

What do we know about socio-economic integration, and what are the key emerging issues?

This briefing addresses socio-economic integration, understood as covering the educational and economic attainment of migrants and their children in Britain. Since fluency in the English language is also crucial for educational and economic success, we briefly cover this too.

We need to recognize that integration is a process which takes time. We cannot expect migrants to be instantaneously integrated into British society the moment they arrive. We therefore take account both of changes over the life-course after arrival in Britain, and of generational changes. We also take account both of ethnic differences and of faith differences.

Fluency in the English language

Many migrants are already fluent when they arrive, but for some, especially those arriving as older adults from parts of Africa or Asia, learning English is difficult and proceeds slowly. Many will continue to use the language of their origin country throughout their lives. For example, 45% of adult migrants from Pakistan and 32% from Bangladesh have difficulty in reading, speaking, making phone calls or completing forms in English. However, the children of migrants are almost uniformly fluent in English.¹ For the second generation, language is no longer a barrier. This is a story of successful integration in the language domain.

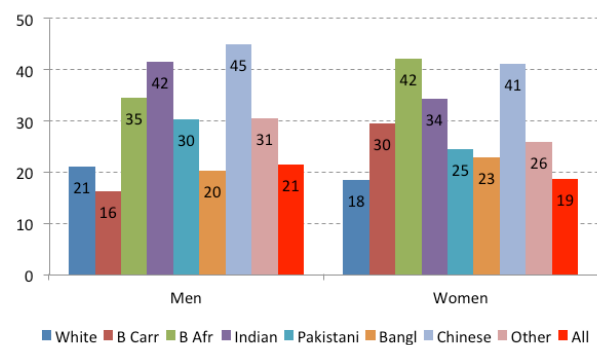
Educational attainment:

There is huge diversity in the educational levels of the migrants themselves when they arrive in Britain, some such as Nigerians including many graduates while migrants from the Caribbean or Bangladesh tend to be much less qualified.² There are also large gender inequalities in the education of migrants from some South Asian origins. Apart from those from the Caribbean, women in all other migrant groups are much less likely to have degree-level education than their male counterparts.

While a proportion of migrants (often those with higher qualifications to start with) invest in British qualifications after arrival, the major advance is in the second generation. In the second generation (defined as people who were born in the UK or arrived by the age of 5), most groups catch up with or overtake the white British (Figure 1). All the main second-generation groups have higher levels of representation in degree-level education than the white British, although typically in less prestigious institutions.³ Minorities are under-represented in Russell group

universities, and this under-representation cannot be explained by their poorer A-level grades.⁴

Figure 1: Degree qualifications of second-generation ethnic groups as compared with white British



The gender inequalities in education found among the migrant generation have entirely disappeared in the second generation. This holds as true for Muslims as for other ethnic or faith groups. We find the same female advantage in educational attainment among second-generation Muslim girls as we do among the Anglicans (largely white British). This is an important success story.⁵

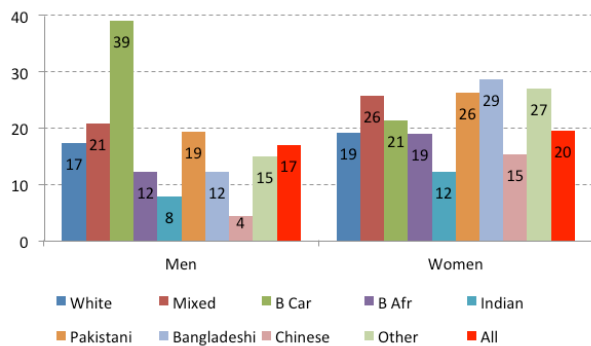
It is sometimes said that it is white working-class boys who are now more disadvantaged educationally than ethnic minorities. But this is at best a half-truth. Black working-class boys from Caribbean or mixed backgrounds continue to have similarly low levels of educational attainment as their white peers. We need to remember that minorities are stratified by social class much as the white British are.

Economic activity

We also find (Figure 2) that there are very high rates of NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) among black Caribbean boys. This is a major emerging

issue. Indeed, 39% of the black Caribbean boys are NEETs (with 34% being unemployed).

Figure 2: NEETs among young people under age 25



However, much the largest gaps in economic activity are found among first-generation Muslim women with three quarters of women of Pakistani/Bangladeshi heritage being economically inactive. This appears to be a general Muslim phenomenon not specific to any particular ethnic group.⁶ This gap is, however, greatly reduced in the second generation.

Unemployment

Among men and women alike, black and Muslim groups have significantly greater risks of unemployment than do their white British peers. These ethnic and religious penalties with respect to unemployment continue largely unabated in the second generation.⁷ This continues to be a major issue, with wide potential ramifications.

Occupational attainment and earnings

Migrant groups, when they take up employment on arrival in Britain, tend to be over-qualified for the work they undertake, and black and Muslim groups experience major 'migration penalties'. However, these disadvantages are somewhat mitigated as they spend more time in Britain, and are to a large extent mitigated among the second generation – at least among those who are lucky enough to have work.

Among the migrants, earnings also tend to be lower than those of their white British peers in the same types of work, but this again is mitigated in the second generation. However, one should note that earnings from self-employment are significantly lower among people of South Asian origin.⁸ This is a neglected source of disadvantage.

Poverty

The cumulative impact of these disadvantages is that minorities are significantly more likely to be found in poverty than their white British peers. Our recent work has also shown that, over and above specific ethnic risks of poverty, there is an additional Muslim

disadvantage which applies to Muslims from a variety of ethnic origins.⁹

Explanations

We can divide explanations for these ethnic and religious disadvantages into three broad categories:

- historically contingent factors such as low qualifications or lack of fluency in the English language, which largely reflect the community's migration history and which are likely to be mitigated across time or across generations;
- factors which may be more intrinsic to particular religious or cultural traditions, such as traditional family values which may encourage women to stay at home and look after children or care for other family members; and
- factors such as prejudice and racial discrimination reflecting how blacks or Muslims are treated by the wider society.

Set against these factors, we should also recognize the fact that migrants are largely 'positively selected', showing unusual drive and determination to succeed. This ambition may in turn explain the remarkable educational success of their children.

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