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# Employment and black and minority ethnic groups in the West Midlands

Briefing paper  
February 2010

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# Employment and black and minority ethnic groups in the West Midlands

## Briefing paper

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# 1 Background

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The [Baseline Report on Economic Inclusion](#) in the West Midlands 2009 presented a picture of worklessness in the region and included sections highlighting the issues in relation to ethnic minority communities in the region.

One of the key issues identified by the research was the position of people from BME communities in the region's labour market. This briefing paper further examines the issues surrounding black and minority (BME) ethnic groups and aims to increase understanding of the issues among the region's policy makers. It also examines any changes to the picture that have occurred since the baseline data was produced. This report seeks to examine some of the long-term issues relating to large and established BME communities in the region. Issues relating to recent migration are not the focus of this briefing paper.

The report begins by examining the position of BME groups in the labour market including employment gaps. We then look at skill levels and occupational and industry profiles of BME groups before examining evidence of discrimination in the labour market and levels of poverty amongst minority ethnic groups.

This briefing paper forms part of a series of 'spotlight reports' following on from the Economic Inclusion Baseline Report 2009. Other reports in the series can be downloaded from our website and cover:

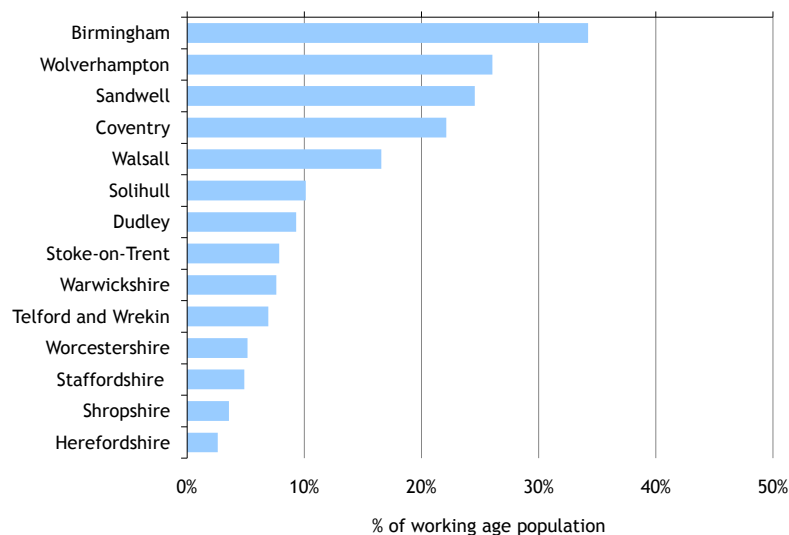
- [Youth unemployment](#)
- [Mental Health and Employment](#)
- [Economic inclusion and older people](#)

## 2 Introduction

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The ethnic diversity of the West Midlands has been growing steadily for a number of years and the region is the second most diverse region in the country (after London) with 14% of the population being from a non-white ethnic group<sup>1</sup>. BME groups tend to have a younger age profile than the white population and so a larger proportion of the working age population (16%) is from a minority ethnic group. There are large variations in levels of ethnic diversity across the West Midlands.

**Chart 1: Proportion of working age population who are non white**



Source: ONS 2007 mid year population estimates by ethnic group - experimental

The urban areas of the region tend to be more diverse than their more rural counterparts. Birmingham is the most diverse local authority with 34% of the working age population being from a BME group. In Herefordshire the proportion is a much lower 3%.

Ethnic minority groups as a whole have an employment rate of 54%, 20 percentage points lower than the white population in the West Midlands (74%). Across England the employment gap is lower but ethnic minority groups still have an employment rate 16 percentage points lower than the white population (60% and 76% respectively).

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<sup>1</sup> In this report the terms 'ethnic minority' and 'black and minority ethnic group' are used to refer to people from a non-white ethnic group. Although these labels might be better used for people from a non white *British* ethnic group, not all of the data sources used allow this distinction, and so for consistency we use non white groups.

Nationally, this employment gap has been estimated to cost the economy £8.6 billion a year (£1.3 billion in benefit payments and lost tax revenue and £7.3 billion in lost output) along with other wider social costs.<sup>2</sup> In the West Midlands, the cost to the economy may be proportionately higher due to the bigger employment gap in this region than nationally.

The importance of closing the employment gap between white and ethnic minority people is recognised by the existence of a Government Public Service Agreement (PSA) focussed on narrowing the gap. PSA 8 aims to ‘maximise employment opportunities for all’ and, within this, one target is to narrow the gap between the employment rates of several disadvantaged groups including ethnic minorities.

In this report we explore the nature of the employment gap, and wider labour market position, of the white and ethnic minority populations and how this varies between different ethnic minority groups in the region. This report is focused on the West Midlands and all of the data and charts in this report refer to the West Midlands unless stated otherwise.

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<sup>2</sup> National Audit Office (2008) ‘Increasing employment rates for ethnic minorities’

### 3 Labour market engagement

#### Key West Midlands Facts

16% of the working age population are BME, however

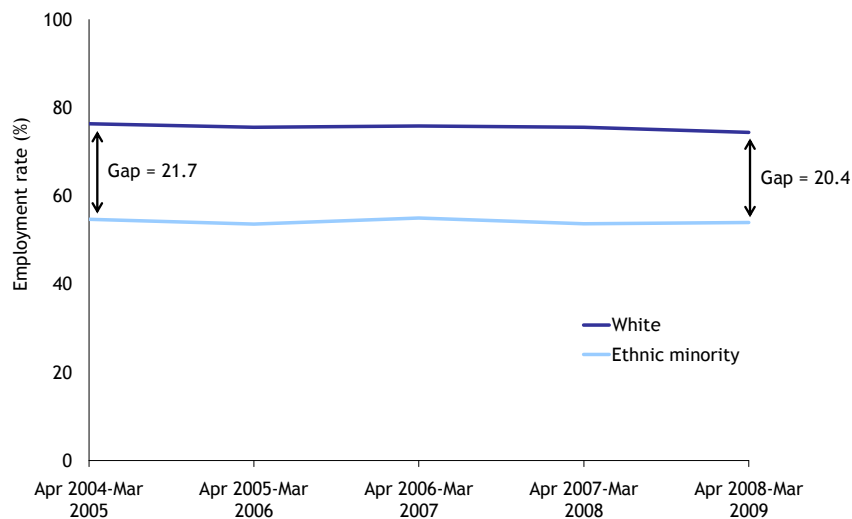
- 12% of those in employment are BME
- 8% of managers/senior officials are BME

74% of working age white people are in employment (compared to 76% nationally), while

54% of working age BME people are in employment (compared to 60% nationally)

#### 3.1 Lower employment rates among BME groups

Chart 2: Employment rate gap

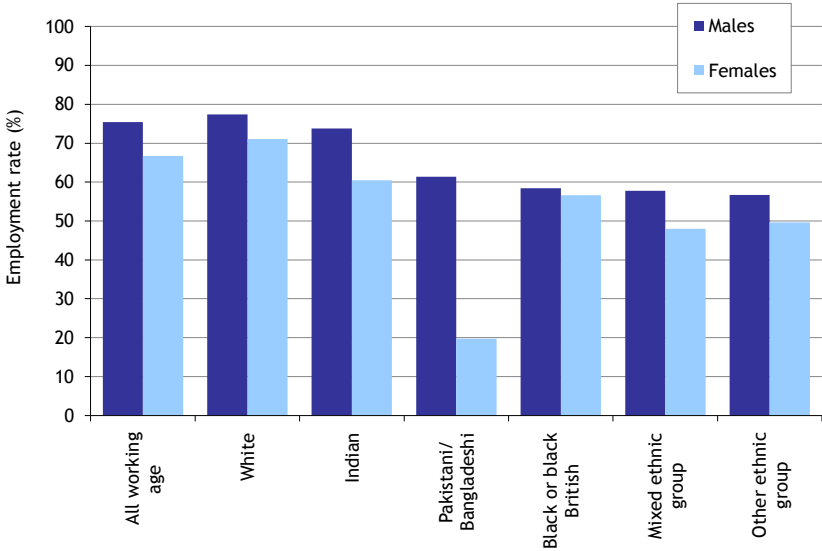


Source: Annual Population Survey

There are approximately 513,000 working age people from minority ethnic groups in the West Midlands, making up 16% of the total working age population in the region. Of the 513,000 working age people from minority ethnic groups, 277,000 or 54% are in employment. This figure is 20 percentage points lower than the employment rate for white working age people in the West Midlands of 74%.

The employment gap between white and ethnic minority groups has narrowed slightly over the last five years (see chart 2 above) but remains greater in the West Midlands than across England.

**Chart 3: Employment rates by ethnic group and gender**



Source: Annual Population Survey (April 08 - March 09)

Chart 3 shows that males and females from all of the ethnic minority groups have lower employment rates than their white counterparts. There are significant differences between the various minority ethnic groups.

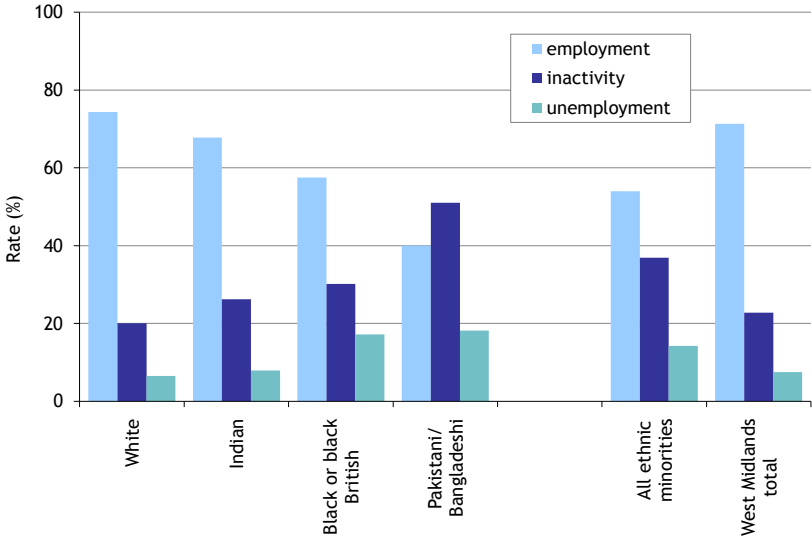
Indian males and females have higher employment rates than other ethnic minority groups, with Indian males having an employment rate 15 percentage points higher than black/black British males.

There is much a much smaller gap (less than two percentage points) between the employment rates of men and women from black/black British ethnic groups than amongst other groups, reflecting the strong labour market attachment of black women. This compares to Pakistani/Bangladeshi groups where the gap between male and female employment rates is 42 percentage points.

The very low employment rate of women from Pakistani/Bangladeshi ethnic groups contributes to the high rate of economic inactivity amongst Pakistanis/Bangladeshis generally. In fact, amongst this group more people of working age are inactive than in employment. Economic inactivity can be due a number of reasons including looking after a family/home, sickness/disability, students and early retirement. Economic inactivity is also high in the other minority ethnic groups, and the overall inactivity rate for BME groups is almost 40% (chart 4).

### 3.2 High rates of unemployment indicate barriers to accessing employment

**Chart 4: Economic activity rates by ethnic group**



Source: Annual Population Survey (April 08 - March 09)

As well as having lower employment rates and higher rates of inactivity, ethnic minority groups also have higher rates of unemployment than white groups. Unemployment describes people who are actively looking for and available for work. High unemployment rates indicate that there are large numbers of people from these groups who want to work and are attempting to do so, but are failing to access employment. The black/black British and Pakistani/Bangladeshi groups have especially high rates of unemployment (17% and 18% respectively). This compares to an unemployment rate in the white population of 6.5% (chart 4).

Unemployment has increased amongst all groups as a result of the recession but unemployment rates and Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) claimant rates have risen more amongst ethnic minority groups than the white population.<sup>3</sup> However, ethnic minority employment rates have not changed significantly during the recession, perhaps indicating that people are moving between inactivity and unemployment.

Numbers of people claiming JSA have increased for all ethnic groups. The rate of increase has slowed since peaking in the early part of 2009.

The greatest increases in the rates of claimants are for the black/black British ethnic groups and the greatest increases in absolute numbers (which don't take account of the size of the population) are amongst the 'white-other' and 'white-British' groups (see table 1 below). Black/black British groups already had high rates of JSA claimants and these have increased by up to 4.5 percentage points. 13% of Black Caribbean people in the region are now claiming JSA, up from 7.5% a year ago. Numbers of white British people claiming JSA have increased by 76%. This is the greatest proportionate increase but as the rate was initially much lower it has increased from 2.7 to 4.7%.

The Asian ethnic groups have also seen increases in claimant rates, but lower than the black/Black British groups.

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<sup>3</sup> WMRO Monitoring the impact of the recession on the population of the West Midlands November 09

**Table 1: Change in numbers and rates of Jobseeker's Allowance claimants by ethnic group**

Ethnic Group	Number of claimants				Rate		
	Sep-08	Sep-09	Change	% change	Sep-08	Sep-09	% point change
Black or black British - other black	795	1,130	+335	+42%	10.7%	15.3%	+4.5
Mixed - white and black Caribbean	1,635	2,580	+945	+58%	7.5%	11.9%	+4.4
Black or black British - Caribbean	5,035	7,110	+2,075	+41%	9.1%	12.8%	+3.7
Other ethnic group	2,315	3,070	+755	+33%	9.8%	13.0%	+3.2
Mixed - other mixed	385	650	+265	+69%	4.4%	7.5%	+3.0
Black or black British - African	2,200	2,970	+770	+35%	7.4%	9.9%	+2.6
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	1,340	1,920	+580	+43%	5.5%	7.9%	+2.4
Mixed - white and black African	200	280	+80	+40%	5.6%	7.8%	+2.2
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	6,335	8,760	+2,425	+38%	5.7%	7.9%	+2.2
White - British	71,810	126,530	+54,720	+76%	2.7%	4.7%	+2.0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	4,175	6,655	+2,480	+59%	3.0%	4.8%	+1.8
Mixed - white and Asian	300	485	+185	+62%	2.5%	4.0%	+1.5
Asian or Asian British - other Asian	690	1,020	+330	+48%	3.2%	4.7%	+1.5
White - Irish	780	1,210	+430	+55%	2.5%	3.8%	+1.4
White - other	910	1,750	+840	+92%	1.3%	2.4%	+1.2
Chinese	130	215	+85	+65%	0.5%	0.8%	+0.3
Prefer not to say	9,365	13,000	+3,635	+39%	-	-	-
Unknown	1,855	2,550	+695	+37%	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>110,250</b>	<b>181,895</b>	<b>+71,645</b>	<b>+65%</b>	<b>3.4%</b>	<b>5.5%</b>	<b>+2.2</b>

Source: ONS claimant count, non-seasonally adjusted data

Young people generally have been disproportionately affected by the recession and have seen the biggest increases in unemployment and claimant rates of all the demographic groups.

In December 2009 there were 54,000 young people aged 18-24 claiming Jobseekers Allowance making up 31% of the total claimant count in the West Midlands (175,000). This means one in 10 young people are claiming JSA. Of the 54,000 young claimants in the region, nearly 39,000 are from a white ethnic group.

Among some ethnic groups the proportion of the claimant count made up by young people is higher than the regional average of 31%. Amongst claimants from a Pakistani ethnic group, 38% were aged 18-24 and for people from a mixed white and black Caribbean ethnic group 54% of claimants were aged 18-24.

However, among black and black British groups, the proportion of claimants aged 18-24 is less than 25% and among Indian claimants is 26%.

These differences between ethnic groups will be partly due to the age profiles of each group. In general ethnic minority groups have younger age profiles than the general population and therefore you might expect a bigger proportion of JSA claimants to be younger.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.3 Breaking down the region's employment gaps

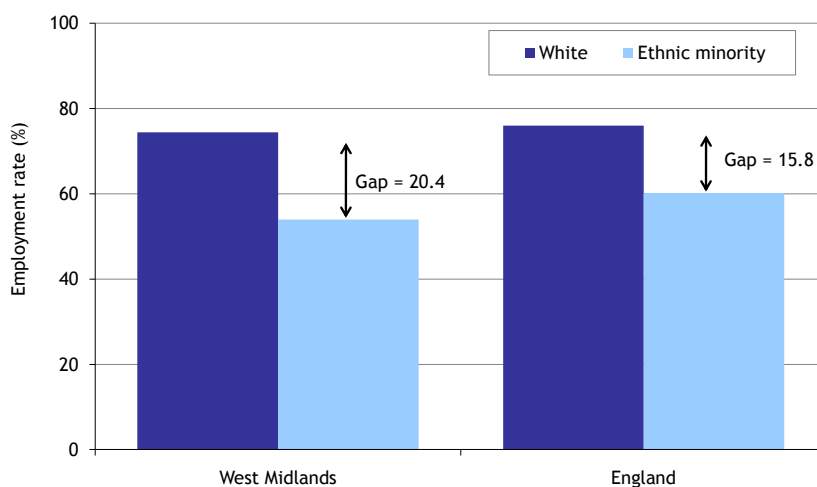
Chart 5 below shows that the West Midlands has a particular problem in engaging its minority ethnic populations in employment. The employment rate gap between white and BME groups is larger in the West Midlands than nationally and the employment rate for minority ethnic groups is lower in this region than across England.

The gap between the employment rates of ethnic minorities and white people is 20 percentage points in the West Midlands compared to 16 percentage points nationally.

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<sup>4</sup> It is not possible to calculate the JSA claimant rate for young people by ethnic group as we do not have ethnic population statistics for this age range at a regional level.

**Chart 5: Employment rate gap**



Source: Annual Population Survey (April 08 - March 09)

There is also a gap between the employment rates for white and BME groups in this region and the equivalent groups in England and this gap is larger for ethnic minority groups than the white population.

The employment rate for BME people nationally is 60%, but only 54% in the West Midlands. For white people the national employment rate is 76%, and 74% in the West Midlands.

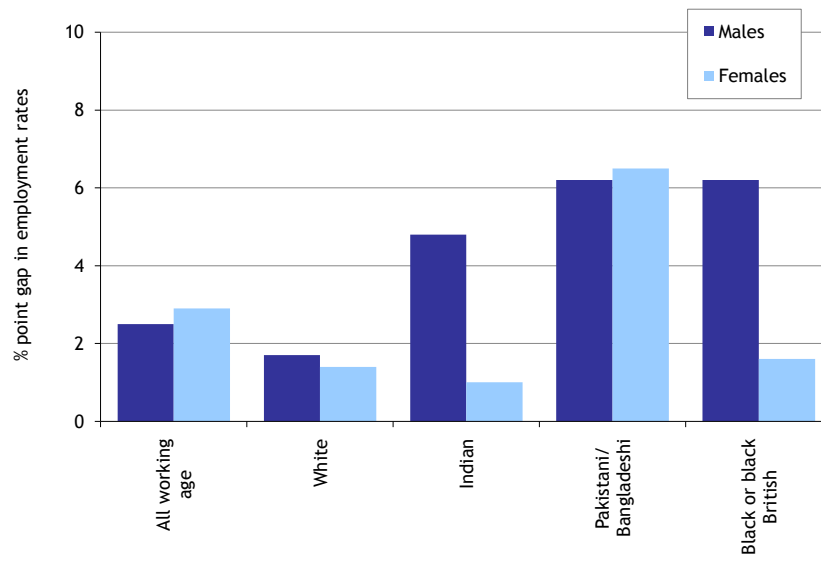
So for white people the region's employment gap is 2%, but for BME people it is 6%.

Ethnic minority groups in the region are therefore in a poor position in the labour market compared to white groups in the region, and also compared to ethnic minority groups nationally.

If we look in more detail at this employment gap, we see that that the region's employment gap is centred on the minority ethnic populations: for white people the gap is below the regional average (chart 6).

The biggest gaps with England are among Pakistani/Bangladeshi males *and* females, Indian males, and black/black British males. The region is failing to engage these groups in the labour market to the same extent that they are engaged elsewhere in the country. It is interesting that the largest gap is for Pakistani/Bangladeshi women, the group with the lowest employment rate. This indicates that perhaps more could be done in this region to help these groups to access employment.

**Chart 6: Gap in employment rates - West Midlands and England**



Source: Annual Population Survey (April 08 - March 09)

## 3.4 In work: occupation and industry of employment

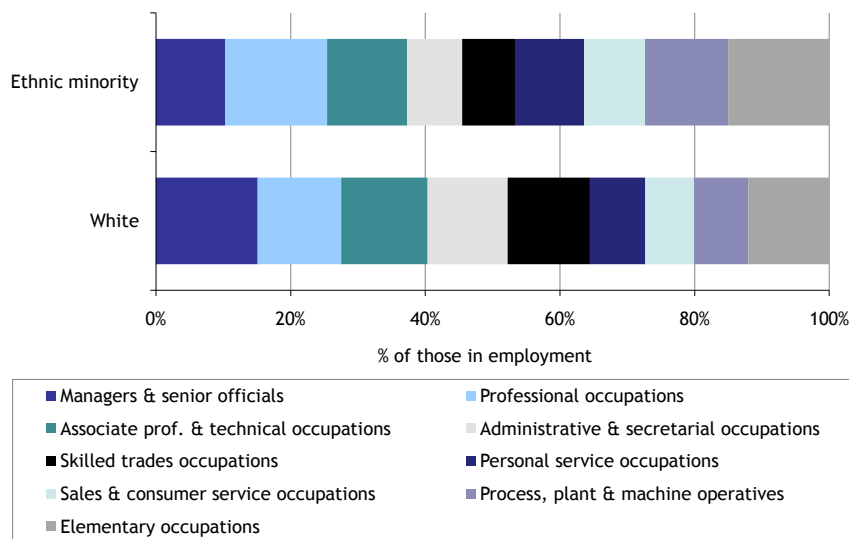
### 3.4.1 Low level occupations

Where people from ethnic minorities are employed they are more likely to be employed in lower skilled and more poorly paid occupations: 27% of employed people from ethnic minority groups work in process, plant, machine operatives or elementary occupations compared to 20% of white employees.

Chart 7 shows that ethnic minorities are most likely to be employed in professional and elementary occupations (15% in each group).

BME employees are also less likely to be in senior or managerial positions: 10% compared with 15% of white employees.

**Chart 7: Occupation profiles**



Source: Annual Population Survey (April 08 - March 09)

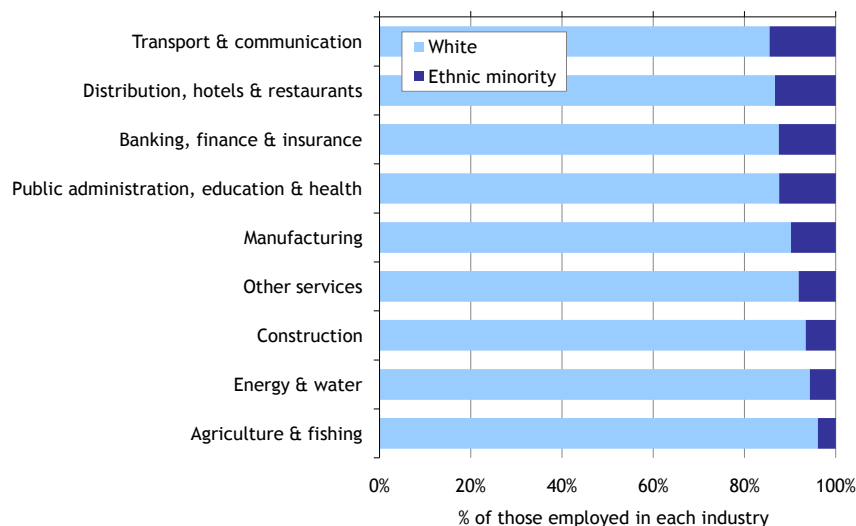
### 3.4.2 An uneven mix of industries

Those from minority ethnic groups who have successfully secured employment are unevenly represented across key industrial sectors of the regional economy. While there is over-representation in hotels and restaurants, transport and health and social work, there is significant under representation in utilities, construction and manufacturing. Construction and manufacturing are sectors which are major employers in the region although they are declining in relative terms.

Some of the region's key future growth sectors (health and social care and business and professional services) are in a relatively strong position as they already have a relatively high proportion of their workforces from BME communities.

Education is a key sector in terms of improving educational attainment amongst minority ethnic children, but currently only 6.5% of the sector workforce is from a non-white ethnic group<sup>5</sup>.

**Chart 8: Industry profiles**



Source: Annual Population Survey (April 08 - March 09)

<sup>5</sup> WMRO Regional Skills Assessment 2008

## 4 Causal Factors

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The overall picture of ethnic minorities' position in the labour market is one of under-employment, although there are important differences between the groups. Previous research<sup>6</sup> has found that people from ethnic minority groups can face many barriers to employment. Having low level qualifications, language problems and lack of relevant experience; living in deprived areas; being in poor health, having caring responsibilities and employer discrimination can all act as barriers to employment for people from minority ethnic groups. Some of these issues are explored in the following sections of this report.

### 4.1 Educational attainment and skills

Educational attainment is a vital contributor to a person's employment prospects. Those with no qualifications are twice as likely to be workless than someone with a qualification. In the West Midlands a greater proportion of the population has no qualifications than in any other region. Furthermore, qualification attainment among some minority ethnic groups is lower than for other groups, increasing further their chances of worklessness.

At 32%, the percentage of people from Pakistani & Bangladeshi groups with no formal qualifications is more than double the average for the West Midlands as a whole (See table 2). While black Caribbean people are no more likely to have no qualifications than average, they are less likely to progress onto higher level learning, with 22% holding level 4+ qualifications, compared with a regional average of 28%.

Previous research by the Observatory<sup>7</sup> has shown that even where minority ethnic groups are well qualified with level 4+ qualifications, they still have lower levels of employment than the white group. This is true for all of the ethnic groups apart from the Indian group who have higher employment rates with level 4+ qualifications than their white counterparts. A national report<sup>8</sup> also found this general trend to be true with white groups having higher employment rates than ethnic minorities at all qualification levels.

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<sup>6</sup> WMRO (2009) 'Causes and dynamics of worklessness: Literature review'

<sup>7</sup> WMRO (2006) 'Skills needs of individuals'

<sup>8</sup> National Audit Office (2008) 'Increasing employment rates for ethnic minorities'

**Table 2: Qualifications attainment by ethnic group**

	Proportion of the working age population 19+ with no qualifications in 2007	Proportion of the working age population 19+ with level 2+ qualifications in 2007	Proportion of the working age population 19+ with level 3+ qualifications in 2007	Proportion of the working age population 19+ with level 4+ qualifications in 2007
British	13%	68%	47%	28%
Other White	10%	65%	40%	30%
Mixed Parentage	15%	69%	58%	34%
Indian	22%	65%	46%	29%
Pakistani & Bangladeshi	32%	48%	29%	18%
Other Asian	19%	63%	52%	32%
Black Caribbean	16%	66%	41%	22%
Black African and Black Other	22%	61%	43%	33%
Chinese	10%	83%	75%	61%
Other	26%	56%	43%	35%
<b>All</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>28%</b>

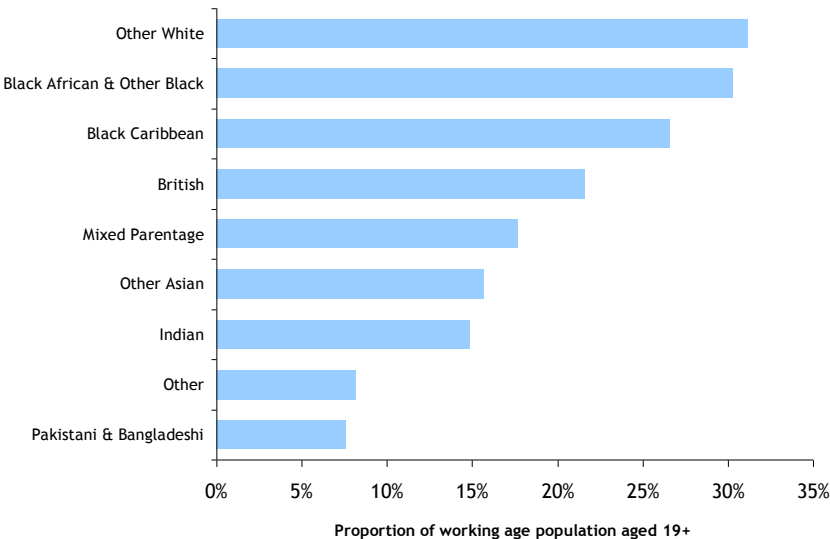
*Source: LFS Oct-Dec 2007*

## 4.2 Participation in education and training

Despite these lower levels of qualification, participation in education and training is particularly low amongst many of the region's minority ethnic communities. As chart 9 below shows, in 2007 only 7.6% of people from Pakistani & Bangladeshi communities and 8.2% of people from 'other' communities (which include Filipino, Japanese, Vietnamese and Arab groups) had participated in vocational training, compared with an average of 21% for the working age population as a whole.

People from black communities have high rates of adult participation in education and training. This reflects a trend in these communities to undertake adult learning as part of a process of improving low rates of school attainment. Black Caribbean people are no more likely to hold no qualifications than white people, yet employment rates do not reflect this. For this group at least, skills are not the main barrier to successful employment.

**Chart 9: work-related training by ethnic group**



Source: LFS Oct-Dec 2007

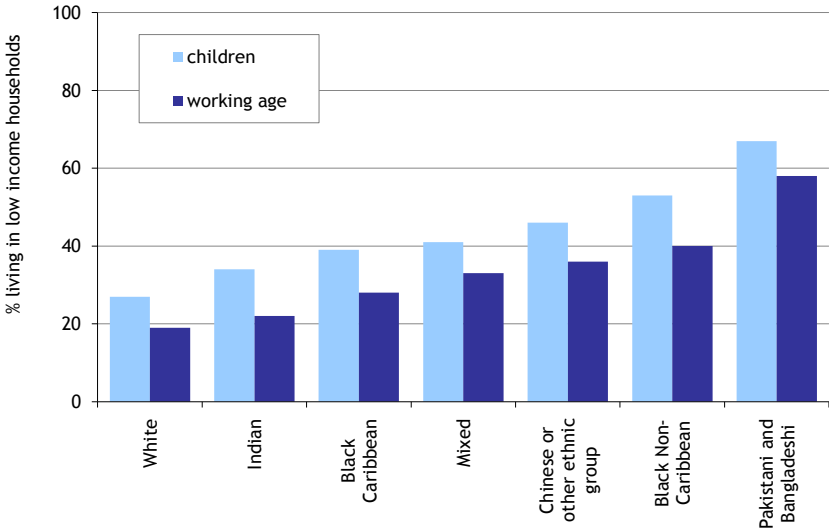
### 4.3 Poverty & deprivation

One of the consequences of disadvantage in the labour market is poverty. People from minority ethnic groups are likely to live in deprived areas<sup>9</sup> and more likely to be in poverty than white people.

Poverty has long-term implications for future labour market success of individuals, as many higher level and advanced qualifications require significant financial investment on the part of the individual.

Chart 10 shows the risk of poverty<sup>10</sup> for children and working age people in each ethnic group in the UK.

**Chart 10: Poverty risk by ethnic group (UK)**



Source: DWP (Households Below Average Income 2007/08)

Nationally, over half (58%) of Pakistani/Bangladeshi people of working age are living in low income households. For children, this figure is even worse with two thirds (67%) of Pakistani/Bangladeshi children living in low income households. Children from Pakistani/Bangladeshi ethnic groups are more than twice as likely as white and Indian children to be living in poverty.

These data are not available at a regional level, however it is possible that these figures are even higher in the West Midlands as Pakistani/Bangladeshis living in the region have much lower employment rates than nationally and so may be more likely to be living in poverty.

<sup>9</sup> National Audit Office (2008) 'Increasing employment rates for ethnic minorities'

<sup>10</sup> Poverty is defined here as living in a household where income is below 60% of the median after housing costs have been deducted. The official child poverty target uses the same definition except that it takes the 'before housing costs' measure.

A research report from the Department for Work and Pensions has looked at the links between child poverty and ethnicity<sup>11</sup>. The research found that the higher risks of child poverty amongst ethnic minority groups could not be explained by the presence of higher proportions of characteristics associated with poverty, such as lone parent families, large families or workless families, amongst ethnic minority groups. Instead the report describes ‘ethnic poverty penalties’ that are experienced by all of the main minority ethnic groups. A ‘poverty penalty’ is the unexplained difference in poverty risk for children from different ethnic groups whose family characteristics are otherwise the same. More needs to be done to understand why poverty penalties exist for children from minority ethnic groups. The findings suggest that addressing known poverty risks, such as worklessness, alone will not be sufficient to remove the differences in poverty levels between ethnic groups.

#### 4.4 Cultural attitudes

Among some minority ethnic groups, traditional attitudes towards women working outside the home lead to the low rates of female economic activity. This is particularly the case among Muslim communities, in particular the Pakistani/Bangladeshi communities, and also some African communities. However, research with women in these communities has shown that many of the younger generations are more interested in taking up employment. Many have faced external barriers in doing so, however<sup>12</sup>.

The employment rate for Pakistani/Bangladeshi women is over 6 percentage points lower in the West Midlands than in England. Pakistani/Bangladeshi women living in the West Midlands have an employment rate of just 20% compared with 26% in England.

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<sup>11</sup> Platt, L (2009) ‘Ethnicity and Child Poverty’ DWP Research Report No.576

<sup>12</sup> Equal Opportunities Commission ‘Moving on up’ 2006

## 4.5 Discrimination

Research<sup>13</sup> has shown that the disadvantaged position of minority ethnic groups in the labour market, including higher unemployment rates, lower hourly wages and being concentrated in lower level occupations, cannot be explained by age, education or foreign birth. So, someone from a minority ethnic group being of the same age and having the same level of qualifications as a white counterpart will be more likely to be unemployed or have lower hourly wages.

Other research has also found evidence of discrimination against people from ethnic minority groups in the labour market.

A recent DWP report<sup>14</sup> looked at whether there was any evidence of discrimination in recruitment practices in the UK. The researchers identified formally advertised vacancies in seven British cities in nine different occupations and sent three applications forms for each vacancy. The application forms were matched apart from the applicants names were changed to be associated with particular ethnic groups - one associated with a white ethnicity and the other two associated with a black African, black Caribbean, Chinese, Indian, or Pakistani/Bangladeshi background. In total 2,961 applications were sent for 987 vacancies.

The research found that applications with a white name were more likely to receive a call back for interview than those with a minority ethnic name, 10.7% compared to 6.2% respectively. This discrimination was high for all of the minority ethnic groups, for men and women and in all of the cities included in the study. Public sector employers were less likely to have discriminated than private sector employers (4% compared to 35%) and this was thought to be due in part to the more widespread use of standard application forms in the public sector: discrimination was more likely to occur where a CV was sent. The research concluded that “the random assignment of names to convey ethnicity in applications in this correspondence test mean there are no plausible explanations for the difference in treatment found between white and ethnic minority names other than racial discrimination.”

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<sup>13</sup> Heath A and Cheung SY (2006) 'Ethnic penalties in the labour market: Employers and discrimination' DWP Research Report No. 341

<sup>14</sup> Wood M, Hales J, Purdon S, Sejersen T, and Hayllar O (2009) 'A test for racial discrimination in recruitment practice in British cities' DWP Research Report No.607

## Full document information

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