



The Experiences of Ethnic Minority Women in Northern Ireland



Prepared for Submission to CEDAW,
June 2013 NICEM Report
Sarah Isal

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Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>I Introduction.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>II Setting the Context.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>III Survey Questionnaire Analysis.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Methodology.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Nationality and age of the sample.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Reasons for moving to NI.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Legal status and entitlement to reside in NI.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Relationship between legal status and marriage.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Qualifications.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Employment</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Recognition of qualifications gained abroad.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Benefits.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Anxiety around economic downturn.....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Perception of discrimination in employment.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Childcare and school</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Racial victimization and harassment.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Language</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Health.....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Community Life</i>	<i>30</i>
 <i>IV Conclusions and summary of recommendations.....</i>	 <i>31</i>
<i>References</i>	<i>34</i>
 <i>Appendix I List of Issues & Concerns raised in response to question 67- “What are your main issues of concerns”</i>	 <i>35</i>
<i>Appendix II Survey Questionnaire</i>	<i>37</i>

Foreword

“ethnic and minority women are underrepresented in all areas of the labour market ... [and] in political and public life”.¹

(The UN Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination Against Women 2008)

The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) is an independent non-governmental organisation. As an umbrella organisation² we represent the views and interests of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities.³ Our vision is of a society where equality and diversity are respected, valued and embraced, a society free from all forms of racism, sectarianism, discrimination and social exclusion, where human rights are guaranteed.

NICEM are delighted to be able to produce this important piece of work prior to the 2013 examination of the UK government by the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on the 17th July 2013. This hugely important and timely piece of research⁴ will assist in the elimination of discrimination against ethnic minority women in Northern Ireland informing policy approaches whilst empowering ethnic minority women through facilitating a better understanding of issues impacting upon their lives.

This research has been produced as part of NICEM’s Strategic Advocacy Project in conjunction with funding received from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister’s Minority Ethnic Development Fund. NICEM would like to thank all those who were involved in making this work possible including all of the women who filled in the questionnaire and assisted in its distribution, the researcher Sarah Isal Williamson and the NICEM staff team and interns.

This research forms part of a number of key actions in light of the forthcoming examination of the UK by the Committee on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women. Components to this initiative include two pieces of research; this report and an additional report focusing on issues of domestic violence against BME women. The need for this research has been informed by a series of

¹ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding Observations: UK, UN Doc. C/UK/C0/6, 10 July 2008, para. 292.

² Currently we have 27 affiliated BME groups as full members. This composition is representative of the majority of BME communities in Northern Ireland. Many of these organisations operate on an entirely voluntary basis.

³ In this document “Black and Minority Ethnic Communities” or “Minority Ethnic Groups” or “Ethnic Minority” has an inclusive meaning to unite all minority communities. It refers to settled ethnic minorities (including Travellers, Roma and Gypsy), settled religious minorities, migrants (EU and non-EU), asylum seekers and refugees and people of other immigration status.

⁴ If due to accessibility requirements if you would like to access this report in a different format, please contact the NICEM office and resource permitting we will do our best to accommodate you

community-based seminars and workshops held with ethnic minority women in the period 2012-2013.

Informed by these research findings and NICEM's broader policy, research, development and advocacy work in the intervening period from the 2008 hearing until now, NICEM has produced a shadow report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. The findings of this collective work will be presented to the Committee at the hearing in Geneva in July 2013 by a delegation of 5 ethnic minority women. As a result of this collective body of work a BME women's network will be established in Northern Ireland, the objective of which will be to develop the capacity of BME women so that they can assist and support their communities in accessing services, furthering their human rights and developing community based leadership.

Helena Macormac
Strategic Advocacy Project Manager

I. INTRODUCTION

This report was produced as part of NICEM's key activities in preparation for the forthcoming examination of the UK by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to be held in July 2013.⁵ The overarching aim of these activities is to empower Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women in Northern Ireland and to build an evidence base to identify their needs and corresponding gaps in service provision. With this in mind, the objectives of this research are:

- To gain a better understanding of the experiences of BME women in Northern Ireland in relation to the articles covered by CEDAW
- To develop a benchmark for the situation of BME women in Northern Ireland, informed by a literature review of available research in Great Britain and action research carried out in Northern Ireland.
- To submit information on the situation of BME women in Northern Ireland to CEDAW and feed into their concluding observations.

This report therefore highlights the main findings emerging mainly from the analysis of a questionnaire that was circulated and returned by over 450⁶ BME and migrant women and makes some recommendations that can be used in NICEM's advocacy efforts at the CEDAW examination and beyond.

II. SETTING THE CONTEXT

There is limited existing research on the situation of BME women in Northern Ireland. Some studies have focused recently on the experiences of specific groups such as the Polish community (McVeigh and McAfee, 2009) which have included women in the research sample, or reports that look at the experiences of women in the context of the current economy, which have included some information on the experiences of migrant women (Women Resource and Development Agency, 2011). A brief review of existing research in Great Britain follows, to set the context for this study and for the analysis of the survey questionnaires. Although most of the research mentioned below concerns Great Britain, due to lack of available research on Northern Ireland BME or migrant women, it can in most cases be useful for the Northern Ireland context, as the issues affecting BME women in GB are similar to those in Northern Ireland.

Equality Legislation (CEDAW Article 2 – Legislative approach to obligations to eliminate discrimination)

As highlighted by NICEM's last submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (NICEM, 2011a), there is no appropriate legislation in Northern Ireland to address the multiple discrimination or intersectional discrimination experienced by BME women. Yet discrimination does impact BME women in specific ways that are different from ethnic minority men or white women. Examples include the barriers faced by Pakistani and Bangladeshi women to access the labour market as a result of perceptions linked specifically to a combination of their gender and their ethnicity (Hart Dyke and James: 2009) or access to appropriate maternity services for Traveller women (University College Dublin: 2010)

⁵ Please note that this is a late draft of the research and whilst statistics will remain the same, the report may be subject to further minor amendment prior to its official launch on 1st July 2013

⁶ Not all returned were usable, see methodology section for further explanation

Development of a BME women's sector (CEDAW Article 3 – The development and advancement of women)

Research carried out in Great Britain has pointed to the invaluable role of social networks and BME women's organisations in supporting women and increasing their capacity as well as access to resources and services. These groups often serve as a crucial alternative to the sometimes inadequate provision of mainstream services, and offer more tailor made, culturally sensitive and supportive services to BME and migrant women. The latter point is particularly important for organisations working with vulnerable migrant and refugee women (JRF, 2002). However, two factors have threatened the operation and existence of BME women's organisations in the last few years. First the economic downturn and the subsequent cuts in public spending have led to the women's NGO sector generally experiencing "its worst funding crisis in recent history and its sustainability [...] being seriously undermined while demand for services is increasing" (WRC, 2013, p.39) which in turn is affecting BME women's organisations. A second factor of concern has been the tendency over the last few years to consider that funding should not be provided to organisations that cater for specific ethnic groups on the ground that it undermines community cohesion. This has led to some local authorities cutting funding to organisations that in some cases filled a crucial gap in mainstream services, the most well-known example of this being that of the Southall Black Sisters, a domestic violence charity working with ethnic minority women in the UK.

Political participation (CEDAW Article 7 – Political and public life)

Research on the voting patterns of BME women in the UK could not be found. Research has shown that BME communities (both men and women) are less likely to vote (although there is no research looking specifically at the voting patterns of non British citizens.) An extensive study of voting patterns of ethnic minorities in Great Britain has highlighted that disparities between ethnic minority and white voters lie more around voter registration rates than turnout, with 78% of BME people in the research sample registered to vote, as opposed to 90% for the White British sample (Heath and Khan, 2012). The research found that the proportion of voters registered was significantly lower amongst Black Africans (59%). Reasons for this can be attributed to a variety of factors, including lack of knowledge about eligibility (especially on the part of Commonwealth citizens), compounded by a lack of fluency in English for the more recent arrivals from Africa. As highlighted by Heath and Khan "[t]hese barriers take on greater salience in the context of proposed changes to registration, namely weakening the requirement of councils to register electors, and will likely lead to even lower registration rates." (Heath and Kahn, 2012)

This research also found that migrants are more satisfied with the British political system than second generation. Heath and Khan explain this by the fact that British democracy compares favourably with the migrants' countries of origin, whereas the second generation does not compare with country of origin of their parents but rather with "[Great] Britain's own claims of equal opportunities and fairness." Finally, the research highlights that "most recent arrivals, who lack citizenship and are less than fluent in English, have lower levels of turnout and identification"

What is known is that there is an under-representation of BME women in parliament and other decision-making posts across the UK. The Northern Ireland Assembly has only 1 BME female member (and 18.5% are women). Following the 2010 general elections, the UK

parliament saw the elections of eight BME female MPs, an increase of six on the previous parliament (Durose *et al*, 2011). This under-representation occurs at all levels of political representation. For instance, research by the Government Equalities Office has found that only 1% of the 20,000 councillors in England are ethnic minority women (GEO: 2011.)

Immigration and Legal status (CEDAW Article 9 – Nationality)

As highlighted by Kofman et al. in their report on the equality implications of being a migrant in Britain, “[w]omen may accrue very different bundles of rights, have different settlement outcomes, and experience migration and settlement in different ways” (Kofman et al., 2009, p.xi)

There are many examples of immigration rules and policies that are having an adverse effect on women. These include:

- Family migration rules
- No Recourse to Public Funds rule
- Immigration Points Based System
- Overseas Domestic Workers Visa

Family migration rules

NICEM’s submission to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Migration inquiry into the new family migration rules reports that the latter are likely to indirectly discriminate against women. In particular, the minimum income requirement for bringing family to the UK discriminates against women because of the gender pay gap observed in Northern Ireland and across the UK: “According to the results from the Northern Ireland Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2012 there has been a widening of the gender pay gap. Female median hourly earnings were some 90.3% of male earnings (compared to 91.2% in 2011)” (NICEM, 2013). It is therefore likely to be more difficult for women to meet the minimum income requirement to bring over their partner or their children.

Immigration Points Based System

The structure of the UK immigration points based system has also been found to admit more men than women (two thirds of applicants are male in Tier 1 and 78% in Tier 2), leading to concerns that “it is structured in a manner which is biased against female workers” (Murray, 2011, p.5).

No Recourse to Public Funds rule

In addition, the negative impact of the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) rule on the safety of migrant women in situations of domestic violence has been well documented, an issue campaigned on by a coalition of human and women’s rights organisations, including Amnesty International, Southall Black Sisters and the Women’s Resource Centre, amongst others.⁷ This rule which prevents migrants from claiming any benefits if they have insecure immigration status (such as being on a spousal visa, work visa or a temporary visa) can have the most devastating impact in particular, for women trying to escape from abusive marriages. In these cases, they are unable to get adequate support such as access to refuges because under the NRPF rule they do not receive any housing or income benefits (a precondition for accessing a refuge for instance). This leaves women who are experiencing domestic abuse with an extremely difficult choice of either having to stay in the abusive relationship or facing destitution (Amnesty International and Southall Black Sisters, 2008).

⁷ Further information on the campaign can be found here:

<http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/our-work/no-recourse-to-public-funds/>

This situation was reported by NICEM to the UN Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in 2011. In its submission, NICEM refers to the setting up of the Sojourner pilot project, funded by the Home Office and enabling women who came on a spousal visa to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILV) if they can prove that domestic violence was the cause of the relationship breakdown. However, the strict eligibility requirements have resulted in only 2 women in Northern Ireland benefiting from this provision in the pilot phase (NICEM, 2011).

Overseas Domestic Worker's Visa

Aside from the No Recourse to Public Funds rule, changes to the Overseas Domestic Worker's Visa mean that migrant domestic workers are in breach of their immigration status if they want to change employers, therefore preventing them from escaping abuse (Lalani, 2011).

The precarious situation in which some migrant women find themselves has therefore in some cases been reinforced by government policies, which affect them in different areas of their lives, whether it is employment, health or otherwise.

Education (CEDAW Article 10 – Education and skills)

ESOL class provision

As two thirds of people taking ESOL (English for Speakers of a Second Language) classes in England are women, the latter are particularly affected by policies that facilitate or hinder their access to these classes. Proposals were put forward in 2010 by government to restrict free ESOL classes to people actively seeking a job, therefore people on income-related benefits would have to pay half the class fees. With the additional proportion of women likely to have childcare responsibilities and therefore not being able to seek work, these proposals were likely to impact women disproportionately. The latter fact was confirmed by an impact assessment carried out by Government, which found that only 7% of female ESOL learners were receiving Jobseekers Allowance and putting these new rules in place would have contributed to excluding women from access to these classes. These proposed policy changes have been temporarily abandoned following the results of the equality impact assessment, however the Government has launched new discussions on the topic and might decide to introduce those changes again in the future (WRC: April 2013).

As pointed out by Kofman et al., free and accessible ESOL classes are all the more important as knowledge of English plays an essential role in the path to UK settlement and citizenship (Kofman et al., 2011)

Recognition of qualifications gained abroad

According to Kofman et al. "there is extensive evidence, often based on the experiences of refugees, of many foreign qualifications not being recognised in the UK. This can be both a cause of disadvantage and a way in which discrimination takes place." (Kofman et al., 2011)

Employment (CEDAW Article 11 – Employment)

Unemployment and economic inactivity

Labour Force Survey figures show that BME women in Great Britain are more likely to be unemployed than ethnic minority men and white women. 14.3% of BME women are

unemployed compared to 6.8% of white women. A recent inquiry conducted by the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Race & Community highlights that the unemployment rates of Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women is even higher with 20.5% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women and 17.7% of Black women being unemployed compared to 6.8% of white women. The highest rates for unemployment among women are found among those of Black African heritage (Runnymede, 2012).

The Shadow Report on the Situation of Racism in the UK 2011-2012 reports higher levels of economic inactivity amongst some minority ethnic women in Great Britain: 66% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are economically inactive compared to 31% of Black African and 25% of White British women (ENAR, 2013).

It has also been reported that BME women are more likely to be in jobs for which they are overqualified and are more likely to be in temporary and part-time jobs (Moosa and Woodroffe, 2009).

Childcare

As women are more likely to bear childcare responsibilities, any discussion on employment for women can seldom be dissociated from childcare provision. Research undertaken by the Daycare Trust found that BME families are less likely to access good childcare and lists the following barriers: costs of childcare, lack of cultural accommodation of childcare provision and lack of flexible childcare. The latter disproportionately affects Black women who are more likely to work evenings and weekends (Daycare Trust, 2008).

Discrimination

Discrimination has been put forward as a reason for the higher levels of unemployment within BME groups generally. Research carried out in Great Britain by the Department for Work and Pensions in 2008 found that if you have an African or Asian sounding surname you need to send approximately twice as many job applications as those with a traditionally British name even to get an interview (Wood et al., 2008).

In addition, stereotypes and assumptions about the choices made by women from certain cultural backgrounds have been mentioned as barriers to accessing the labour market for certain BME women, in particular Pakistani and Bangladeshi women (Hart Dyke and James, 2009 and EOC, 2007).

Health (CEDAW Article 12 – Health)

Research into maternity services for BME women in England found that, compared to white women born in the UK, BME women born outside the UK report getting poorer information and are less likely to be treated with respect by staff in the provision of maternity care (Redshaw and Heikilla: 2010). Health inequalities can affect women because of a variety of different factors, such as her migration status, her ethnicity, or whether she is an asylum-seeker or refugee, for instance. Research has shown that the provision of services by GPs, for instance, can be discriminatory towards migrants with GPs often refusing to register new patients who are migrants, even if their migration status entitles them to be registered (WRC: 2013.) This disproportionately impacts on women given their needs to access antenatal and maternity services. Of relevance to BME women is also the need for healthcare providers to provide a culturally sensitive environment as well as offer interpretation services.

Lack of adequate pregnancy and maternity rights can also affect women in the workplace. The British Commission on Equality and Human Rights (EHRC) carried out an inquiry into the employment practices in the meat and poultry processing sector, where a high proportion of

workers are migrant women. It found in particular that poor treatment of pregnant workers was widespread, with women reporting that they were often forced to work in conditions that were posing significant health and safety risks to them and their unborn children (EHRC, 2010).

Health inequalities affecting Travellers in particular were highlighted through the All-Ireland Traveller Health Study (AITHS), a major piece of research carried out on the island of Ireland (including both Ireland and Northern Ireland). The study found that, at 70.1 years, Traveller women “now have a level of life expectancy experienced by the general population in 1960 to 1962 when it was 71.9 years” (University College Dublin, September 2010, p.95). In terms of infant mortality rates, the study finds that Traveller infants today are 3.6 times more likely to die than infants in the general population,” a situation which has actually worsened since 1987 (University College Dublin, September 2010, p.87).

BME women living in poverty and impact of the recession (CEDAW Article 13 – Economic and Social benefits)

Poverty

Moosa and Woodroffe report that in the UK “about 40% of ethnic minority women live in poverty, twice the proportion of White women. Poverty extends to more than a third of Black women and almost two thirds of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women” (Moosa and Woodroffe, 2009). In their research, they point to the fact that ethnic minority women are likely to continue experiencing higher levels of poverty unless the government thinking shifts in the following ways:

- Increase data and access to evidence specifically on the experiences of BME women (as opposed to women generally or BME communities generally) and consult directly with BME women to gain a better understanding of their experiences
- Start from the assumption that BME women make “rational choices relative to their lives and experiences, and plan to tackle their poverty from an understanding of why those choices are made and what support women need to continue making rational choices”
- Ensure that examination of issues affecting BME women goes beyond employment income-related issues, and adopts a broader approach to support BME women’s economic wellbeing (Moosa and Woodroffe, 2009, p9).

Partly as a result of the over-representation of BME women living in poverty, the various changes to the tax and benefit systems, including the introduction of the Universal Credit are likely to hit BME women disproportionately (Women Resource Centre: 2013, p.129).

Impact of recession

Investigation of the government’s unprecedented cuts to public spending is increasingly finding that they are impacting ethnic minorities disproportionately, in particular BME women, not least because of the cuts to public sector jobs. With nearly half Black Caribbean and 37% of Muslim women working in the public sector, it is likely that government’s cuts to public spending over the last 3 years have disproportionately impacted these groups (ENAR: 2013). For instance, a survey of 17 London boroughs carried out by UNISON found that BME women were disproportionately hit by job cuts, citing one particular Council where BME women constituted 55% of the workforce but 23% of redundancies (UNISON: 2012).

Conducting this brief literature review of existing literature on BME women has allowed us to uncover a number of issues that are affecting them across a broad range of areas. These issues will be explored further in the next section, with the analysis of the survey responses.

III. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS

Methodology

The methodology used for collecting the data was a self-completed questionnaire, with questions covering issues relating to women's lives, many in line with the articles of CEDAW. The questionnaire is attached as an appendix to this report. It consisted of 67 questions, covering the following topics:

Nationality

Education

Employment (including experiences of discrimination in employment)

Family, Childcare and School

Political Participation

Health

Racial Harassment

Knowledge of English Language

Transport and Rural Life

Access to Benefits and Impact of Recession

The questionnaire included an open-ended question at the end with space for respondents to highlight their current main concerns. The latter are included in the analysis under the relevant headings and are referred to as responses arising from Question 67. Comments in Question 67 will generally have already been brought up by one or more questions but provide a more qualitative element to the analysis and when possible quotes from responses are included.

The analysis provided is based on 434 returned questionnaires. In addition nine questionnaires, which were filled out on paper copies, could not be inputted as they were incomplete. Finally, it is worth noting that an additional 12 questionnaires were returned and uploaded on Survey Monkey after the final cut off date and as a result could not be included in the analysis.

Data collection and issues related to inputting the data in survey software

The questionnaire was piloted by NICEM staff members, who provided comments for adjustment. It was then translated in eight languages (Polish, Lithuanian, Thai, Arabic, French, Spanish, Chinese-simplified and Traditional) and disseminated widely through the NICEM network.

NICEM staff members at times have provided direct support to women to fill the questionnaire out. Paper copies were collected and manually inputted to the survey software English version.

Methodological issues arising from the questionnaires

It is worth mentioning that NICEM staff members have noticed whilst inputting the questionnaire, that a number of respondents did not seem to understand some questions. In particular, reference was made to Question 8 (Do you have any dependents?), with women in some cases answering no when it was apparent from the way they responded later in the questionnaire, that they did have children.

Issues were highlighted in relation to Question 19 (Is your qualification gained abroad recognised in Northern Ireland?), with a significant number of respondents not knowing and writing down 'not yet'.

Skipped questions

It is worth noting that in some instances a large number of respondents skipped particular questions. Throughout the analysis, the statistics that are reported are based on those of who have responded (as opposed to the full sample). On some questions, the numbers are small, something which is highlighted throughout the analysis. The questions with a particular low response rate (less than one third) included:

- Question 12: on whether their entitlement to stay in Northern Ireland depends on their husband
- Question 30: on the reasons for not reporting harassment at work
- Question 33: on types of childcare provision
- Question 37: on reasons why they answered 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to the question 36 on finding a school for their children
- Question 47: on the reasons they did not go to the police to report racial harassment
- Question 49: on the quality of their experience with the police if they did report harassment
- Question 57: on reasons they answered 'poor' or 'very poor' to question 56 on their experience of visiting their GP or local hospital.
- Question 60: on reasons they answered 'poor' or 'very poor' to question 59 on their experience of childbirth.
- Question 62: on experiences of public transport if they live in rural areas.

For most of the above questions, the low response rate can be explained by the fact that they are follow-up questions and the situations they refer to apply to only part of the sample. Potential reasons for the low response rate of question 12 are discussed in the section on legal status

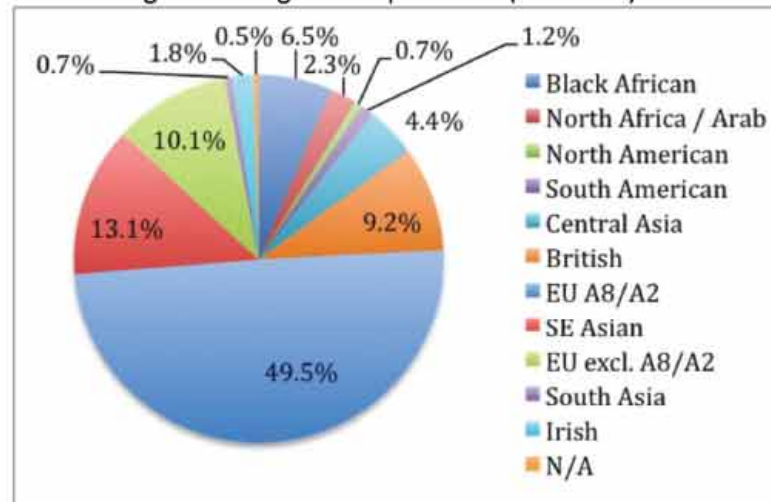
Nationality and age of the sample

Nationality of respondents

Just under half (49.5% or 215) of respondents are nationals from the EU A8 and A2 countries (Eastern European countries and Baltic countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007).⁸ The largest group of respondents is Polish, which constitutes over a third (35.7%) of the whole sample. This is consistent with the fact that A8/A2 migrants are the largest group to have migrated to Northern Ireland in the last 8 years. The Polish minority is now estimated to be the largest ethnic minority group in Northern Ireland (McVeigh and McAfee, 2009). Other nationalities represented in the A8/A2 group included Bulgarian, Czech, Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Romanian and Slovak.

⁸ A8 countries are: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia. A2 countries are: Bulgaria and Romania

Chart 1: Regions of origin of respondents (Total 434)



Thirteen per cent (13% or 57) of respondents came from South East Asia, with the majority of respondents from that group being Chinese and Thai. Other nationalities represented in that group included East Timorese, Indonesian, Laotian, Malaysian, Singaporean, Taiwanese. Notably, only one respondent came from the Philippines, which is at odds with the trend in the general population of Northern Ireland.

The third largest group of respondents is the EU excluding A8 and A2 countries group at 10% (44) of the total. Nationalities represented in that group included Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish. The largest group in this category is the Portuguese, which again is consistent with migration trends in Northern Ireland (R Russell, 2012).

This group does not however include the Irish and British respondents who have been kept separately for analysis. The British constitute just under 10% of the sample (9.2% or 40 respondents) and only 1.8% (eight) of respondents were Irish. Closer examination of the Irish responses indicates that these include Irish travellers as well as BME women.⁹ All the British respondents, except for two, were born outside the UK and have acquired UK citizenship. Of those, the South East Asian group is the largest group (13 from China and Thailand mainly) followed by the South Asian Group (seven – from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh). Other countries of origin include Egypt, Russia, Kosovo, Moldavia, Kazakhstan, Iraq, and Jordan.) Only one EU national (from Lithuania) has acquired UK citizenship, probably because the level of rights and entitlements to live and work in Northern Ireland are higher for EU citizens as opposed to third country national. There is therefore less incentive to acquire citizenship. When respondents have indicated they hold dual nationality (in nine cases) they have been included in the British group for the purpose of analysis. There is a small sample of respondents from South Asia (three) mainly because the South Asian respondents have acquired UK citizenship and therefore fall in the “British” category (see above). Six point five percent (6.5% or 28) respondents came from Africa (excluding North Africa), including Congo, the Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Four point four percent (4.4% or 19) of respondents come from Central Asia, the largest group amongst them being the Russian group (13). Interestingly, on examination of the Russian responses, it is noticeable that although they have written Russian as their

⁹ This was deducted from the comments written in open-ended questions, referring directly to their ethnicity

nationality, they were based in a Baltic country (Lithuania or Estonia) where they are a national minority. It is not clear whether they hold an EU passport, a Russian one, or both.

Only 2.3% of respondents came from North African or the Middle East (Egyptian, Jordanian, Moroccan, Algerian, Omani and Turkish) and at 1.2% (five), an even smaller group of respondents came from South American (Brazilian, Argentinian and Venezuelan). Finally, only three respondents came from North America (USA and Canada)

Table 1: summary of Nationality of respondents

Nationality	Region	Num	Percentage
Congo, Ivory Cost, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe	Black African	28	6.5%
Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, Oman, Turkey	North Africa / Arab	10	2.3%
Canada, USA	North American	3	0.7%
Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela	South American	5	1.2%
Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine	Central Asia	19	4.4%
(Country of birth): Argentina, Bangladesh, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Lithuania, Moldova, Pakistan, Russia, Thailand.	British	40	9.2%
Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia	EU A8/A2	215	49.5%
China, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand	SE Asian	57	13.1%
France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain	EU excl. A8/A2	44	10.1%
Bangladesh, India, Pakistan	South Asia	3	0.7%
	Irish	8	1.8%
None given	N/A	2	0.5%

Age of respondents

Nearly three quarters of the respondents are aged between 26 and 44.

Table 2: Age of respondents

Age group	Number (out of 429)	Percentage
<16	1	0.2%
16 - 25	50	11.7%
26 - 35	201	46.9%
36 - 44	108	25.2%
45 - 54	51	11.9%
55 - 64	16	3.7%
65 - 74	1	0.2%
75 - 84	0	0.0%
>85	1	0.2%

Reasons for moving to NI

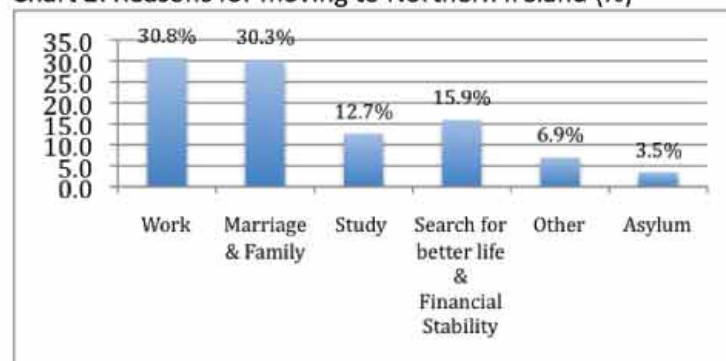
Out of the 398 women who responded to this question, a third (133) have stated they moved to Northern Ireland to find work. Linked to that, another 23 respondents stated they came because they felt the financial situation back in their home country was not good and 33 mentioned they wanted a better life for themselves and their children. Economic reasons therefore seem to be the main driver for coming to Northern Ireland for just under half of all respondents. This is particularly the case for the EU A2/A8 group, two thirds of which has given financial and employment related reasons for moving.

Another third (127) of the women who responded to that question stated marriage or family reasons (82 out of the 127 specifically stated marriage reasons). This reason was given by the majority of women in the South East Asian group, with just over half of them answering marriage or joining family as the reason for settling in Northern Ireland.

Marriage is the reason cited by the majority of women within each group except for the EU A2/A8 and the EU (excl A2/A8) groups who have given work as the main reason for coming. But family and relationship were also given as a reason by nearly one in four women from the EU A2/A8, highlighting that a significant number are moving to Northern Ireland to follow their partner or husband. More than half of the British respondents also reported coming to Northern Ireland for marriage or family reasons, which confirms the fact that most of the respondents in the British group have acquired UK citizenship as opposed to being born British.

Asylum was given as a reason by 10 out of the 24 Black African women who have responded to that question. Finally, 45 women cited studying as their main reason to come to Northern Ireland

Chart 2: Reasons for moving to Northern Ireland (%)

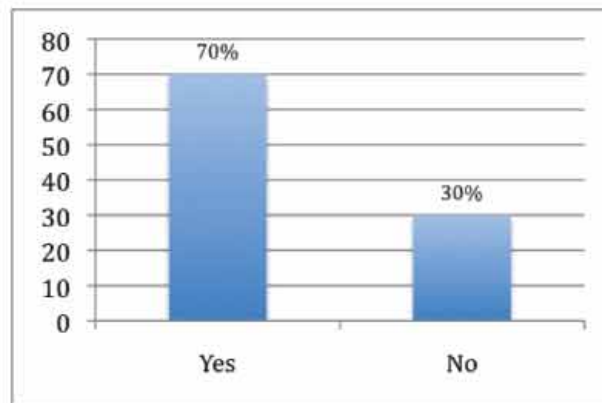


Marital Status and Children

The majority of respondents (63.8%) are in a relationship (either married or co-habiting) and 22.8% are single. This is not surprising since it has been established that marriage or relationship was the reason given for settling in Northern Ireland by the largest number of respondents.

Over two thirds of respondents (70%) have children and a similar percentage can be found when looking separately at the Black African, the A8/A2 and the South East Asian groups.

Chart 3: Do you have any children? (%)



Answers from question 67 on domestic issues

Domestic and relationship issues have come up as concerns in response to question 67 for nine women. One clearly states the “*loss of income support*” and “*risk of deportation*” if she divorces her husband. Another eight mention difficulties in their relationship although do not specify of what nature. Whilst relationship challenges are not specific to migrant women, the latter are affected in particular ways. These relate mainly to the consequences of separating or divorcing their partner, for instance in relation to their entitlement to stay in the country and the vulnerability they can find themselves in both emotionally and financially (see section below on legal status).

Legal status and entitlement to reside in Northern Ireland

Just over one in five women (21.9%) answered that they needed a special resident permit or visa to stay in the UK. This is likely due to the over-representation in the sample of EU nationals (70%) who therefore do not need a special permit to stay in the UK. The majority (61%) of non-EU respondents stated they needed a special visa or resident permit.

There seems to be some degree of confusion and uncertainty linked to their legal status from respondents. For instance, a limited number (18) of A8/A2 and even nationals from EU excl. A2/A8 stating that they need a specific resident permit and visa to stay in Northern Ireland, something which is not actually correct, since EU citizens are entitled to stay in the UK (although there are varying registration processes and rules to follow, depending on the country of origin.)

Equally worrying were instances where women answered that they did not need a permit, however it was obvious from the rest of the questionnaire that they did need one.

This points to the need to raise awareness and provide better information on what women’s rights and entitlements are in relation to their legal status. This is particularly important in order to avoid exploitation in the workplace due to lack of awareness of rights. It is also important to allow women who might have come with their partners (and sometimes prompted by the latter) to consider the option of staying in Northern Ireland even if the relationship breaks down. This confusion and lack of awareness of their legal status leaves them in a potentially vulnerable situation that might be uncovered in future, should their circumstances change (such as losing their jobs, or separating from their partners).

Answers from question 67 on immigration status

Difficulties around their status as residents in Northern Ireland have been mentioned a few times:

“The main problem I faced has been to prove that I’m habitually resident here”

“Work permit arrangements”

“Immigration law barriers”

“My immigration status”

Recommendation: Better information and support is needed to ensure that women are aware of their rights in relation to their legal status and entitlements to reside in Northern Ireland.

Recommendation: Efforts as well as resources, including interpretation and practical support, should be put in place to provide free immigration advice to women and help them deal with the bureaucracy attached to their immigration status.

Relationship between legal status and marriage.

Related to that issue, question 12 asked whether the legal status of the respondents depended on their spouse. This is an important issue to explore as some women may find themselves in the situation of not being able to exit from an abusive relationship because their entitlement to stay in the country and access to benefits are attached to the fact that they are married. If the marriage ends, so do their entitlements in Northern Ireland.

Only 29% of women responded to question 12, so the majority of respondents skipped that question. This can be explained by the fact that the majority of women in the sample stated they do not need a resident permit (78.1%). But the low response rate could also point to the fact that this is a sensitive question that women are not necessarily comfortable talking about or responding to via a questionnaire. Investigating this issue further using a qualitative methodology such as interviews or focus groups are therefore likely to yield better results.

Of the 126 women who did respond to question 12, the majority stated they could stay in Northern Ireland even if they separated from their husband or spouse (80) and just over a third said they could not (46).

The highest response rate to that question came from the South Asian and North American groups (though these represent extremely small numbers, 2 and 3 respectively), followed by the Black African group and the South East Asian group. For the latter, 15 women out of the 34 who responded stated they could not stay if they separated from their spouse (44.1%)

Interestingly, 37 A8/A2 women responded to that question, and of these nearly half stated that their status did depend on their spouse (16). Similarly, of the few respondents from the EU 15 group (seven), five of them answered that they would lose their entitlement to stay in Northern Ireland if they separated with their husband or spouse, something which again points to a certain confusion and lack of awareness of their rights and entitlements to stay in the country even if they separate from their husbands.

Based on these responses, it seems that the majority of women perceived that their marriage or relationship does not determine their entitlement to stay in Northern Ireland, even if marriage was one of the main reasons for moving in the first place. Similarly, it is not clear what the proportion of respondents affected by the No Recourse to Public Funds rule might be in the context of this research. However, even if they are not likely to get deported or sent back if they were to divorce or separate from their spouse, there might be other

factors preventing them from doing so, especially if the very reason they have moved to Northern Ireland is marriage (having children, fear that they will not be able to make ends meet in Northern Ireland by themselves, cultural pressures from within their community that considers they should stay in a marriage at any cost, fear of domestic violence etc...)

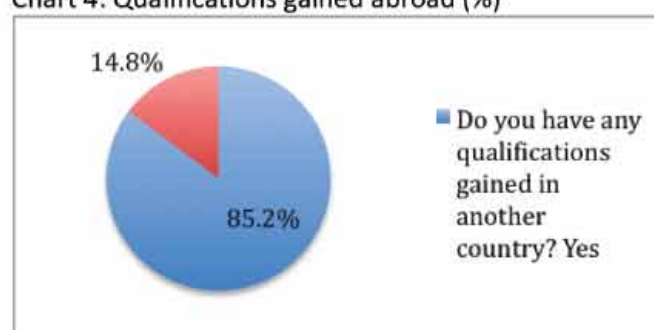
Recommendation: Further qualitative research is needed to establish the experiences of married migrant women in Northern Ireland, to ascertain the extent of restriction on their freedom of choice should they want to separate from their spouse, and how they might be affected by the No Recourse to Public Funds rule.

Qualifications

Looking at the respondents overall, only a little more than a third responded that they had gained any qualifications in the UK (37.3%). Of these, one in five have a Postgraduate degree or a PhD. When examining the different groups separately, the only two groups where a majority of respondents do have a qualification in the UK are the Central Asian group – which can be explained perhaps by the fact that studying was the second most common reason for moving to Northern Ireland given by women in this group – and logically the British; although interestingly, a third of the British respondents still said they had no qualifications in the UK. However, all of these except for one reported they had gained qualifications outside the UK. It is therefore likely that a significant proportion of British citizens in the sample has acquired citizenship (as opposed to being born British) and studied in the country of origin before coming to the UK.

When looking at the result of question 15 on qualifications gained abroad, 85.2% of respondents stated they have qualifications gained outside of the UK. Of these, over half of respondents have qualifications equivalent to a university degree (56.4%)

Chart 4: Qualifications gained abroad (%)



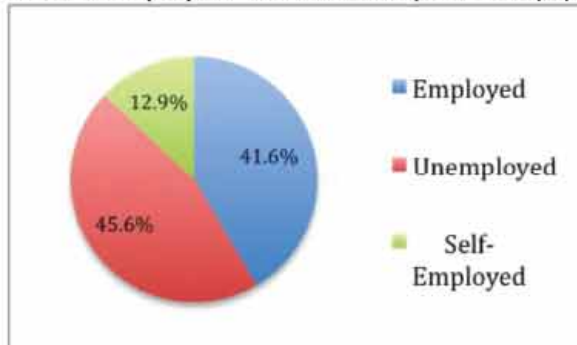
The sample therefore includes quite a high proportion of women who are highly qualified with over half of the qualifications gained abroad being university degrees and 20% of those gained in the UK being postgraduate and PhD level. It is important to examine the qualifications question together with the employment questions below, in particular to ascertain whether there is a correlation between employment and qualifications and whether the skills and qualifications are underused as a result of the latter not being recognised in Northern Ireland.

Employment

A little under half of the respondents are unemployed (45.6%), with 41.6% having responded that they were employed and 12.9% self-employed. The highest levels of unemployment in the sample are found in the North African/Arab group with 90% being unemployed and the

Black African group, with 88.9% being unemployed. It is then followed by the Irish group, with 75% respondents being unemployed and the EU excl. A2/A8 group with 65.9% being unemployed.

Chart 5: Employment status of respondents (%)



With half the EU A2/A8 having responded that they are employed, they constitute the group with the highest proportion in employment.

When looking at the reasons provided by those who have responded that they are unemployed, the main reason given is childcare responsibilities (35.2%) followed by "I cannot find a job" (17.6%) and 12% responded that they could not find a job to match their qualifications.

Other reasons given by respondents for not being in employment included:

Language (and the need to improve English)

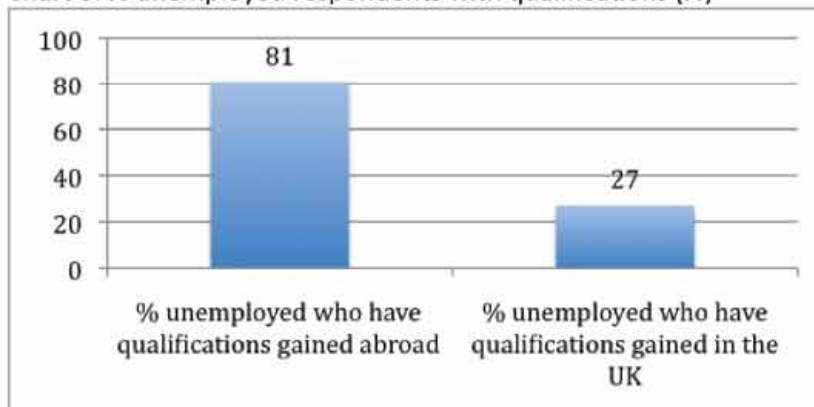
Studying (and therefore not looking for a job)

Discrimination ("Fired while pregnant" – "wearing a headscarf")

Caring responsibilities (towards husband or children with ill-health)

When cross-referencing respondents who have answered they were unemployed with where they have gained their qualifications, one finds that 81% of those who are unemployed have qualifications gained abroad, whereas only 27% who stated being unemployed have gained their qualifications in the UK. This points to the potential difficulty of finding a job without UK qualifications and the lack of recognition of foreign qualifications (an on-going problem mentioned by respondents under question 67)

Chart 6: % unemployed respondents with qualifications (%)



Answers from question 67 on employment

The worry of not finding a job and/or losing their current job is the issue mentioned most frequently by respondents in response to question 67 (mentioned in 70 out of 373 responses).

These comments included anxieties around job security as well as unemployment:

"Few jobs available"

"Not being able to find a job to help with family finance"

"I can't get a permanent teaching position"

"I worry I will lose my job"

"I can't find a permanent job – it's hard to make ends meet for my family"

Respondents are not only worried about their job security but also that of their spouse. A few comments reflect that by referring to their husbands' situation:

"I worry that my husband's hours in work will be cut"

"Lack of job opportunities for my husband (not able to get a decent job despite being well qualified)"

"My husband could lose his job and I won't find one when the kids are older"

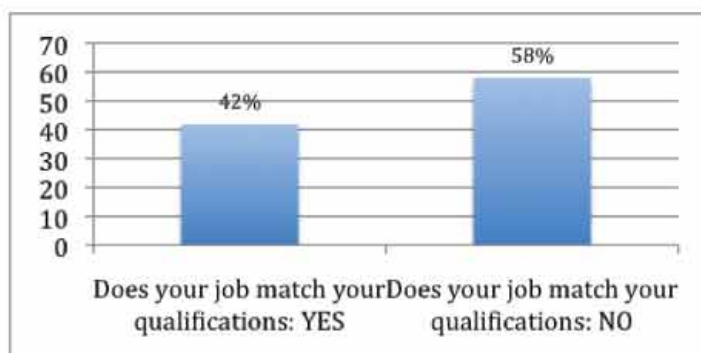
This could be partly because their husbands are the sole breadwinners of the household and therefore losing their jobs would have serious implications for their families.

Recommendation: The Government should develop strategies to increase the participation of BME women on the labour market. These should recognise the specific barriers encountered by BME women as a result of their ethnicity or migrant status as well as their gender and find solutions to address them, including better provision and more flexible childcare.

Recognition of qualifications gained abroad

To question 23 on whether their jobs matched their qualifications, 58% of respondents answered 'no'. This seems to be a particularly stark issue for women of the South East Asian group, the A8/A2 group and the Black African group.

Chart 7: Does your job match your qualifications? (%)



Answers from question 67 on recognition of qualifications

Concerns about their qualifications not being recognised in the UK came up 15 times in response to question 67. In particular, this seems to be a great subject of concern amongst women coming from the EU A2/A8 group. Comments on this issue included:

"I can't use my qualification in Northern Ireland"

"My degree isn't really applicable, unless I teach foreigners"

"Trying to get my degree recognised in Northern Ireland"

"Prejudice against my foreign qualifications"

These concerns are understandable when one remembers that the main reason for the majority of the respondents to come to Northern Ireland was to work. The challenge then becomes finding work that is in line with the qualifications gained. Although this research does not provide the necessary data to ascertain whether women are over-qualified, it is likely that this phenomenon, which has been demonstrated in existing research, applies in this case. Failure to recognise the skills and qualifications of these women is a waste of talent that could be crucial to contribute to economic recovery, in particular given the current economic downturn.

Recommendation: There is an urgent need to recognise the qualifications gained abroad by BME and migrant women, both to allow them to access the labour market and ensure that they are employed in jobs that match their qualifications.

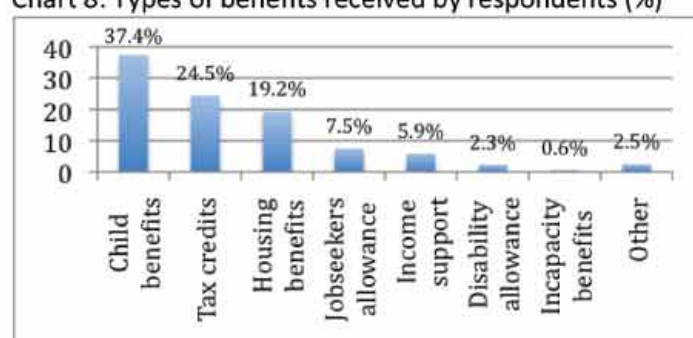
Benefits

Nearly all the respondents (98.6%) receive some benefits with the majority being child benefits (37%). This is not surprising since over two thirds of respondents have children. Around one in four respondents receive work tax credits, highlighting that they are likely to be in the low-income brackets. Nearly one in five respondents receive housing benefits. Other benefits mentioned by respondents include Employment Support Allowance and National Asylum Support (although the latter is not considered a benefit in terms of social security but is support provided by the Home Office to asylum seekers).

Only 15% of the women who stated they were unemployed claim the Jobseekers Allowance. This is a worryingly low take up and could indicate that women who are unemployed rely heavily on the income brought by their partner or husbands, which puts them in a dependent and potentially vulnerable position. The low take up of is also worrying given the talks by government to reduce access to free ESOL classes to those on Jobseekers Allowance

and Employment Support Allowance. However, it is important to recognize that the low take-up might be explained by the fact that most women who are unemployed are not necessarily actively seeking employment.

Chart 8: Types of benefits received by respondents (%)



Answer from question 67 on anxiety around benefits

Respondents have expressed concern around losing some benefits as a result of government cuts and the economic downturn:

"My housing benefit has been reduced"

Some have also mentioned the bureaucracy around claiming benefits and the difficulties they have faced as a result of not knowing how the system works:

"I didn't know the forms that I fill for jobseekers and the people didn't explain to me"

"Bureaucracy - all letters in English - no cultural awareness"

Recommendation: Any changes to the benefits-related policies should ensure they do not adversely impact on BME and migrant women.

Recommendation: Specific attention should be paid by authorities to ensure that women are not left in a vulnerable financial position, with less access to benefits, as a result of changes to their marital status.

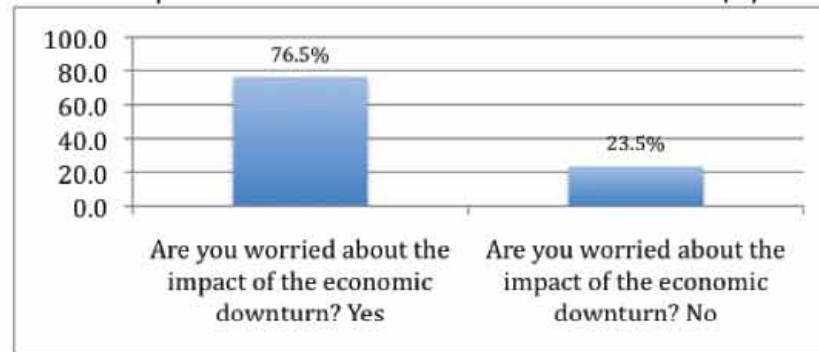
Recommendation: The low take-up in Jobseekers Allowance should be investigated further to understand the potential barriers to accessing this specific benefit.

Recommendation: Further support should be provided to women to ensure that they access all the benefits that they are entitled to. This includes practical support such as interpretation services and help with navigating the bureaucracy when needed.

Anxiety around economic downturn

There are high levels of anxiety about the current economic climate across all groups with nearly three quarters of respondents (72%) answering yes to question 65 (are you worried about the impact of the economic downturn on yourself and your family?)

Chart 9: Respondents' anxieties about economic downturn (%)

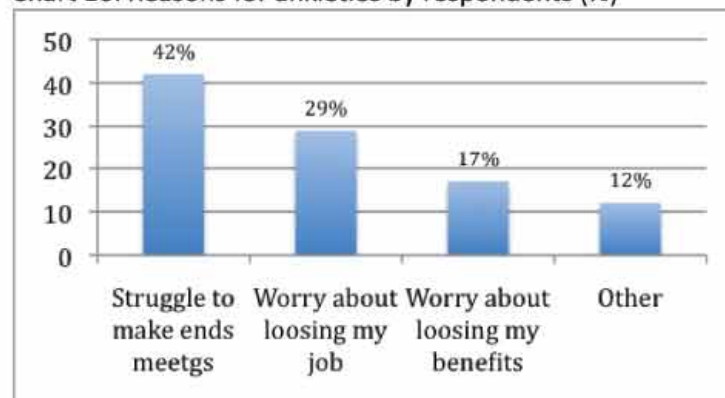


Nearly half are worried about how the crisis might impact on them financially (42% answered "I will struggle to make ends meet"). Twenty nine percent (29%) worry they would lose their job and 17% are worried about losing their benefits. Others are anxious about not being able to provide a suitable future for their children:

"My child's plan to go to university may be hard as a result of the crisis"

"I will not have enough to feed my children"

Chart 10: Reasons for anxieties by respondents (%)



Answers from question 67 on the economic downturn

There is great anxiety around the economic downturn – whilst the main concern around the recession is the difficulty in finding a job, the second and interlinked source of anxiety is financial. Respondents recognise that their job security is at risk and are worried about not being able to cover the most basic costs, such as providing food for their children or paying electricity and gas bills:

"To make ends meet in the current economic recession"

"I feel the crisis will get worse and I won't find a job"

"Poor economic climate and its consequences"

"The present economic situation may influence our lives to a great degree"

"The economy is very bad and very little money to survive and provide for my kids"

"Is my income enough for my bills and other expenses"

Perceptions of discrimination in Employment

The majority of respondents do not feel they experienced discrimination in finding a job (63%). Of those that did feel they experienced discrimination, 21.5% felt they did as an ethnic minority or migrant and a small number felt it was because of their gender (3.4%) whilst 12.3% felt it was a combination of being both a woman and an ethnic minority or migrant.

Only 45% answered question 25 on how they experienced discrimination. Of these, just over a quarter of respondents felt that they experienced discrimination via the interview process (27%) and 15% responded that the discrimination took place via the application form.

Respondents referred to other ways in which they felt discriminated against including:

- A lack of recognition of their qualifications;
- Being told their English is not good enough;
- Assumptions about their ethnicity, culture or religion that led employers to question their ability to do the job;
- Legal status that makes it more difficult for employers to recruit non-UK citizens;
- Their applications being overlooked because they are not British and priority being given to people with UK citizenship;
- Differential treatment between UK and non-UK citizens.

Again, when asked whether they experienced discrimination in the workplace, a majority (62%) answered 'no.' A quarter of respondents responded they felt discriminated against as an ethnic minority or migrant and 10% as a combination of being an ethnic minority and a woman. The main way in which they felt the discrimination occurred was through lack of promotion (22%) followed by lack of support networks (19.6%) and bullying (14.2%).

Nearly three quarters of respondents stated that they did not experience any harassment in their workplace. Those who did experience harassment at work felt they did so mainly because of their ethnicity or migrant status (14.5%.) The majority of respondents did not report the harassment to their management; the main reasons given was the feeling that it would make the situation worse (28.3%) and that it would not be taken seriously by management (29.7%.) Eighteen point one (18.1%) of those who responded to that question replied they were afraid to lose their job as a result of reporting the harassment to which they were subjected.

Answers from Question 67 on discrimination in employment

Discrimination in recruitment and in the workplace was mentioned numerous times by respondents, who referred to it as a barrier to their ability to access to the labour market:

"Sometimes I feel discriminated (in the short-listing process) because of my nationality/origin."

"Discrimination at work and Offices"

"Discrimination when apply for a job"

"Discrimination in all areas"

"Unequal treatment at work"

Childcare and school

In response to question 33 on types of childcare, half of the respondents stated that they put their children in nursery or with a childminder (50%) with around 1 in 5 relying on members of their family to look after their children. This is particularly important because it shows that rules restricting family migration, including bringing over family members, can have an impact on the childcare options for some communities.

Reasons given for not putting their children in childcare are mainly the fact that it is too expensive (37% of respondents) and a reluctance to leave their children with strangers (18%), perhaps pointing to the lack of cultural accommodation for women to feel comfortable enough to leave their children in a nursery or with a childminder.

Answers from question 67 on Childcare and children's education

Anxiety around finding suitable and affordable childcare and good education was mentioned by 31 out of the 373 respondents.

"Childcare is very expensive"

"I worry about my children's education when they become of school age"

"I worry about my child's future"

Less than one third of respondents (29%) did not know that each child is entitled to up to 15 hours of funded pre-school childcare when they turn three, pointing to a lack of information provided to them on this issue.

The vast majority of respondents (81.7%) felt it was either very easy or easy to find a school space for their children. As a result, only 46 respondents answered question 37 on the types of difficulties encountered when looking for a school for their children. Of the 46 responses, the majority (18) did not know where to turn to for information, 16 felt that they had no access to information about schools and 12 felt they had no support from their local authorities in finding a school for their child.

Recommendation: Further information should be provided to parents about the 10-15 hours of funded pre-school childcare available to all children who turn three years old.

Recommendation: Further attention should be paid to the provision of culturally sensitive childcare, to ensure that all women are comfortable with making use of childcare facilities.

Recommendation: Childcare provision should be more flexible to allow women who work outside the traditional working hours (including weekends and evenings) to make use of childcare facilities.

Political Participation

A majority of respondents (61.7%) answered they have a right to vote in Northern Ireland; 13.6% stated they did not know whether they have a right to vote or not and 24.7% responded that they did not have a right to vote.

The right to vote in the UK is offered in varying degrees depending on the citizenship status: whilst EU citizens have a right to vote at local and European elections, citizens from a Commonwealth country and the Republic of Ireland are entitled to vote at all UK elections.

It is interesting that there are still significant numbers of respondents who think that they cannot vote when in fact they are entitled to. Nearly a third of EU citizens responded either that they could not vote or did not know if they had a right to vote, thus pointing to the need for better information on voting rights.

Although the majority of respondents reported that they are registered to vote, nearly three quarters of respondents (72.3%) stated that they did not vote at the last election (question 40).

Only half of the sample responded to question 41 (why did you not vote). The two main reasons given for that were their lack of interest in politics (24.4%) and their lack of knowledge of who to vote for (18.2%). A limited number of respondents felt that politicians did not represent them (6.7%). Perhaps as a logical consequence of the findings above, only 2.6% of respondents are members of a political party and an overwhelming majority (90%) of respondents never considered standing for elections.

There were notably no comments under Question 67 on political participation, highlighting that this is not an issue of concern for most respondents and that this topic is not a priority for BME women compared to the more urgent financial and job-related concerns, which they have highlighted. Another interpretation could be that women might not see the link between being politically active and the potential for changes in their lives, specifically on the issues that they are concerned about.

Recommendation: Further awareness raising and clarification is needed to ensure BME women know when they are entitled to vote and at which elections.

Recommendation: There should be increased efforts to encourage women to participate in politics, both as voters and actors. This should be done through articulating a clear message about the relevance of political participation to their lives and the impact that voting can actually have on addressing some of their concerns.

Racial Victimisation and harassment

Although the majority of respondents (62%) stated that they did not experience victimisation because of their ethnicity, religion or country of origin, it is worth looking at the various groups and their experiences of victimisation:

the majority of Black African women stated they experienced victimisation (63%), almost half of the South East Asian reported victimisation (44%), and 35% of EU A2/A8 respondents and 42.6% of EU 15 respondents (including the Irish group) stated they had experienced victimisation.

Less than half of the sample responded to question 45 on the forms of racist harassment experienced. Of those who did respond, the most common type of victimisation was verbal abuse (45%) followed by damage to their property (22%).

Only a quarter of respondents reported the harassment to the police (25%). In response to question 47 on the reasons why they did not go to the police, the majority answered that they did not think the police would help them. A few respondents, especially from the Black African group mentioned specifically their poor level of English as a reason for not going to the police. Others stated they did not feel the incident was serious enough to justify reporting it to the police. It is worrying that the majority of women surveyed did not report the abuse (neither to the police nor a third party reporting centre) and this points to the

need to consider the impact of being victimised, even if the abuse does seem relatively “low-level” such as verbal abuse.

Answers from Question 67 on Racism and victimisation

Racism, victimisation, discrimination and stereotyping of migrants or ethnic minorities was mentioned in 45 comments (11% of all comments) and ranged from general worry about the tolerance of society towards their community to fears for their safety. ‘*Fear of racist attacks*’ and ‘*bullying*’ were mentioned by a number of respondents both for them and their children (‘*I’m worried about safety of my children at school and in the community around us.*’)

Other respondents highlighted a general sense of not feeling welcome or being misunderstood as migrants in Northern Ireland:

“People from outside are treated like trash, especial the one running away from persecution in their countries, there is no help for them from anywhere”

“Negative media coverage of migration makes me very uncomfortable”

“My children will be mistreated as immigrant children”

“Verbal abuse from some unfriendly local young people”

“When walking in Belfast I never speak in my mother tongue as I fear the reaction of passers-by”

“Feeling as if I am constantly having to explain where I’m coming from and meeting with blank stares”

“Negative attitude towards immigrants by the local community

“Prejudice against my nationality”

“Ignorance - people do not know where I am from and many feel accent defines your intelligence level”

A few comments referred to their lack of trust in the police and the fact that the police were not helpful in dealing with racial harassment or victimisation:

“PSNI deciding no racist attack after bricks are thrown on my front door”

“100% no trust to the local police”

“Inactivity of the police. Poor work in their actions. Discrimination towards foreigners could be felt”

Also mentioned, was the worry that intolerance and racism towards them as migrants might increase as a result of the current economic downturn, illustrated by these comments:

“Theft in my home, which I feel is because of economic downturn and many people with loss of jobs. Felt a little unsafe at that point”

“Will public sentiment in Northern Ireland allow me to remain here”

“I worry that racism in Belfast will get worse”

Since we know that migrants are often the scapegoats in times of economic hardship and that levels of xenophobic sentiments tend to go up in times of recession, with migrants often serving as scapegoats in those situations (K. Schmitz, 2012) it is important to ensure that this tendency is not exacerbated by the media and political discourse.

Recommendation: Politicians and the media should take special care not to fuel xenophobic attitudes and sentiments that are likely to be more prevalent in the current economic climate

Recommendation: Further efforts should be made to encourage victims of racial harassment to report the abuse to either the police or other bodies.

Recommendation: The police should be sensitive to victims coming to them to report racial harassment or abuse.

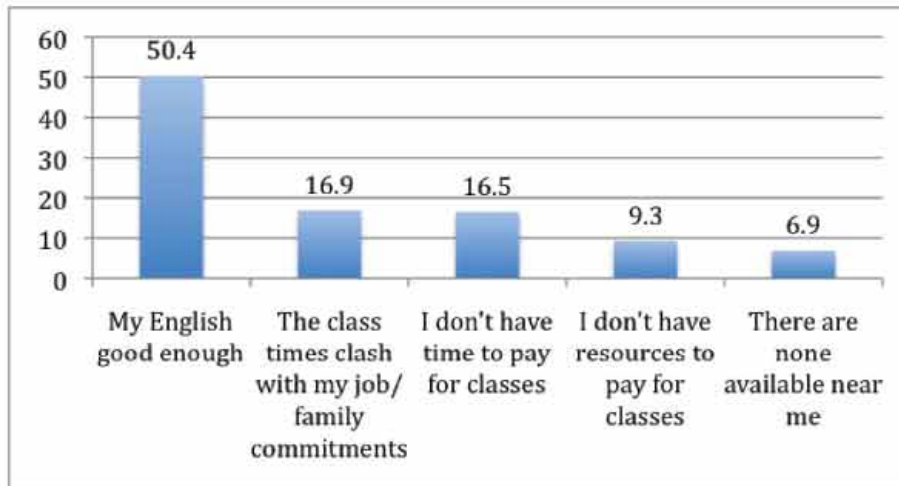
Language

Around two thirds of respondents consider their level of English to be excellent, very good or good and 20% reported their level of English to be satisfactory.

Poor language skills therefore did not seem to be an issue for the majority of respondents to the questionnaire, thus contradicting some assumptions and generalisations made in the media or in policymaking circles about migrants living in the UK not being able to speak English. However, as this figure is based on the self-assessment of the respondents' proficiency level, it should perhaps not be interpreted to mean that language issues are not important for BME and migrant women, especially since knowing the language of the host country is such a key element in labour market inclusion as well as participation in society more broadly. It has also become a key requirement for settlement and acquisition of citizenship.

Twelve point seven percent (12.7%) of respondents do consider their English level to be poor or very poor. Notably, only one respondent reported her English level to be very poor. A little over half of the sample (248) responded to question 52 (reasons for not attending English classes). Of those, the main reason given by half of them was that their level of English was good enough. A third of them (83) answered that they either did not have the time to attend or that the times of classes were inconvenient and clashed with their job or family commitments. Twenty-three women gave lack of resources as a reason and 17 stated they were no classes available near them.

Chart 11: reasons for not attending English classes (%)



Answers from Question 67 on Language

Language was the biggest worry reported by respondents after financial and job-related concerns. It constitutes 10% of all concerns raised and the majority stated that their poor level of English is what prevents them from finding a job:

"I can't find work because of my English"

"I need to improve my English. I need more English classes to provide childcare"

"I have problems communicating in English"

Recommendation: Access to English language classes must be made flexible for women to attend them despite other responsibilities such as childcare or work. This is particularly important for those women who are unemployed, as they have identified that their poor language skills are one of the main barriers to finding work.

Recommendation: ESOL classes should remain free for women claiming benefits (not just Jobseekers Allowance), as gaining a sufficient level of English is crucial to ensure their participation in the labour market, and facilitate their full inclusion in society.

Health

The majority of respondents consider both access to their local GP or hospital and their experience once there to be very good, good or satisfactory (86% and 84%) whilst 13.6% consider the access to be poor or very poor and 15.8% report their experience of visiting the GP or hospital to be poor or very poor.

Only 30% (128) responded to question 57, which asked them the reasons for their negative experience. Of these, the majority (56) answered that they did not get the medical treatment they felt they needed. Sixteen women responded that they felt discriminated against, 15 mentioned that no interpretation was available to them and 10 women stated that there was no culturally sensitive accommodation of their needs. Other issues mentioned included the long waiting time before getting an appointment with a doctor or in hospital.

Similar data comes out of looking at the respondents' experiences of childbirth, with nearly 90% of women reporting their experience to be very good, good or satisfactory. Only 50

women answered question 60 on the reasons for their poor experience; of these 21 reported they did not get the treatment they felt they needed, six mentioned that no interpretation was available, six mentioned a lack of cultural accommodation of their needs and six felt discriminated against

Answers from question 67 on health

Thirteen respondents mentioned health as one of their concerns, without giving much more detail. A few respondents did mention that their difficult living conditions adversely affected their health, including their mental health. Even though there were no questions in the questionnaire to ascertain the mental health situation of women, the issue was brought up in the concerns raised under question 67. Depression was mentioned 5 times and in one instance, reference was made to suicidal feelings, highlighting the severity of the mental health situation that some BME women face.

"I got depression because of thinking too much what will happen, what my life will be, I don't have any future"

Recommendation: Healthcare providers should recognise the needs of different communities and gain a good understanding of how health inequalities affect different groups. This includes providing adequate cultural accommodation for BME women when needed.

Community Life

The place in which the respondents are most active is a place of worship (church, mosque, temple etc...), which was mentioned by 25% of respondents, whilst 17.6% mentioned that they were active in women's groups. When looking at the category 'Other', respondents have mainly mentioned their involvement in activities and groups organised around their ethnic or national community, such as a Polish Saturday school. There are also a few respondents who mentioned being involved in inter-ethnic or inter-faith organisations as well as some more "mainstream" groups, such as gardening clubs or golf clubs.

Asked whether these existing places cater for the needs of BME and migrant women, 53% responded 'yes' whilst a bit over a third responded 'no'. Comments under that question included the need for more minority ethnic women's groups; others mentioned the need for groups to be set up to teach English or to help with practical matters such as writing CVs or helping with filling out job application forms.

Answers from question 67 on community support

Concerns expressed in relation to community life point to the need for further organisations and community initiatives that cater specifically for the needs of BME or migrant women.

"Not enough facilities for Traveller women's groups"

"Lack of Polish groups"

"No advocates for minority groups, even more so for women who are in forced marriages"

"Islamic organisations in Northern Ireland don't provide enough support and services for migrant women and children"

"I am an Irish Muslim and I feel there is very little support for individuals like me except in Belfast"

Many women mentioned their feelings of isolation and the challenges of being alone in a new country without family members; having those community initiatives are therefore all the more important in filling this gap.

Some respondents referred to the lack of support by the state to these initiatives

"Can't get enough funding to support Polish School I run in Derry"

"Lack of state support for community activities"

"Lack of social support and social networks"

Recommendation: Government should recognise the importance of community groups in supporting the inclusion, integration and sometimes resilience of BME and migrant women. Funding should be guaranteed to support these groups and ensure that they do not close down as a result of lack of funds.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of the responses to the survey questionnaire has shown that many of the issues affecting BME women highlighted in the literature review are relevant to the experiences of BME women in Northern Ireland.

In particular, the following conclusions are worth noting:

- Women can be vulnerable through the uncertainty of their legal status, in particular if they are married and their entitlement to stay in Northern Ireland is dependent on their husbands. In several cases, women seem to lack clarity in relation to their legal status.
- BME and migrant women suffer specifically from a lack of recognition of their qualifications, which prevents them from accessing the labour market and getting jobs that match their qualifications and skills.
- BME women report high levels of unemployment or economic inactivity. Whilst there are numerous factors to explain this, lack of flexible and affordable childcare has been mentioned (as well as lack of recognition of relevant qualifications gained abroad)
- The majority of BME women receive different types of benefits and any changes of benefits policies are likely to impact heavily on their lives.
- There is still a low take-up of childcare by BME women, partly as a result of the lack of flexible and affordable childcare, as well as a lack of culturally sensitive childcare options.
- BME women have a very low rate of political participation, both as voters and actors, and have generally reported a lack of interest in politics, highlighting a worrying disconnect between themselves and political decision makers.
- Although the majority of BME women reported their language skills are good enough, there is still a sizeable minority stating their need to improve their English, pointing to the need for appropriate language classes, which are both flexible and affordable.

- There is a lack of appropriate community organisations catering for the needs of BME women. These groups have been reported to be particularly important to their lives by the women themselves, highlighting the need to support their development and sustainability.

The following recommendations are therefore a reflection of the emerging findings highlighted through this report and relate to the different articles of CEDAW in the following way:

CEDAW Article 1 – Overarching approach to the elimination of discrimination

- Government should recognise the importance of community groups in supporting the inclusion, integration and sometimes resilience of BME and migrant women. Funding should be guaranteed to support these groups and ensure that they do not close down as a result of lack of funds.

CEDAW Article 5 – Sex roles and stereotyping

- Politicians and the media should take special care not to fuel xenophobic attitudes and sentiments that are likely to be more prevalent in the current economic climate.

CEDAW Article 7 – Political and public life

- Further awareness raising and clarification is needed to ensure BME women know when they are entitled to vote and at which elections.
- There should be increased efforts to encourage women to participate in politics, both as voters and actors. This should be done through articulating a clear message about the relevance of political participation to their lives and the impact that voting can actually have on addressing some of their concerns.

CEDAW Article 9 – Nationality

- Better information and support is needed to ensure that women are aware of their rights in relation to their legal status and entitlements to reside in Northern Ireland.
- Efforts as well as resources, including interpretation and practical support, should be put in place to provide free immigration advice to women and help them deal with the bureaucracy attached to their immigration status.
- Further qualitative research is needed to establish the experiences of married migrant women in Northern Ireland, to ascertain the extent of restriction on their freedom of choice should they want to separate from their spouse, and how they might be affected by the No Recourse to Public Funds rule.

CEDAW Article 10 – Education and skills

- There is an urgent need to recognise the qualifications gained abroad by BME and migrant women, both to allow them to access the labour market and ensure that they are employed in jobs that match their qualifications.
- Access to English language classes must be made flexible for women to attend them despite other responsibilities such as childcare or work. This is particularly important for those women who are unemployed, as they have identified that their poor language skills are one of the main barriers to finding work.

- ESOL classes should remain free for women claiming benefits (not just Jobseekers Allowance), as gaining a sufficient level of English is crucial to ensure their participation in the labour market, and facilitate their full inclusion in society.

CEDAW Article 11 – Employment and economic rights

- The Government should develop strategies to increase the participation of BME women on the labour market. These should recognise the specific barriers encountered by BME women as a result of their ethnicity or migrant status as well as their gender and find solutions to address them, including better provision and more flexible childcare.

CEDAW Article 12 – Healthcare and women’s health

- Healthcare providers should recognise the different needs of different communities and gain better understanding of how health inequalities affect different groups. This includes providing adequate cultural accommodation for BME women when needed.

CEDAW Article 13 – Social and economic benefits

- Any changes to the benefits-related policies should ensure they do not adversely impact on BME and migrant women.
- Specific attention should be paid by authorities to ensure that women are not left in a vulnerable financial position, with less access to benefits, as a result of changes to their marital status
- The low take-up in Jobseekers Allowance should be investigated further to understand the potential barriers to accessing this specific benefit.
- Further support should be provided to women to ensure that they access all the benefits that they are entitled to. This includes practical support such as interpretation services and help with navigating the bureaucracy when needed.

CEDAW Article 15 – Equality before the law

- Further efforts should be made to encourage victims of racial harassment to report the abuse to either the police or other bodies. The police should be sensitive to victims coming to them to report racial harassment or abuse.

CEDAW Article 16 – Equality in marriage and family life

- Further information should be provided to parents about the 10-15 hours of funded pre-school childcare available to all children who turn three years old.
- Further attention should be paid to the provision of culturally sensitive childcare, to ensure that all women are comfortable with making use of childcare facilities.
- Childcare provision should be more flexible to allow women who work outside the traditional working hours (including weekends and evenings) to make use of childcare facilities.

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APPENDIX I: List of Issues & Concerns raised in response to question 67 – “What are your main issues of concerns?”

Issue	Times mentioned
Access to healthcare	8
Accommodation	9
Asylum Process	9
Away from family	6
Benefits related concern	2
Bureaucracy	4
Caring responsibilities	1
Childcare	14
Children's education and future	17
Depression	7
Discrimination	13
Domestic issue	9
Economic downturn	7
Financial	49
Finding a job	49
Health	13
Identity	2
Integration	4
Job insecurity	21
Lack of community support	14

Lack of information on access to services	3
Lack of recognition of qualifications	14
Lack of support to claim benefits	1
Language	38
Legal status	8
No concern	3
No interpretation	1
Police unhelpful	3
Poor Transport	2
Problem with social services	1
Racism	13
Safety	5
Stereotyping of migrants	6
Supporting children	1
Unemployment	1
Victimisation	8
Work/life balance	7

APPENDIX II: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE AS AN ETHNIC MINORITY WOMAN IN NORTHERN IRELAND

WHY SHOULD I FILL OUT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE?

The UN will be examining how the UK government is complying to the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This will take place in a hearing in July 2013 where the UK government will present to the Committee what it feels it is doing to protect women against discrimination.

We want to provide our own report to the CEDAW Committee, highlighting the experiences of ethnic minority women on the ground. By filling out this questionnaire, you can help us get a better picture of the real issues affecting ethnic minority women in Northern Ireland. This will help inform our report that we will present to the UN.

HOW WILL MY ANSWERS BE USED?

Your anonymous answers will be reflected in a report, which will be used to advocate for your rights

Your answers will be kept completely confidential

Many thanks in advance for taking the time to fill out this survey.

SECTION A: YOUR DETAILS AND LIFE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

1. Age: _____
2. Nationality: _____
3. Country of birth: _____
4. Date settled in NI: _____
5. Reasons for moving to NI: _____
6. First Language: _____
7. Marital Status:
 - a. Single ☐
 - b. Married ☐
 - c. Divorced/Separated ☐
 - d. Widowed ☐

8. Do you have any dependants?

YES

☐

No

☐

9. If YES, how many live in Northern Ireland? -----

10. Postcode (or county) -----

11. Do you need a special resident permit or visa to stay in Northern Ireland?

YES

☐

NO

☐

12. If YES, does your resident permit or visa allow you to stay in Northern Ireland even if you separated from/divorced your husband?

YES

☐

NO

☐

SECTION B: EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT

EDUCATION

13. Do you have any qualifications gained in the UK educational system?

YES ☐
NO ☐

14. If YES, what level qualifications did you gain in the UK?

- a. GCSEs ☐
- b. A-Levels ☐
- c. Bachelor's degree ☐
- d. Master's degree ☐
- e. PhD ☐

15. Do you have any qualifications gained in another country?

YES ☐
NO ☐

16. If YES, what is your qualification level?

- a. Secondary School degree ☐
- b. University degree ☐
(Please provide details)

-
- c. Other (please provide details) ☐

17. Please specify in which subject you have gained your qualification (ie. Chemistry, social science, journalism etc...)

18. Please write here any other training qualifications you may have gained, including level and subject

19. Is the qualification gained abroad recognised in Northern Ireland?

EMPLOYMENT

20. Are you currently employed?

- YES ☐
NO ☐
Self-Employed ☐

21. If you are not in employment, what is the main reason?

- a. I do not have the right to work in Northern Ireland ☐
b. I cannot find a job ☐
c. I cannot find a job that matches my qualifications ☐
d. I have childcare responsibilities ☐
e. I have a long-term illness ☐
f. Other (Please provide details) ☐

22. If you are in employment, what is your job title?

23. Does your job match your qualifications gained either in the UK or abroad?

- YES ☐
NO ☐

24. Do you feel you experience(d) discrimination in finding a job?

- a. YES, as a woman ☐
b. YES, as a person from an ethnic minority/migrant background ☐
c. YES, as a combination of both ☐
d. NO ☐

25. If you answered Yes to the question above tell us where you feel the discrimination took place (*please tick all that apply*):

Via the sorts of questions on the application form ☐
(Please provide details)

Via the interview process (Please provide details) ☐

Other ways (Please provide details) ☐

26. Do you feel you experience(d) discrimination in your workplace?

- a. YES, as a woman ☐
- b. YES, as a person from an ethnic minority/migrant background ☐
- c. YES, as a combination of both ☐
- d. NO ☐

27. If yes how do you feel you are experiencing discrimination at work? *(please tick all that apply)*

- a. Name-calling ☐
- b. Bullying ☐
- c. Lack of training opportunity ☐
- d. Lack of support through networks, support groups etc... ☐
- e. Lack of promotion ☐
- f. Other (Please provide details) ☐

28. Have you ever felt intimidated/harassed at work?

- a. YES, as a woman ☐
- b. YES, as a person from an ethnic minority/migrant background ☐
- c. YES, as a combination of both ☐
- d. NO ☐

29. If you have experienced harassment/discrimination at work did you report it to your management?

- YES ☐
NO ☐

30. If you didn't report it, was it because *(please tick all that apply)*:

- a. I didn't know who to report this to ☐
- b. I didn't think it would be taken seriously ☐
- c. I was afraid I would lose my job as a consequence ☐
- d. I was afraid of making the situation worse for myself and/or my colleagues ☐
- e. Other (please provide details) ☐

SECTION C: FAMILY, CHILDCARE AND SCHOOL
--

31. Do you have any children?

- YES ☐
NO ☐

If YES, how many?

How old are they?

32. Do you currently put your children in childcare?

YES ☐

NO ☐

33. If YES, what type of childcare provision do you have?

- a. Nursery ☐
- b. Childminder ☐
- c. Nanny ☐
- d. Member of the family (ie grandparents) ☐
- e. Other (please provide details) ☐

.....

34. If you don't put them in childcare is it because *(please tick all that apply)*:

- a. There is no suitable childcare in my local area ☐
- b. It's too expensive ☐
- c. Childcare is not flexible around my work schedule ☐
- d. I could not find a place in nursery for them ☐
- e. I feel uncomfortable leaving my children with strangers ☐
- f. I feel that childcare provisions are inadequate for my children (ie lack of culturally sensitive staff; no cultural accommodation for my child's needs) ☐
- g. Other (please provide details) ☐

.....

35. Did you know that if your child is 3 years old, he/she is entitled to 15 hours of free childcare per week?

YES ☐

NO ☐

36. How easy was it to find a school for your children

- a. Very easy ☐
- b. Easy ☐
- c. Difficult ☐
- d. Very difficult ☐

37. If you answered difficult or very difficult to the previous question, was it because *(please tick all that apply)*:

- a. I had no access to information about schools ☐
- b. I had no support from my local authority ☐
- c. I did not know where to turn to for information and advice ☐

SECTION D: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

38. Do you have a right to vote in Northern Ireland?

YES ☐

If YES, go to question 39

NO ☐

If NO, go to Question 44

I don't know

39. Are you registered to vote?

YES ☐

NO ☐

40. Did you vote in the last elections?

YES ☐

NO ☐

41. If you didn't vote, what were your reasons? *(please tick all that apply)*

a. I feel politicians don't represent me ☐

b. I am unable to get to the polling station ☐

c. I don't know who I would vote for ☐

d. I am not interested in politics ☐

42. Are you a member of a political party?

YES ☐

NO ☐

43. Have you ever considered standing for elections?

YES ☐

NO ☐

SECTION E: HARASSMENT

44. Have you ever felt victimised because of your ethnicity, religion or country of origin?

YES ☐

NO ☐

45. If YES, what form did the harassment take?

a. Verbal abuse (ie. Name calling, comments) ☐

b. Damage to my property ☐

c. Physical violence ☐

d. Offensive communication (ie. Graffiti) ☐

e. Other (please specify):

46. Did you go to the police to report the harassment?

YES ☐

NO ☐

47. If NO, why did you not go to the police?

- a. I was scared to go to the police? ☐
- b. I did not think the police would help me ☐

48. If you didn't go to the police, did you go somewhere else to report the harassment?

- a. YES, to a third party reporting centre ☐
- b. YES, to my local community centre ☐
- c. NO ☐

49. If you did report the harassment to the police, was your experience:

- a. Very good ☐
- b. Good ☐
- c. Satisfactory ☐
- d. Not good ☐
- e. Very bad ☐

SECTION F: LANGUAGE

50. Would you consider your level of English language to be

- a. Excellent ☐
- b. Very good ☐
- c. Good ☐
- d. Satisfactory ☐
- e. Poor ☐
- f. Very poor ☐

51. Do you attend English language classes?

- YES ☐
NO ☐

52. If NO, why do you not attend classes? *(please tick all that apply)*

- a. I don't feel I need language classes as my English is good enough ☐
- b. There are none available near me ☐
- c. I don't have the resources to pay for classes ☐
- d. I don't have the time to attend classes ☐
- e. The class times are inconvenient as they clash with my job/family commitments ☐

SECTION G: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

53. Are you actively involved in any of the following *(please tick all that apply)*

- a. Local Church/Mosque/Temple/Place of worship ☐
- b. Community centre ☐
- c. Women's groups/clubs ☐
- d. English language schools ☐
- e. Parents groups ☐
- f. Other (please provide details) ☐

54. Do you feel that any of the above cater sufficiently for the needs of ethnic minority/migrant women?

- YES ☐
NO ☐

SECTION H: HEALTH

55. How would you rate your access to your local doctor or hospital

- a. Very good ☐
- b. Good ☐
- c. Satisfactory ☐
- d. Poor ☐
- e. Very Poor ☐

56. How would you rate your experience when visiting your local doctor or hospital

- a. Very good ☐
- b. Good ☐
- c. Satisfactory ☐
- d. Poor ☐
- e. Very Poor ☐

57. If you've answered Poor or Very Poor to the question above, was it because (*please tick all that apply*):

- a. I didn't get the medical treatment I felt I needed ☐
- b. I needed interpretation but there was none available ☐
- c. There was no cultural accommodation of my needs ☐

(Please provide an example):

- d. I feel I was discriminated against ☐

(Please provide an example):

- e. Other (please provide details): ☐

58. Have you given birth to children in Northern Ireland?

- YES ☐
- NO ☐

59. How would you rate your childbirth experience?

- a. Very good ☐
- b. Good ☐
- c. Satisfactory ☐
- d. Poor ☐
- e. Very Poor ☐

60. If you've answered Poor or Very Poor to the question above, was it because (*please tick all that apply*):

- a. I didn't get the medical treatment I felt I needed ☐
- b. I needed interpretation but there was none available ☐
- c. There was no cultural accommodation of my needs ☐

(Please provide an example):

- d. I feel I was discriminated against ☐

(Please provide an example):

- e. Other (please provide details): ☐

SECTION I: RURAL & TRANSPORT

61. Where do you live

- a. In a city/town ☐
- b. In the countryside ☐

62. If you live in the countryside, how would you describe your local transport services?

- a. Good, I travel easily to different places ☐
- b. Poor, I struggle to travel around ☐

SECTION J: ACCESS TO BENEFITS AND IMPACT OF RECESSION

63. Do you currently receive any welfare benefits?

- YES ☐
- NO ☐

64. If YES, which benefits do you receive? *(please tick all that apply)*

- a. Child benefits ☐
- b. Tax credits ☐
- c. Housing benefits ☐
- d. Jobseekers allowance ☐
- e. Disability allowance ☐
- f. Income support ☐
- g. Incapacity benefits ☐

h. Other (please specify): _____

65. Are you worried about the impact of the economic downturn on yourself and your family?

- YES ☐
- NO ☐

66. If YES, what are your main concerns? *(please tick all that apply)*

- a. I worry I will lose my job ☐
- b. I worry I will lose my entitlement to benefits ☐
- c. I will struggle to make ends meet ☐

d. Other (please specify): _____

SECTION K: YOUR ISSUES AND CONCERNS

67. What are the main issues or problems you are facing?

- 1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE!

IF YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION OR HARASSMENT OR IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING THE ISSUES MENTIONED IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE, YOU CAN CONTACT THE BELFAST MIGRANT CENTRE, WHICH OFFERS GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT
Belfast Migrant Centre 2nd Floor Ascot House 24-31 Shaftesbury Square Belfast BT2 7DB
– Tel: 028 90438962



Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)
Ascot House 1st Floor
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