

# POVERTY AND ETHNICITY: KEY MESSAGES FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

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This Viewpoint contextualises for Northern Ireland the main findings from a number of recently published reports from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on poverty and ethnicity. The research identified four main themes that shape experiences of poverty among different ethnic minority groups: employment, education, provision of services and caring.

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## Background

Northern Ireland is a disadvantaged region relative to the rest of the UK. Over-reliance on the public sector, a large small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) base, a lack of inward investment and the high percentage of people registered as economically inactive, all present significant economic threats (Irwin *et al.*, 2015, pp. 15). The proportion of people in Northern Ireland experiencing poverty over the last decade has remained at around 22 per cent (equivalent to approximately 355,000 people) after housing costs (defining relative poverty as households that have an income below 60 per cent of median income (MacInnes *et al.*, 2012)). Poverty after housing costs rose slightly in the latter half of the last decade. The incidence of poverty is broadly similar to that in Great Britain for Northern Ireland children (28 per cent compared with 30 per cent), and for working-age adults (20 per cent compared with 21 per cent). Meanwhile, the incidence of poverty is higher and rising for pensioners in Northern Ireland (21 per cent compared with 16 per cent) while the poverty rate for pensioners in Great Britain has been falling.

Northern Ireland has the second highest level of workless households of all UK regions. A greater proportion of working-age people claim disability benefits in Northern Ireland compared with Great Britain (7 per cent compared with 4 per cent). People from a Catholic community background had higher rates of worklessness (35 per cent) between 2007/8 and 2009/10 compared with people from a Protestant community background (28 per cent). Considerable research has been carried out into the economic position of people from the two main communities in Northern Ireland (Nolan 2012, 2013, 2014). However, the situation of ethnic minority people in Northern Ireland has received much less attention.

## Key points

- Inequality and segregation in the employment market are key obstacles to moving out of poverty for ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland. Those who are particularly affected are people from the Black community and the post-2004 EU accession countries who face disproportionate concentration in low-level elementary and production-line occupations.
- It is important to recognise ethnic minority workers as a valuable addition to the Northern Irish economy and a significantly underutilised resource, within which exists substantial underemployment and limited pathways for progression.
- Additional support for developing language skills, recognition of qualifications gained abroad, and improved advice on career choices and training were all identified as invaluable in challenging the ethnic minority 'penalty' that limits employment opportunities and thus overall poverty among ethnic minorities.
- There are numerous difficulties and problems for ethnic minority individuals in accessing suitable and adequate housing, healthcare and benefit services. Issues as a lack of culturally sensitive care services are predicted to become increasingly problematic as the ethnic minority population in Northern Ireland grows and ages.
- To combat these issues, access to information on the availability of services should be improved. Racist or discriminatory views of frontline staff should be monitored and challenged.
- The Traveller Community continues to suffer from particularly severe inequalities in the areas of employment, education, accommodation and health. Substantial intervention is required.
- Asylum seekers, who are legally excluded from working, continue to face particularly severe challenges.

## Introduction

Lack of data prevents a meaningful analysis on the comparative distribution of poverty between ethnic minority groups and there is a significant need for further research to properly understand the lived realities of ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland. Focus groups testify to many of the immediate impacts of poverty including food shortages and overcrowded housing (Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 43).

Table 1 shows the population breakdown by ethnicity in Northern Ireland according to the findings of the 2011 census.

**Table 1: Population breakdown by ethnicity**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
All usual residents	1, 810, 863	100
White	1, 778, 449	98.20
Chinese	6, 303	0.34
Indian	6, 198	0.34
Mixed	6, 014	0.33
Other Asian	4, 998	0.28
Black African	2, 345	0.14
Irish Traveller	1, 301	0.07
Pakistani	1, 091	0.07
Black Other	899	0.05
Bangladeshi	540	0.03
Black Caribbean	372	0.02
Other	2, 353	0.14

Northern Ireland remains the least ethnically diverse region of the UK, in part due to its unique political history. While established ethnic minority communities include the Jewish, Chinese and Traveller communities, a significant proportion of Northern Ireland's ethnic minority population has arrived recently, primarily following the enlargements of the European Union in 2004 and 2008. Census findings indicate that the ethnic minority population has increased from 0.8 per cent (14,259) in

2001 to 1.8 per cent (32,414) in 2011. However, the Census does not enable any distinction to be made between European nationals, reinforcing a commonly held belief that ethnicity refers solely to the non-White population (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 13). This also makes it much harder to examine and understand the ways in which living standards and opportunities vary between different groups. This difficulty will be exacerbated in future as there will be no way to include information about the children of people from other European countries, who may well continue to be disadvantaged in employment and incomes. Census data for country of birth indicates that the population of 'White' ethnic minority groups originating from the post-2004 accession EU states (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) has increased dramatically from 710 in 2001 to 35,560 in 2011.

The increasing ethnic diversity of the region sits against a backdrop of a historically divided society. It is suggested that the legacy of sectarianism in Northern Ireland affects people from ethnic minority backgrounds in three ways: first, as an important determinant of racist attitudes; second, with regard to residential choices and, third, in the shaping of policy and legislative responses to overcome inequalities (Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 38). The region is struggling to implement a good relations agenda that takes account of the needs of ethnic minorities alongside the traditional Catholic/ Protestant divide (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 8) and to challenge the anti-diversity views of a significant minority of the population (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 2011).

## **Employment**

This section explores problems with unemployment, underemployment and the over-representation of particular ethnicities in certain employment sectors before addressing the barriers to progress.

### **Ethnicity and inequalities in employment**

It is essential to recognise the value that ethnic minorities, including migrant workers, bring to the region's economy. The Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) found that migrant workers have made a 'significant positive contribution' to the Northern Ireland economy and estimated the overall net impact of post-2004 migrant workers at 39, 920 jobs adding £1.2 billion to the economy (Bell *et al.*, 2009).

Nevertheless, Catney and Sabater (2015) identified a significant ethnic minority 'penalty' in the labour market from their analysis of the 2011 census data. This 'penalty' was apparent in three forms: higher unemployment rates; over-representation of ethnic minorities in low-paid occupations, and a notable clustering into some occupations for some groups. While such observations are not as marked in Northern Ireland, census data reveals worrying statistics for a number of ethnic minorities.

At the time of the 2011 Census the unemployment rate for all usual residents of working age in Northern Ireland was 5 per cent. The unemployment rate for people from Black groups was much higher at 12.4 per cent, having increased from 7.2 per cent in 2001. This was the highest rate of unemployment of any ethnic group and represents a significant challenge to moving out of poverty. Asylum seekers face a uniquely difficult situation as they are unable to work while awaiting a decision on refugee status (Wallace, *et al.*, 2013: pp. 26).

Black people are also disproportionately concentrated in low-paying jobs. Of the 1,615 individuals from a Black ethnic background in work in 2011, 28.7 per cent were working in low-level elementary or production line occupations; the highest proportion in these occupations across all ethnic categories. Also of concern are those from the post-2004 accession countries who have the lowest rate of employment in the top four occupation classes. While they have the highest overall rate of employment of any group at 72.7 per cent, just over half are employed in either lower elementary or plant occupations. As the vast majority of this population will be recorded in the Census as being of White ethnicity, this statistic is missed when looking at occupation by ethnicity only. This goes some way to support the finding that wage inequalities derive from the fact that ethnic minority groups are relatively likely to be concentrated in occupations that pay poorly rather than being paid poorly for doing the same work as White employees (Brynin and Longhi, 2015, pp. 13–14). There is also significant evidence of clustering in the workforce with those from Indian and Other Asian ethnic backgrounds over-represented in health and social care; the Chinese community over-represented in the accommodation and food industry; and those from the post-2004 accession states disproportionately employed in manufacturing (Irwin, *et al.*, 2014, pp. 19). Such patterns may represent a barrier to progress in the labour market for individuals from certain groups.

One factor exacerbating the concentration of individuals from some ethnic minority groups in Northern Ireland into certain occupations is employers failing to recognise

overseas qualifications (Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 25). However, the research also suggested other important factors contribute, such as stereotyping by employment services and employers, where staff assume that people from some ethnic groups should be channelled into certain kinds of work (Irwin, *et al.*, 2014).

## Recommendations

### Tackling unemployment

- Support to improve English language skills must be increased. The correlation between a low English speaking ability and a low rate of employment is clear, with an unemployment rate of 5.2 per cent for those whose first language is not English but speak it very well, compared with 7.7 per cent for those who cannot speak any English (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 19). Better provision of accessible and affordable ESOL courses and greater promotion of those already available is vital.
- An improved careers service would produce a positive impact on all three areas of concern identified (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 60; Wood and Wybron, 2015, pp. 14).
- DEL needs to do more to identify and focus on the difficulties faced by ethnic minorities (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 31). One option would be the use of relevant role models to provide advice and guidance to individuals. Staff in Jobs and Benefits Offices should receive training to respond appropriately to the specialised needs of ethnic minorities (Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 53) and to challenge stereotypes. DEL should also work with employers to help them recognise and make better use of the skills within their workforces and promote equal opportunities policies and practices (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 60).

### Tackling under-employment

- The government should promote the use of the Qualifications Equivalency service available through DEL to help to reduce the instances of individuals being employed below their skill level. DEL provides a free service for migrant and foreign national workers to check the qualification equivalents of their overseas qualifications but the uptake is not closely monitored, with only patchy data available (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 38). Monitoring of the take-up and awareness of the service among both ethnic minority jobseekers and employers should be improved (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 60; Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 52).
- English language training by employers could also challenge the problem of under-employment among ethnic minority communities. Invest NI should make employers aware that this is covered in any training funding as an incentive to include language training in existing training programmes. Where in-

employment language training is not possible, there should be a range of other learning opportunities such as distance learning programmes developed which can be accessed in the home or community (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 61).

### Tackling labour market clustering

- Attention must be given to improving ethnic monitoring to better assess ethnic minority access of government initiatives intended to support training and development. Improved data collected by staff administering the qualifications equivalency and careers services as well as, for example, the Regional Start Initiative, could provide an insight into inequalities in the labour market. This should be an important feature of the government's new Racial Equality Strategy (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 59).

### Progression in the workplace

The UK is experiencing the emergence of an 'hourglass' economy with increasing numbers of both higher and lower paying jobs and a reduction in middle-income employment, creating concerns around opportunities for progression in the workplace. Although employment rates for ethnic minority men and women are projected to increase, the growth in employment is predicted to be largely in low-paid occupations (Owen *et al.*, 2015, pp. 73).

The JRF reports identify a number of barriers to progression in the workplace for ethnic minorities. In many of the low-paid occupations in which they are concentrated, pathways for progression simply do not exist. Any training provided is aimed at improving the quality of work in the existing job rather than career progression. Where opportunities for advancement do exist, line manager involvement often determines who benefits (Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 27, 39, 43). While employers in Northern Ireland expressed the belief that all employees had a fair and equal opportunity to access training and promotion, this was perceived not to be the case by employees. There was a striking lack of awareness among employers of the problems facing many ethnic minority employees and very little sign of pro-active steps to enable staff to make full use of their skills or to progress to better paid jobs (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 50). This could be as a result of conscious or unconscious discrimination or cultural insensitivity where a gap exists between equal opportunities policy and practice (Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 34, 43).

Other significant difficulties included a lack of English language skills and the impact of perceived discrimination on the confidence of individuals in putting themselves forward for promotion (Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 27–28). The high occurrence of

self-employment within ethnic minority communities is a separate but important issue for progression given its often low paid and precarious nature (Broughton, 2015, pp. 11).

## Recommendations

### Employers

- Workplaces should invest in creating a 'working to learn' culture by introducing a variety of learning opportunities (Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 53). This should support individuals from all ethnic backgrounds to take up vocational or other accredited qualifications, including through flexible working arrangements. Informal on-the-job training, coaching, mentoring, secondments and placements, offer additional possibilities for workers to increase their skills, with social relationships being a key vehicle for learning and development. This could be supplemented by supporting internal applications through personal support with CV and interview preparation and including relevant work experience in place of an over-emphasis on formal qualifications in the promotion process (Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 54).
- Employers should make existing progression and training opportunities more transparent and objective (Wood and Wybron, 2015, pp. 16). It is also important to raise awareness of rights to apply for promotion, grants or bursaries, supported by explicit articulation of equal opportunities policies in these areas. Managers' performance objectives should include team development and ensure an inclusive approach that supports the development of all team members (Hudson *et al.*, 2013).
- There needs to be positive action to counter labour market discrimination. This can take the form of targeting under-represented groups for specific work-based learning opportunities and support, such as traineeships and Modern Apprenticeships (government-funded apprenticeships offering people over 16 a combination of paid employment, workplace training and off-the-job learning) (Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 64).
- The specific needs of women and disabled people need to be taken into account. For instance, support for working mothers, including (lone) ethnic minority mothers, may take the form of facilitating access to affordable childcare (e.g. on-site crèche provision or childcare vouchers) and allowing flexitime. More part-time jobs at higher levels might allow women in particular to fulfil their career-related aspirations alongside caring responsibilities. Disabled people might need to be supported by providing the equipment or help they need, and attention paid to ensuring due representation in the shortlisting process (Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 55).

- Improved ethnic monitoring and benchmarking is recommended, including data on promotions and take-up of training. This should specifically include the position of women, including ethnic minority women (Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp.60).
- There is a need for ongoing training in equal opportunities policies, rather than such training being provided on an ad hoc basis. The Equality Commission could take a lead in building on its work in this area by developing toolkits that may be a useful means of addressing hidden practices such as stereotyping that disproportionately impact on some ethnic minority workers (Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 65).

### Government and local authorities

- Government has a role in providing an adult careers service that might support employer efforts to develop working-to-learn workplace cultures and practices. This should include support with language learning, through ensuring adequate ESOL provision. Alongside this, support for women should involve access to culturally appropriate childcare. The restricting costs of further education for some low-paid workers should also be acknowledged and better shared (Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp.66).
- There is potential for local authorities to work with stakeholders to develop a focus on tackling in-work poverty. Drawing on JRF research, they can engage with employers and employers' organisations to raise awareness of the realities of low-paid work for some workers. For example, local stakeholders can be brought together to discuss the causes of in-work poverty and local solutions (Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 66). This could include identifying which groups are most affected, greater use of procurement, commissioning and investment to create good quality opportunities for disadvantaged groups and transparency by local authorities about their own workforces, with action plans to improve representation where necessary (see for example Hughes, 2015; Morris, 2015).
- Local government should also focus on increasing the demand for skills and therefore levels of pay in development plans through, for example, providing business advice and support to create business models in which competition is on the basis of quality rather than cost (Owen *et al.*, 2015, pp. 80).
- The DEL Careers Service should ensure that those entering work or who are in work and seeking promotion are made aware of progression opportunities. This could take the form of US-style 'career ladders' schemes where advice describes jobs in different industries and demonstrates the

‘connection between education and training programmes at a range of levels’ (Barnard, 2014).

### Procurement

- The research highlighted the importance of equality-proofing procurement policies and promoting equalities practices in supply chains. Public sector organisations in particular can seek to influence equal opportunities for low-paid workers.

### Social networks

A repeated theme within the reports is the impact of social networks on poverty. People with larger, ethnically mixed networks were found to be significantly less likely to be in poverty than those with small mono-ethnic ones (Finney *et al.*, 2015, pp. 24, 26, 37, 45; Lalani *et al.*, 2014, pp. 46–48); yet social networks are underused by many ethnic minority individuals who do not see them in terms of their strategic usefulness and merely use them as a means of ‘getting by’ rather than ‘moving on’ (McCabe *et al.*, 2013, pp., 13, 26–29). Nevertheless, a lack of time and money, racism and the absence of neutral and culturally sensitive spaces in which to meet others were all noted as barriers for ethnic minorities in building networks and gaining access to people of influence (McCabe *et al.*, 2013, pp. 19–25, 34). Given the cross-currents of ethnicity, class, culture and education influencing the formation of networks, advantages and disadvantages tend to be multiplied leading to ‘stratification’ in network relationships (McCabe *et al.*, 2013, pp. 23). Negative aspects of using social networks to seek out employment were also noted including reinforcing routes into low-paid work and pressure to take on family businesses (McCabe *et al.*, 2013, pp. 17, 24; Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 17, 57; Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 47; Barnard and Turner, 2011, pp. 11). In Northern Ireland the distinctive history of inter-communal tensions and hostility, extensive residential segregation, and physical divisions are further factors affecting people’s abilities and opportunities to create and sustain ethnically mixed social networks.

### Recommendations

At the heart of the recommendations is the idea of helping individuals form advantageous networks and make better use of their existing networks.

- Employers in all sectors should have a mentoring system and facilitate greater networking among staff at all levels of their organisation (McCabe *et al.*, 2013, pp. 43–44; Finney *et al.*, 2015, pp. 45; Wood and Wybron, 2015, pp. 15; Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 55, 64, 65). This could be encouraged by including

mentoring responsibilities as part of senior role progression or performance review. If possible, mentors should be from similar ethnic backgrounds to mentees. Would-be mentors could work with third sector organisations to better understand the specific challenges that might face employees from particular backgrounds (Wood and Wybron, 2015, pp. 15). This could also involve setting up staff groups and networks within the workplace, including low-paid workers and equality groups (Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 65). However such schemes may be difficult for SMEs, which make up a large proportion of the Northern Ireland employment base, to implement. Business associations could play a stronger part, setting up mentoring and networking schemes across sectors which could support SME employees and managers.

- The government might encourage employers to promote mentoring as a developmental skill, highlight the productivity gains of developing staff as mentees and mentors, and offer guidance and contacts with relevant external training and support organisations to help would-be mentors (Wood and Wybron, 2015, pp. 16).
- The value of voluntary, community and faith organisations needs to be recognised when allocating funding (McCabe *et al.*, 2013, pp. 46). They are key in the provision of services and advice and for signposting and networking across and within ethnic groups, enabling the building of stronger, more diverse networks and supporting people to move on from poverty.
- Service-user networks were recognised by employment agencies as an underused resource in identifying potential employment opportunities, yet there was no systematic practice for making people aware of such networks or developing them. Standardised 'toolkits' should be developed within Jobcentre Plus, Work Programme providers and careers services. They should include materials to help people identify their networks, strategies for extending and using those networks to access employment, and signposting to agencies that can help individuals to develop new links (bridging capital) (McCabe *et al.*, 2013, pp. 45).
- Employer action is also needed to offset the less desirable influence of social networks in recruitment and selection for training or promotion (McCabe *et al.*, 2013, pp. 45.) The research suggests that (in addition to the implementation of a standard equality checklist – for example ensuring that people reviewing applications are not aware of candidates' ethnic backgrounds) employers/managers should actively consider the potentially unfair effect of people's use of social networks on their recruitment or progression. For example, if somebody has got a job, an internship place or a promotion

through 'who they know', not 'what they know', then employers need to be aware that this is a form of unfair recruitment (McCabe *et al.*, 2013, pp. 45).

- The improved provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes would have a huge positive effect on the ability of individuals from ethnic minorities to form social connections (McCabe *et al.*, 2013, pp. 45; Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 61).

### Challenging workplace subcultures

The effect of workplace subcultures in undermining formal equal opportunities policies was identified as a significant barrier for low-paid workers across many groups and in particular for some ethnic minority workers. These included potentially discriminatory informal recruitment practices; (i.e. through family and friends of existing employees). Opportunities for promotion and training for some low-paid workers were seen to be strongly shaped by personal relationships with supervisors and line managers. There were strong suggestions that ethnicity played a role in workplace relationships, negatively influencing opportunities for career development and progression, and a sense of inclusion in the workplace. Some low-paid workers suggested that experience of favouritism made people cynical about their prospects for promotion given perceived biases in workplace practices, and eroded their trust of management. A contrast between the formal organisational cultures promoted by policy and the more informal micro-politics of organisational life and decision-making as well as the arbitrary exercise of management discretion, were also identified as problematic (Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 34, 43-47).

### Recommendations

- Positive action by employers is vital (Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 58; McCabe *et al.*, 2013, pp. 45). This should include training in equal opportunities policies, and underlying issues such as unconscious bias, and continued vigilance and responsiveness to bullying, harassment and discrimination in the workplace (Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 65; Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 42).
- Employers should consider setting up staff groups and networks within the workplace, including low-paid workers and equality groups, so staff can build a collective voice on issues of concern (Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 65). Small organisations could enable staff to take part in networks across employers.

## Education

This section explores the challenges for people from ethnic minority groups in getting an equal education equal to the white ethnic majority and getting specific careers advice and language support to direct them into advantageous and desirable employment.

### In schools

There is little data regarding the attainment of children from ethnic minority groups in Northern Ireland's education system. The published statistics on pupil qualifications and destinations after GCSEs aggregate all pupils from ethnic minority groups (DENI, 2015). In 2013/14, 75.5 per cent of pupils from ethnic minority groups (including young people from white Irish traveller backgrounds) achieved five A\*–C grades at GCSE compared with 78.7 per cent of White pupils. However UK data shows a greater variance in educational attainment between pupils from different ethnic minority groups. At Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 4 across the UK Chinese, Indian, Mixed Asian and White heritage children outperform children of other groups, but children of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma significantly underperform (Lawrence, 2012, in Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp.33). Criticisms of the education system in Northern Ireland include flawed English as an Additional Language (EAL) support, with insufficient resources and uncertainty about how the support should best be delivered (Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 33–34), as well as an inadequate promotion of good relations and understanding of diversity (Geraghty, *et al.* in Wallace *et al.*, 2013).

A number of UK-wide barriers to educational attainment specific to those from ethnic minority communities were identified. For families recently arrived in the UK or from communities with a high density of immigrants, these included reduced parental support due to parental unfamiliarity with the UK education system or lack of English language skills. UK born or long-established ethnic minority people continued to suffer from racism from teaching staff, and for some the demands of cultural or religious activities on a child's time was an issue (Lalani *et al.*, 2014, pp. 28–29, 31–33).

Socio-economic status is the biggest driver of difference in educational performance. For example, at secondary school the differences between poorer and richer children are three times as great as the differences between children from different ethnic backgrounds who are equally disadvantaged (Gillborn, 2008, in Barnard and Turner, 2011, pp. 5). The strongest pattern of ethnic differences

is seen in the benefits of degree qualifications (Barnard and Turner, 2011, pp. 5–6). The institution attended, choice of subject, level of attainment and route into university all influence how valuable a degree is perceived to be by employers (Ramsey, 2008, in Barnard and Turner 2011, pp. 6) with high tariff universities having a strong bias towards ‘traditional’ entrants (with A levels, applying from school), who are less likely to be from an ethnic minority background (Purcell *et al.*, 2009, in Barnard and Turner, 2011, pp. 6). Findings also indicated that the often high employment expectations of those from ethnic minorities were at times frustrated by poor or non-existent formal careers guidance in school which varied significantly according to locality (Lalani *et al.*, 2014, pp. 31–32, 34–36, 53–53).

The government should introduce a quality standard for the provision of school-based careers advice and improve school-level destination data so that schools can be held to account for the longer term employment outcomes of their pupils (Wood and Wybron, 2015, pp. 7–8, 11) (see also under *Tackling unemployment*, above). Pupils from ethnic minority groups are particularly poorly served with careers advice, with teacher stereotyping being identified as a problem. Those delivering the service should therefore be aware of issues around under-representation of ethnic minorities in certain job sectors as well as the specific barriers faced by these individuals (Wood and Wybron, 2015, pp. 7–8, 11).

## **Adult learning**

Across the UK, people from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to take part in adult learning than the majority white communities but the effectiveness of this training and returns from it in terms of employment and pay varies significantly. This raises the issue of the quality of careers advice and guidance available for adults, especially those stuck in low-paid work (Lalani *et al.*, 2014, pp. 49–52, 52). Within Northern Ireland the DEL Careers Service provides impartial advice including information on labour market trends and post-graduate opportunities. To address the over-representation of certain ethnic groups in low-paid occupations, it is suggested that the service targets older adults as well as young people with role models and guidance on opportunities for development and the specific skills frameworks that exist within different sectors. They should also work with employers to help them recognise and make better use of their workforce’s skills and promote equal opportunities policies and practices (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 60).

The government should make funding available to support outreach services for ethnic minority groups through Jobcentres and make ethnic minorities a priority group for the Careers Service (Wood and Wybron, 2015, pp. 9, 11). Employers

should be encouraged to undertake a review of recruitment procedures and implement employment mentoring to support non-traditional candidates and young ethnic minority workers (Hughes, 2015, pp. 7). Developing programmes to improve the transition from education to work should be led by DEL in partnership with local government and the Equality Commission (Morris, 2015).

There is a correlation between low English speaking ability and a low rate of economic activity, difficulty in gaining access to influential social networks, and progress in the workplace (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 19; Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 28). Greater promotion of and access to ESOL classes is essential to address this barrier (McCabe *et al.*, 2013, pp. 44).

## Provision of services

People from ethnic minority backgrounds often encounter inequalities and difficulties in accessing services. This section explores this in relation to housing, healthcare and uptake of benefits.

### Housing

In Northern Ireland a majority of people from ethnic minority backgrounds live in the private rented sector with a number of associated problems including disrepair, high costs and overcrowding (Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 30-31). In the context of recession and associated austerity policies, housing costs had a disproportionate impact on people from ethnic minority communities. After 2008, average and median household incomes generally fell; however after housing costs incomes fell more than before housing costs incomes. While mortgage repayments fell during the recession, rents increased, resulting in a disproportionate impact on ethnic minorities given their high density in the private rented sector (Fisher and Nandi, 2015, pp. 13–15, 21).

There are specific problems with tied accommodation provided by employers to migrant workers. It is often expensive, landlords exert excess control over the premises, and properties can be overcrowded, unsuitable for children and insecure (Allamby *et al.*, 2011, in Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 31). Other problems with housing were reported by asylum seekers who are provided with an allowance and housing, but have no choice of location or region and can be moved frequently and at short notice (McGovern *et al.*, 2011, in Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 31). Campbell and Frey (2010) noted that the rents charged in the Dungannon area to migrants exceeded the local housing allowance rate, and a third of survey respondents said it was hard

to pay the rent (Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 31). However, take-up of housing benefit appeared low (Bell *et al.*, 2009; NICEM, 2012, in Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 31). Reports of larger households and overcrowding as a response to these affordability problems have been reported (McAliskey *et al.*, 2005; Campbell and Frey, 2010; NICEM, 2012, in Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 31).

## **Health**

There is little evidence about the health outcomes of ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland, although more is known about access and satisfaction with health services. Generally, people from ethnic minority backgrounds value the healthcare support available in Northern Ireland. Some problems exist however, including contrasts with health systems in their home country; racism of frontline staff; lack of recourse to public funds and awareness of services; and problems communicating their needs (Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 32, 47).

## **Receipt of benefits**

Most individuals from ethnic minority communities don't want to claim benefits, and many are confused about, or unaware of, their entitlements. For those forced to rely on benefits, a key factor is the time delay in receiving benefits. Blockages in the system can cause serious shortfalls to household income, with supporting agencies providing emergency funds. Given the prevalence of low-wage employment, not least for those with families, accessing in-work benefits is of critical importance to mitigate in-work poverty. In the recent past there have been reports of A8 nationals falling through safety nets through non-compliance with the Worker Registration Scheme due to unawareness of the benefits of the scheme or misplaced trust in employers to complete paperwork for them (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 45; Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp.27).

## **Barriers to access**

Common features that limit accessibility to services for ethnic minority groups are: reliance on community- and kin-based networks limiting access to or distorting accurate information and advice; lack of awareness and understanding among service providers as to why different ethnic groups are not using or benefiting equally from services; experiences of racism and discrimination (Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 36–38; Hudson *et al.*, 2013, pp. 52; Lalani *et al.*, 2014, pp. 45, 47; Lane *et al.*, 2014, pp.19–22); and fear or mistrust of mainstream services (Nicholl and Egino, 2014, pp. 7). This reinforces the importance of local authorities' understanding the particular dynamics of ethnicity within their area (Nicholl and Egino, 2014, pp. 8).

## Recommendations

- Greater embedding of equality principles in society needs to take place. The publication of the Racial Equality Strategy (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, 2015) is a recognition of the persistence of deep-seated problems of racism and negative attitudes towards ethnic minority communities. The advocacy of an intercultural approach conveys a clear message of tolerance and integration, but this must be accompanied by a strengthening of the evidence base on the extent of poverty among ethnic minority groups and the effectiveness of equality measures already taken (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp.59; Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp, 53).
- Consideration should be given to ensuring that staff in Jobs and Benefits Offices respond appropriately to the barriers faced by people from a range of ethnic minority backgrounds and ensure that they are not disproportionately affected by benefits delays. Working with community organisations could be both effective and economic as they represent a link to ethnic minority groups and can promote better understanding of them (Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 53)
- Aggregating similar groups in needs analyses (e.g. 'Asians'), focusing on developing support based on size of population and taking a reactive approach to policy development (e.g. responding to lobbying, rather than identifying needs), are approaches which risked overlooking small minority groups (Lalani *et al.*, 2014, pp. 63). Local authorities should be aware of the affects on ethnic minority groups.

## The impact of caring on poverty outcomes

While the cost of childcare was noted as a barrier to full involvement in the labour market for ethnic minority people in Northern Ireland (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 44; Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 26), Khan *et al.* identified a number of other related issues which could affect families. Among these was a lack of culturally sensitive care services (especially in regard to the elderly) which meant that care had to be delivered in the home or by family members (Khan *et al.*, 2014, pp. 45–47, 54–63). Some ethnic minority women felt a cultural expectation to stay at home and provide care which impacted on their employment aspirations (Khan *et al.*, 2014, pp. 36). This is compounded by a lack of good-quality flexible jobs which would make it easier for women across all ethnic groups to combine caring and earning. There were also issues identified in awareness and take-up of disability-related benefits among some ethnic minority groups.

## Childcare

The high costs and low supply of childcare pose a particular challenge for those living in poverty. For many parents getting work is not easy to balance with childcare. There are often significant gaps in provision for older children and parents who work atypical hours. The Bright Start Strategy (2013) acknowledged insufficient childcare resources and facilities in Northern Irish and also noted that the 'current childcare provision was seen as failing to meet fully the needs of Travellers and ethnic minority people. Some providers thought they might benefit from language training or from support services that would enable the parents of ethnic minority children to liaise with providers' (Northern Ireland Executive 2013, pp. 29).

The JRF research identified a notable variation in how different ethnic minority populations access childcare. Black Caribbean people are most likely to use formal care such as nurseries or childminders (45 per cent) with only 29 per cent of families using informal parent or partner care. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis have more or less opposite care use. Over 70 per cent of both groups use parents or partners for childcare with only 7.3 per cent using formal care of any kind. Ethnic minority communities tend to have larger family sizes, however it is important to remember that ethnic groups vary in terms of their family structures, with higher rates of lone parents in Black Caribbean households and lower rates among Pakistanis. This means they face very different choices in terms of balancing work and care. (Khan *et al.*, 2014, pp. 27–28).

A lack of knowledge or awareness of availability of local childcare, its cost and government policies was a problem. This was particularly the case for Somali and Pakistani parents. The need for local services to respond to cultural, religious or language needs and preferences is by now a familiar one. For some families there was a concern around racism and Islamophobia in formal childcare services. For some respondents a familial connection with those providing care was of particular importance. (Khan *et al.*, 2014, pp.33–35)

Childcare has a clear gender perspective. Although Black Caribbean women have very high labour market participation rates, Pakistani and Somali women have very low rates. The Pakistani and Somali families interviewed were generally quite traditional in terms of childcare, with the mother doing most if not all of the caring. While many of the women interviewed intended to have children at a young age, almost all also sought to work. There are issues with women taking jobs for which

they are overqualified, given the lack of opportunities for high-skilled or good part-time work. (Khan *et al.*, 2014, pp. 36–39).

### **Caring for children with a disability**

Perhaps most significantly, those who care for disabled children have longer term challenges in getting a job than those who look after older disabled relatives. It is notable that the poverty rate among black and ethnic minority families with disabled children is 44 per cent compared with 17 per cent for households generally. Factors contributing to this are childcare costs which can amount to three times more to raise a disabled child; and missing out on vital income by not taking up benefits (Contact a Family, 2011 in Khan *et al.*, 2014, pp. 42). Not enough childcare provision for disabled children also means that families with disabled children are much more likely to have a parent stay at home. Research suggests that only 16 per cent of mothers with disabled children work, compared with 61 per cent of mothers with non-disabled children (Langerman and Worall, 2005 in Khan *et al.*, 2014, pp. 43). The chances of living in a household with a disabled member were much higher for Pakistani (34 per cent) and Bangladeshi (37 per cent) children than they were for Black Caribbean (16 per cent) and Black African (14 per cent) children (Khan Langerman and Worall, 2005 42–43).

There was a strong preference, across all ethnic groups, to be able to care personally for their children. However parents often felt that experience and knowledge were more important than cultural awareness or competence in providing the specific and tailored support their children need. Findings about people's use of formal services were mixed. Somali and Pakistani respondents generally had a lower uptake than Caribbean people. In general, lack of uptake of services was more because of a lack of knowledge or information than because parents rejected the services on offer (Khan *et al.*, 2014, pp. 46).

Of lone parents, 3 in 10 (29 per cent) have a sick or disabled child and only 50 per cent of disabled children receive Disability Living Allowance (DLA). These findings do not explicitly apply to ethnic minority communities, but they do suggest that those groups with higher lone parent rates (including Caribbean and Somali households) are more likely to have sick or disabled children, while the already lower rate of benefits uptake among South Asian groups in particular may mean that disabled children from these ethnic backgrounds are even less likely to be getting DLA (Khan *et al.*, 2014, pp. 51).

## Caring for older people

Again there was an issue with lack of knowledge about the availability of services as well as a lack of culturally appropriate services to care for older people. As in the UK population as a whole, ethnic minority individuals were much more likely to engage in 'informal' caring, or to provide care within the family and in the home. Very few respondents were in full-time employment, with relatively few even working part-time. The literature indicates that people from ethnic minority backgrounds are less likely to take up Carer's Allowance, which impacts further on already low incomes. While individuals were often familiar with formal medical services, there was a lack of trust in other forms of statutory support as well as associated shame in asking for help. (Khan *et al.*, 2014, pp. 61–64)

## Recommendations

- To alleviate the impact of caring on the employment prospects, and therefore poverty outcomes, of ethnic minority individuals, there is a need for greater employer and policy support for flexible working. The Equality Commission could assess and monitor how far employers actually offer flexibility as well as considering implementation of sabbaticals and longer leave policies, even if unpaid (Khan *et al.*, 2014, pp. 66).
- The NI Executive should ensure that there is better information on available childcare services in implementing the Bright Start Strategy. There was some demand that more ethnic minority women should be trained as childminders to meet the demand for culturally sensitive services, although this would need to be combined with measures to improve pay in the childcare sector to avoid trapping more women in low-paid work. Provision of childcare during irregular hours should also be improved (Khan *et al.*, 2014, pp. 67).
- Special Educational Needs Assessments should be checked to ensure they are adequately assessing and addressing needs in ethnic minority families. There is a need for sensitive work by public bodies in some ethnic minority communities to raise awareness about disability and challenge discrimination or stigmatisation and which could be supported by bodies such as the Equality Commission and Disability Action (Khan *et al.*, 2014, pp. 69)
- People from ethnic minority communities need greater awareness and knowledge of Carer's Allowance. DSD should also work to ensure that older ethnic minority people receive any qualifying disability benefits to which they are entitled (Khan *et al.*, 2014, pp. 69).
- Care homes should provide care that better caters to the needs of ethnic minorities. This could include ethnic-specific care homes, more diverse meal

choices, more training of care workers and more diverse television and cultural offerings (Khan *et al.*, 2014, pp. 70).

## Poverty and the Traveller community

Extreme and long-term inequalities between the Traveller community and the wider population are an enduring problem. However some positive policy developments in this area have been made in Northern Ireland and continue to produce welcome results. These are explored further below. However the absence of a local approach similar to the National Roma Integration Strategy, but addressing the needs of both Travellers and Roma, may be indicative of a lack of political will to directly address the needs of this community which is hampering progress.

### Employment

A key barrier to employment for Travellers is the perceived discriminatory attitudes of employers (Irwin *et al.*, 2014, pp. 56). Travellers face particular difficulties because of the rapid disappearance of many of their traditional sources of employment such as seasonal work in agriculture (Lane *et al.*, 2014, pp. 36). This is exacerbated by increased statutory regulation in certain industries which has narrowed the field of possible occupations even further (Lane *et al.*, 2014, pp. 36; Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 26).

### Recommendations

- Monitoring of employment service outcomes and the impact of welfare reforms for the Traveller community should be increased. The government should trial specific interventions to support Travellers in claiming the benefits they are entitled to, in moving community members into employment, and in improving their incomes and security in work, as part of a National Roma Integration Strategy developed in line with the European Commission framework published in 2011 (Lane *et al.*, 2014, pp. 49, 47.)

### Education

Research into Travellers' educational needs reveals very serious levels of educational disadvantage with 58 per cent of Traveller children leaving school with no qualifications (Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 33). Northern Ireland has seen several examples of positive practice in this area following the Traveller Child in Education Action Framework in 2013. The Inclusion and Diversity Service in the Department of Education provides interpreters, translators and a multi-lingual website for teachers and parents. It also directly funds schools to give them flexibility in

determining the best way to support newcomer pupils and promote their inclusion. Roma and Traveller children in grant-aided schools are allocated additional funding of over £1,000 a year for each Traveller child. (Lane *et al.*, 2014, pp. 34).

### *Recommendations*

- As part of a National Roma Integration Strategy, the DEL and the education authority should ensure that specific policies are used effectively in all schools in relation to the bullying of Traveller children. The culture and history of Travellers should be included on the broader curriculum to promote inclusion. Schools and education services should rigorously track and monitor the progress of Traveller children, while the government should endeavour to secure adequate funding for Traveller specific education services (Lane *et al.*, 2014, pp. 48).

### **Accommodation**

The Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment carried out by the NI Housing Executive in 2014 found that of the 380 traveller households interviewed, 23 per cent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their standard of accommodation: 112 households needed better accommodation of varying types including grouped accommodation, serviced site pitches and social housing. The main reasons for dissatisfaction were poor living conditions and a preference for alternative accommodation. A significant proportion of Travellers cited poor environmental quality and a lack of basic amenities such as drainage and refuse collection (Lane *et al.*, 2014, pp. 26; Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 31).

### *Recommendations*

- The impetus behind the Traveller Accommodation Programme and the programme of Traveller-specific schemes for the next five years, addressing the need identified in the latest Traveller Needs Assessment (NIHE, 2015, pp.30), must be maintained.

### **Health**

Particularly significant healthcare inequalities exist between the Traveller community and the general population (Lane *et al.*, 2014, pp. 41). The All Ireland Traveller Health Study (AITHS) carried out in 2010 demonstrated that although this population subjectively rates their health in a positive manner, they have in fact substantially higher rates of ill-health affecting them on a day-to-day basis than the wider population. They have a higher burden of chronic disease and higher measures of risk factors such as smoking and high blood pressure (Abdalla

*et al.*, 2010, pp. 80). The shorter life expectancy and significantly higher mortality rates are stark as well as a suicide rate in male Travellers that is 6.6 times higher than in the general population (Abdalla *et al.*, 2010, pp. 90–91, 94). Furthermore, their experiences of health services are consistently less positive than those of the general population. There is evidence that some medical practices are even reluctant to accept Travellers, exacerbating already significant problems in accessing healthcare services (Wallace *et al.*, 2013, pp. 32).

### Recommendations

- The key recommendations of the AITHS – provision of adequate accommodation and adult education to promote positive health behaviours – should be implemented. Mother and child services, men’s health issues and cause-specific issues around respiratory and cardiovascular disease connected to unhealthy lifestyles are of particular concern. Programmes are also needed to challenge harmful stereotypes preventing Travellers from accessing health services (Abdalla *et al.*, 2010, pp. 173–174.)

### Conclusions

This review of JRF commissioned research highlights a number of the challenges faced by different ethnic minority communities in relation to employment, education, access to services and demands of caring for family members, which will impact on levels of poverty, social mobility and inclusion within the wider society.

Research has highlighted the positive impact that ethnic minority communities have on the economy and society in the UK but has also noted a variety of factors that limit the opportunities for people from ethnic minority communities in the workplace or in employment that reflects their skills and capacities. In particular research has highlighted the challenge they face in gaining recognition for qualifications gained abroad, a major factor in people working in jobs that do not reflect their skills and abilities.

Improvements in the quality and availability of language support and training is one factor that could have a significant impact in increasing employability, aiding children’s performance in education and influencing social inclusion. Research also highlights the need for greater recognition of the role, value and potential of social networks to have a positive contribution to social inclusion but also, in certain circumstances, to reinforce social isolation and segregation.

The poverty and marginalisation experienced by people from ethnic minority backgrounds applies perhaps even more so to indigenous minorities such as Travellers, and to other nomadic communities such as the Roma, whose experiences of this remain a deep and enduring problem which appears to be reinforced by widespread prejudice and strategic inertia.

Many of the challenges faced by ethnic minority people will be even more severe for asylum seekers who are legally excluded from working and who will therefore be more susceptible to being drawn into poverty and marginalisation. A further tightening of immigration controls and the retrenchment of the government view of migrants as a threat rather than an opportunity risks increasing scope for racism and discrimination to flourish

More generally there is a need for greater recognition and awareness among government departments, statutory agencies and local councils of some of the distinctive factors that negatively impact upon people from ethnic minority backgrounds. These need to be addressed through policy development, implementation and monitoring, the provision of information, and through greater recognition of social and ethnic diversity; an opportunity to be grasped rather than a problem to be confronted.

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## About this paper

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## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

This Viewpoint is part of JRF's research and development programme. The views are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the JRF

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