including the Labour governments of 1997–2010 and the Conservative government of 2015–2016, created significant pieces of policy broadly around minority ethnic workers and their experience in the labour market. The first was New Labour's Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force (EMETF), established in 2003. The aims of the EMETF were threefold: first, to improve the employability and prospects of minority ethnic workers; second, to create links between minority ethnic communities and employers, removing traditional barriers to employment; third, to strengthen equal opportunities frameworks and decrease discrimination suffered by minority ethnic communities in accessing work.¹⁰⁶ The EMETF sought to improve the 'human capital' of minority ethnic workers with a view to improving their prospects,¹⁰⁷ while

at the same time acknowledging the impact of discrimination by employers and the importance of bridging the gap between employers and prospective employees.

This focus differed from the later McGregor-Smith review commissioned by the Conservative government in 2016, titled *Race in the Workplace*, which sought to understand the experiences of and issues faced by minority ethnic individuals in the workplace. Prior to the review's publication, the Race Disparity Audit was also commissioned, which sought to gather data on the experience of minority ethnic individuals working in public services.¹⁰⁸ While both the EMETF and the McGregor-Smith review sought to understand barriers to employment for minority ethnic workers, their focuses diverge. The EMETF aimed to improve the 'human capital' and thus the employment prospects of minority ethnic workers (and acknowledged the government's role in achieving this), whereas the review pointed to employers themselves as the main agents of change.¹⁰⁹ The McGregor-Smith review underscored not only that minority ethnic groups face additional barriers to work and typically have lower levels of pay, but also that there is a potential economic reward for addressing these systematic barriers – both for individual companies and the exchequer – due to increased productivity and growth.

Another non-government initiative that is becoming increasingly prevalent among larger companies is the publishing of ethnicity pay gap (EPG) information. The current government ran a consultation to seek views on EPG reporting in 2018–19; however, unlike gender pay gap reporting, which is mandatory for companies with over 250 employees, publishing EPG data remains voluntary. While it has been welcomed by many as a move towards greater transparency, methods of collecting EPG data have faced criticism for their often unreliable sample sizes.¹¹⁰ While gender pay gap reporting largely has two distinct (though not necessarily evenly sized) groups to report on, minority ethnic workers often do not represent close to 50 per cent of a workforce in certain areas and industries. This is further compounded by the regional disparity in the population of ethnic minorities, with 2011 census data showing that of 650 UK constituencies, 437 hold populations that are over 90 per cent white.¹¹¹ Employers based in these constituencies face a smaller pool of minority ethnic workers from which to source employees, thus making any ethnicity pay gap data they publish unreliable due to small sample size.¹¹²

The continuation of National Minimum Wage policy resulted in the development in 2016 of the National Living Wage, which constitutes a minimum wage for

workers aged 23 and over and is at a higher rate of pay than the minimum wage for workers under 23. This has also had an impact on minority ethnic workers. In 2018, the Low Pay Commission found that the National Living Wage was paid to a higher proportion of minority ethnic workers than white workers: 13.2 per cent of minority ethnic workers compared with 9.6 per cent of white workers. The landscape differs when looking at compliance with payment of the statutory minimum wage among minority ethnic workers. Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers are hardest hit by non-compliance on the part of their employers, with 10.6 per cent and 17.8 per cent respectively paid less than the minimum wage from the period 2000–2013.¹¹³ The fact that Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers are often over-represented in occupations that favour casual work and contracts, particularly catering,¹¹⁴ could be a factor in this experience of non-compliance in minimum wage payment.¹¹⁵ While compliance with government-enforced rates of pay such as the National Living Wage is beneficial to minority ethnic workers, these statistics do not always paint a full picture, particularly for those in insecure work on casual (or non-existent) contracts.

7 TRENDS OVER TIME

As shown by recent ONS figures, minority ethnic workers have ostensibly made significant progress in terms of closing the ethnicity pay gap, with the difference in pay between white and minority ethnic workers at its lowest level since 2012.¹¹⁶ There is also evidence that employment rates among minority ethnic workers are improving and that this gap, too, is closing.¹¹⁷ Looking at the employment rate gap between white and minority ethnic workers, the removal of students as a data point reveals that some ethnic groups in particular have benefited from its narrowing, with Pakistani and Bangladeshi men seeing the highest increase in employment rates – by 20 percentage points since 1991.¹¹⁸ Similarly, minority ethnic workers are on an upwards trajectory in moving into high-paid jobs, with some ethnic groups moving into these positions at a faster rate than white workers. Bangladeshi workers are the minority ethnic group who saw the biggest shift towards higher-paid jobs between 2015 and 2020. In this group, the number of Bangladeshi workers in the top five paid professions grew by 74 per cent while the number in the bottom five shrank by 2 per cent. They are not the only group to have benefited, with workers in the ‘other ethnicity’ group shrinking their presence in the bottom five jobs by 5 per cent and raising their presence in the top occupations by 40 per cent. However, it should be noted that significant upticks in the occupational grade of minority ethnic workers are usually indicative of an extremely low base in the first place, and even with the increase, Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers are still under-represented in four of the top five best-paid occupational groups.¹¹⁹

While such developments appear positive, it is important not to paint

an overly rosy picture of progress in the labour market for minority ethnic workers. While the unconditional ethnicity pay gap, where there is no accounting for factors that influence pay, such as education level, has narrowed to its lowest level in the last decade, the same cannot be said for the conditional pay gap, which does take these factors into account. Taking into account factors such as educational background and qualification levels, the gap in pay between minority ethnic and white workers has not shrunk significantly since 2000.¹²⁰ This is indicative of the persistent gaps between white and minority ethnic groups within the labour market, both ‘horizontal’ – i.e., where minority ethnic workers are paid less despite being in the same/similar sectors, occupational grade and having comparable qualifications – and ‘vertical’, where minority ethnic employees become disproportionately concentrated in low paid sectors.

Charting the progression of social mobility by ethnic group demonstrates that among children whose parents work in manual roles, some minority ethnic groups are more upwardly mobile than their white peers.¹²¹ Chinese children in particular exhibit an upwards trajectory in terms of their mobility, with only 5 per cent following their parents into manual work compared with the 24 per cent of white children.¹²² This trend of upwards mobility has been so consistent over time that Chinese and Indian groups are now placed on a largely equal footing with white individuals in terms of their socio-economic class.¹²³ However, the majority of minority ethnic groups are not benefiting from this upsurge in mobility, with social mobility among Black Caribbean men and the combined male Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups falling below that of white individuals.¹²⁴

Employment rates for Black Caribbean and Black African women have stayed relatively stagnant over time rather than mirroring the upwards trend exhibited by minority ethnic men. While employment rates have largely not improved for Black African and Black Caribbean women, since 2005 the gap has narrowed significantly between Pakistani and white women.¹²⁵

While employment rates are improving for some minority ethnic groups, this does not paint a full picture, in that they do not point to the level of pay, security or suitability of said employment for minority ethnic workers. Indeed, when looking at pay gaps over time for different minority ethnic groups, the picture is one of stagnation, or even decline, rather than progress. Though Chinese and Indian women have similar levels of pay to white women, this has been the case for over 25 years.¹²⁶ For Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, the pay gap with white women is even wider now than it was over half a century ago, and most dramatically for Bangladeshi women.¹²⁷ For minority ethnic men (excluding Chinese men), pay differentials have again widened since 1999;¹²⁸ these figures indicate that contrary to recent claims from publications such as the Sewell report, the pay landscape for ethnic minorities in Britain is still starkly unequal.

The stagnation of the conditional ethnic pay gap since the year 2000 is in direct contrast with the gender pay gap, which has gradually narrowed in the last 20 years.¹²⁹ While all ethnic minority groups have seen improved rates of employment, occupational mix and participation in the labour force since 2000, minority ethnic individuals are still falling behind white individuals in almost every socioeconomic measure.¹³⁰

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