

# MAKING THE LINKS: POVERTY, ETHNICITY AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

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**This report** examines the ways in which people use social networks to help cope with or escape from poverty, and how this varies within and between ethnic groups. It shows how networks can also function to restrict ambition and hinder attempts to move on in life.

Drawing on interviews and case studies with people from a range of ethnicities and income brackets, the study explores how people's propensity to use networks to move out of poverty is affected by different levels of awareness, access and ability.

The report:

- explores the ways in which ethnicity, gender and class play important roles in shaping people's networks;
- illustrates how it can be hard for people in, or at the margins of, poverty to establish 'bridging' links with others who can create opportunities and advantage;
- emphasises the role of voluntary, community and faith organisations in supporting people to make connections that help them address poverty;
- suggests ways in which agencies can support people to use and extend their networks to help them move out of poverty.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores the relationship between poverty, ethnicity and social networks, and the extent to which networks can mitigate against, or help people to move on from, poverty.

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The research reported here examined how social networks help or hinder people to move out of poverty and whether this varies within and between different ethnic groups living in England. Social networks are defined as the links and relationships connecting people with one another and with organisations. They are used for communication, cooperation and coordination and may involve face-to-face interaction or use social technologies. The study sought to identify whether, and how, networks affect trajectories into, through and out of poverty. The research examined three dimensions:

- **Awareness:** how conscious were people of their social networks and how they could actively use them?
- **Access:** how easily were people able to participate in personal, community and organisational networks? What opportunities were available and what barriers were encountered?
- **Utility:** how did people use connections to cope with, reduce or escape from poverty? Are some network connections more effective than others?

The research considered diversity within populations, rather than seeing ethnicity as about differences between migrant communities and the majority population. It took a layered approach, moving out from the individual through family relationships, friendship circles, informal community networks, links generated by voluntary organisations and agencies, and the use of digital technologies to establish and maintain connections that could be local or global.

## Research methods

Fieldwork took place in three areas in England: Birmingham, Liverpool and Cumbria. Some 91 individuals of working age and with different levels of income were interviewed: 39 men and 52 women from a range of ethnic

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backgrounds, including 14 per cent white British. Most interviewees were settled migrants rather than new arrivals, with 30 different countries of origin represented. Just over a third of those interviewed were born in the UK and there were booster samples from the Chinese and Polish communities. The sample included interviewees living in and at the margins of poverty and others with significantly higher income levels. Representatives of 28 public, private and voluntary sector agencies were interviewed to gain an appreciation of the use of networks in service provision and of their understanding of the networks of those who use their services.

Eleven focus groups were also convened across the three areas to scope the investigation, explore the use of social media and 'test' interim findings and recommendations. Eight researchers were recruited from different communities to facilitate access and enable ten interviews to take place in people's first language.

## Network awareness

The majority of individuals interviewed did not naturally analyse their networks or their strategies for networking. The family was seen as providing the core relationships from which people built their wider social networks, but family expectations could also limit opportunities for networking. Some younger respondents were constrained by pressures to contribute to the family business or stay close to home.

Network awareness, self-confidence and a belief in having something to offer were fundamental in terms of people's capacity to network.

Those who had reflected on their social networks saw the importance of broad, particularly cross-cultural, connections. However, trying to develop untested contacts in order to 'move on' beyond immediate familial/community-based networks was seen as risky. Family and friends constituted a safety net of trusted financial and practical support. For many, this provided a springboard to develop 'weak ties' that could help them move on, but for some these close relationships placed restrictions on their ability to develop useful links. Trust and reciprocity were recognised as fundamental and the conscious manipulation of social networks for personal or family advantage could jeopardise these very characteristics and increase the 'cost' of using those networks.

## Network access

The social networks of all participants experiencing poverty were shaped by social class, age and gender role expectations. The level of education and the nature of employment were seen as key factors in determining the characteristics, and use, of networks. Those in low-paid jobs with long working hours had particularly limited networks beyond the immediate workplace. Members of more 'visible' minority ethnic groups were additionally affected by racism. Prejudice and discrimination were barriers to accessing and participating in influential networks.

Agencies, particularly voluntary, community and faith organisations, were seen as playing three important networking roles: as *places* where people felt comfortable and affirmed within their own culture; as *spaces* where diverse groups could come together to build connections; and as having the *faces* (people) with the skills and knowledge to bring others together, to support network development. Volunteering was seen as a route into work, through

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network-related resources such as increased skills and confidence, wider contacts and references.

Networking required resources in terms of time and money. In dispersed minority ethnic communities in rural Cumbria, travel distances and inadequate broadband infrastructure were additional barriers.

For migrant and refugee communities, learning English was a basic requirement to opening up networks, accessing employment or staying in work. Poor levels of English hampered access to, and participation in, networks. Formal learning (e.g. an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course) was an important platform for developing connections as well as gaining qualifications.

Using social technologies to maintain personal networks was felt to be less expensive than face-to-face communication but was characterised by a higher proportion of irrelevant information. Some felt that they might be 'held back' by being dependent on face-to-face connections. Further, social technologies offered new opportunities for strengthening existing and lapsed ties. A minority saw social media as a way of 'marketing' themselves strategically.

There were also negative aspects to social networks. Informal recruitment procedures in certain industries (e.g. the hospitality and restaurant trades) confined some people to in-work poverty. Peer pressure could prevent people from moving on (as exemplified by gangs). Networks are often fragile and easily disrupted by divorce or loss of long-term employment.

Cultural assumptions, for example that 'some communities look after their own', were felt to be misleading and did not reflect contemporary life for many minority ethnic people living in this country.

## **The use, usefulness and limitations of networks**

Social networks are important in surviving poverty. Interviewees described instances of sharing food, exchanging fuel cards or finding out about low-cost clothing and food outlets or free exchange services. Most ethnically specific networks were about survival and socialising: 'getting by' rather than 'getting on'. Where social networks did help people to escape poverty, it was usually through connections into influential, predominantly white, mainstream society. However, even those minority ethnic interviewees who were 'successful' had identified limits to how far social networks could take them, for instance in promotion at work.

Multicultural, 'open' services that facilitate contact and integration provide opportunities to establish bridging and linking connections or 'weak ties'. However, different ethnic communities also organise collectively to deliver their own support and advice services, sometimes because they do not feel well served or welcomed by mainstream agencies. Poor-quality services forced some to rely on family and social connections for advice – though the information given was not always reliable. Social networks were used by people in or at the margins of poverty to understand and negotiate complex systems such as the health service, the benefits system and the education system.

Traditional cultures and values provided a significant basis for networking, although less so for some ethnicities and for younger generations. Nevertheless, social technologies were widely used to maintain transnational ties that helped people to stay in touch with their family cultures as well as enabling global trade links to flourish.

Differences were apparent in the use of social networks to gain access to finance. White British interviewees used loans within the family or accessed

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mainstream institutions or high-interest 'pay-day loan' companies, whereas several from minority ethnic communities relied on informal or semi-formal saving and lending schemes, often based around the village or district of birth in their country of origin.

Representatives from statutory agencies and private sector providers of public services were sceptical about the capacity of social networks to lift people out of poverty. A common view was that moving on from poverty was particularly difficult where low-wage labour markets were dominant. However, there was recognition of the importance of social networks in terms of access to employment, and examples of good practice that could develop people's awareness of and ability to use their networks were identified.

## Recommendations

Recommendations from the research therefore prioritise ideas that will help people to make the best use of their existing connections, while identifying possibilities for extending their networks with links that will help them move out of poverty.

**Mentoring** could be powerful in promoting the positive use of networks for gaining work, setting up in business and progressing to better jobs. There would be value in piloting peer mentoring within the workplace and for those finding a return to the labour market problematic. Schemes could be built into any future Work Programme contracts, with appropriate evaluations.

As online access increasingly becomes the default for service provision, the need to promote digital fluency becomes more urgent. For people in or at the margins of poverty this means having access to and being able to use digital media to communicate with contacts and agencies, promote themselves, make online applications, find information and negotiate complex systems. **Social media clinics or surgeries, with an emphasis on network awareness**, could be developed by local partnerships linked to adult and informal education and to Digital Champions in Jobcentre Plus.

The networks of those using services were recognised by employment agencies as an underused resource in identifying potential employment opportunities, yet there was no systematic agency practice in terms of network awareness and development. **Standardised 'toolkits'** could be developed for Jobcentre Plus, Work Programme providers and careers services, since consistency of practice will be critical to ensure equality of opportunity. Such toolkits should include materials on enabling people to identify their networks more comprehensively, strategies for extending and using those networks, and signposting to agencies that can assist individuals in developing 'bridging capital'.

Employer action is also required to address the negative aspects of networks in recruitment and promotion in the workplace. While equality legislation is designed to respond to indirect and direct discrimination, the legal framework has always faced challenges in identifying and responding to 'informal' processes or workplace 'cultures' that limit people's progression. Social networks are a strong case in point. This research suggests that (in addition to the implementation of a standard equality checklist – for example, ensuring that people reviewing applications are not aware of candidates' ethnic backgrounds) **organisations should routinely review the extent to which informal workplace networks discriminate** in terms of access to employment and progression in the workplace.

**Access to ESOL classes** is critical in terms of migrant and refugee community access to employment. ESOL provides an important space for

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the development of cross-cultural social networks that can lead to useful inter-ethnic friendships and increased confidence in language and literacy skills.

**Volunteering** offers a basis for developing links beyond family and community, thereby opening up potential routes into employment. The quality of the volunteering experience and access to support, supervision and training is critical in terms of personal and professional development. Recognition of diverse motivations for taking up unpaid work in the community is necessary. The National Citizen Service programme could be extended to adults returning to the labour market, and good practice in multicultural volunteering should be promoted. Mainstream organisations need to develop a greater awareness of the barriers to volunteering for black and minority ethnic communities, and to promote diversity in their workforce.

**Voluntary, community and faith organisations** were seen as key locations for advice and services mitigating against poverty, and for informed signposting and networking, across and within ethnic groups. Such resources need to be nurtured and developed in the contracting culture and their significance in mitigating against poverty and promoting social mobility recognised. The principles of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 should be incorporated into all public service commissioning and procurement procedures, so that contractors are required to demonstrate the added social value of their proposals created through connections with organisations that can promote access to community networks.

## Concluding remarks

Social networks can be powerful in helping people stay out of poverty and deal with its effects. Building inter-ethnic bridging links that help people move on from poverty is more problematic, as the networks identified through the research tended to be 'like with like'. Gender and class played important roles in shaping people's social networks. This could be an advantage, but it also played a part in restricting relationships and opportunities for progression. For black and minority ethnic people, there continues to be the added dimension of racial prejudice and discrimination.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings and implications of research commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) to investigate how people are able to use social networks to move out of poverty and to explore whether this varies between different ethnic groups living in England.

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There has been recent interest in the role of different forms of social capital in helping people to 'get by' or, on the other hand, to 'get on'. Social capital is generally seen as a resource in people's lives, having positive correlations with health, wealth, achievement and general well-being (Putnam, 2000; Halpern, 2005, 2010). The concept has been refined to identify different forms of social capital, or networks (Woolcock, 2001).

- **Bonding capital** refers to very close connections between people with common backgrounds (e.g. family or friends). It tends to be associated with strong relationships that help people to 'get by'.
- **Bridging capital** refers to weaker ties that span social and other boundaries and is associated with 'getting on'. Connections might arise through inter-ethnic marriages, through the workplace or in mixed neighbourhoods where people of different economic status live in proximity, sharing the same services and amenities.
- **Linking capital** is created through interactions between people in different roles or positions of power and influence, for example between agencies providing a service and the people who use that service for support and advice. The project was therefore interested in how ethnic background affects people's access to the help and resources offered by agencies, as well as through their informal networks.

People's relationships and connections provide them with a variety of sources of advice, support, information and encouragement, as well as creating systems for the exchange of money and goods. Evidence from ethnography and sociology indicates that this is common to all societies. But are there subtle variations that reflect individual and cultural differences in the degree to which community and family obligations are balanced against personal interests? Previous research has suggested a mixed picture (Afridi, 2011; Gilchrist and Kyprianou, 2011).



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It is well documented that black and minority ethnic people are disproportionately worse off in terms of household income and experience significant inequalities regarding health, education and housing (EHRC, 2010). However, a closer inspection of the data reveals that deprivation is not evenly distributed across all minority ethnic groups, with some doing much better than others. Various explanations have been put forward, including racial stereotyping and racist discrimination, resulting in segregation in housing and employment, alongside current global patterns of migration and settlement. Favouritism and nepotism are also seen to operate in employers' recruitment and promotion practices (Hudson *et al.*, 2013) and in preferential treatment given to friends, family and business acquaintances. The role of social networks in addressing poverty across and within different ethnic communities has been under-researched, and this project was designed to provide evidence to address this gap.

## Definitions and conceptual frameworks

### Social networks

Social networks are defined as the links and relationships connecting people with one another and with organisations. These are used to communicate, interact, share and exchange, and to exert power and influence. Networks can be formal or informal, operating between specific individuals or as part of a wider 'pool' of community members defined through social identity, shared fate or regular interaction. Networks are typically activated face to face, but they can also be instigated remotely through digital media.

The research aimed to investigate personal relationships amongst family, friends, neighbours and colleagues and within communities, and to discover whether these helped people to manage on low incomes and move on in their lives. In addition, we sought to examine how networks operate through organisations, encouraging cooperation and reaching out to provide support to sections of society that might have difficulties accessing reliable information.

There are less positive sides to social networks (Kenway and Palmer, 2007; Butler and Hamnett, 2012), in that they can exclude or entrap people and otherwise hinder them from fulfilling their potential. Network contacts can block or distort advantageous connections, for example through prejudice, racist discrimination or cultural biases.

Previous evidence indicates that, although different ethnic groups share common values and priorities, ethnicity continues to have a disproportionate impact on poverty levels and affects how people interact socially and economically (Afridi, 2011; Gilchrist and Kyprianou, 2011; CLG, 2012).

The conceptual framework adopted to explore both community and agency networks originally considered three facets of networks:

- **Access:** How easily are people able to participate in personal, community and organisational networks? What opportunities are available and what barriers are encountered (Gilchrist, 2009; Marcus *et al.*, 2011)?
- **Utility:** How do people use connections to cope with, reduce or escape from poverty? To what extent are people strategic in fostering useful links and developing networks for mutual support (McPherson *et al.*, 2011) and to overcome disadvantage?
- **Efficacy:** Are some kinds of networks more effective than others (Blau, 2012) in alleviating poverty and opening up possibilities in terms of income, aspirations, qualifications, enterprise and financial assets?

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It became apparent that the majority of interviewees did not think of their social networks in instrumental or strategic ways; they referred mainly to family, friends, neighbours and colleagues. Two additional elements were therefore added as prerequisites of effective networking:

- **Network awareness** – in order to make use of the various networks that exist within communities and those used by agencies and businesses, people need to have some idea of how they function, how to make contact and what to expect from becoming involved.
- **Network capability** – similarly, in order to establish, maintain and use network connections, people deploy certain skills and understandings, for example around how to engage with and ensure a level of reciprocity in the ‘pool of relationships’.

## Ethnicity

The research adopted a complex and dynamic concept of ‘ethnicity’ (Craig *et al.*, 2012) to incorporate aspects of social and personally defined identity. This identity relates primarily to pride and belonging as articulated through customs, orientation towards the ‘homeland’, language and community networks (Keeley, 2007). Ethnicity may be regarded as a negotiated dimension of identity and ‘world view’ reflecting emotional attachments and moral expectations, for example relating to kinship ties or wider social commitments.

Ethnicity has been described as a creative strategy for generating solidarity (Modood and Salt, 2011) amongst people sharing similar experiences and sometimes racialised physical characteristics (skin colour, facial features, etc.). This relates to the level and type of racism and xenophobia that minority ethnic communities experience. Ethnicity is about setting boundaries (Law, 2010) and fostering differentiated communities based on a mutual belonging within society. People may draw on cultural traditions to do this, for example through celebrations linked to religious festivals and family occasions such as weddings and funerals.

The significance and pattern of these relationships shift over time and with changing circumstances. Changes may be brought about through ‘modernisation’ as well as migration, as successive generations settle in a new country, and communities may become increasingly stratified in terms of economic and educational achievements. Although historical factors such as the rationale, legal status and recency of the migration journey are not an aspect of ethnicity *per se*, they inevitably affect the experience of arrival and integration (Vertovec, 2007).

The research emphasises ethnicity as the individual and collective choices that people make and reflects the notion of *diversity* within populations, rather than seeing ethnicity as about *differences* between migrant, often marginalised communities and the majority white population. Interviews therefore explored how various facets of people’s lives and their ethnic identities shape the connections, interactions, exchanges and influences that constitute their social networks.

## Poverty

While there are definitions of poverty that take account of income relative to household size (DWP, 2012), the model used here was of those households living on 60 per cent or less of the median gross annual income in the UK of £26,500 (ONS, 2012a).

However, adopting a monetary definition of poverty proved problematic. Demographic profiles indicated that interviewees were living in or at the margins of poverty, but this was not how they described themselves.

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Migrants from minority communities often reported that they were 'relatively well off' in comparison with the situation in their country of origin, expressing pride in being self-sufficient and adept in budgeting on limited resources. Those with strong (particularly faith-based) networks felt that they 'were not well off but getting by' because of the quality of life provided through these relationships and other factors such as housing and health.

Two further factors played a part. Remittances sent to family living abroad were significant in the lives of some black and minority ethnic interviewees. These could be substantial amounts relative to income, and therefore reduced their level of financial security while relieving the poverty of relatives in the country of origin. Interviewees were also aware of media and political discourse on poverty and the culture of blaming the poor for their condition (Jones, 2012). Poverty was not readily admitted to by interviewees, even when household income was substantially below the national median income.

## Methodology

### Research design

The purpose of the research was to explore the experiences of people from a range of ethnicities in understanding how settlement patterns, cultural values and current circumstances shape their networks, and to identify factors and activities that affected trajectories into, through and out of poverty. The research therefore attempted to identify those who had made use of social networks to move away from life on a low income, as well as the stories and strategies of people living in or on the edge of poverty.

In considering different types of networks, the research took a layered approach, moving out from the individual through family relationships, friendship circles, informal community networks, links generated by voluntary organisations and agencies, and the use of digital technologies to establish and maintain connections across the world.

In order to understand different community perspectives, the research team worked with relevant community partners in the chosen areas to organise scoping workshops. These workshops generated themes and issues for further exploration through visits, field observations and semi-structured interviews with individuals and agency representatives. Community researchers were recruited and trained to ensure that a sample of interviews (ten) could take place in the participants' mother tongue.

The research also explored respondents' uses of social technologies to maintain networks, access information and find work, business support or enterprise opportunities. In addition to specific questions in the interview schedule, focus groups on this theme were arranged in each area.

We shared preliminary findings and conclusions with three different audiences in order to gauge the validity of our evidence, draw out implications and identify potential recommendations for policy and practice. Feedback workshops were held in each area. A reference group that comprised academics, practitioners and policy-makers commented on our initial findings. Finally, a deliberative seminar was held in Westminster, with invitations targeted at policy-makers in the field from central and local government and the voluntary sector.

### Approach to sampling

The fieldwork took place in three distinct areas in England: the Birmingham suburbs, inner-city Liverpool, and Cumbria. These areas (see Appendix B)

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were chosen partly because they embodied different migration histories for a wide range of ethnic populations.

Birmingham is characterised as a super-diverse city, with relatively segregated communities and numerous small-business owners, some living in pockets of affluence.

Liverpool has been the gateway for several waves of migration and is home to long-settled communities and recent incomers. The inner-city neighbourhoods have high levels of deprivation but stable populations.

Cumbria is England's least diverse county but has a rapidly growing proportion of residents from black and minority ethnic communities. Unemployment is generally low, but there are wide disparities between the well off and people working in low-paid jobs or receiving benefits.

A total of 91 individuals, across post-18 working ages, were interviewed: 39 men and 52 women. The largest percentage (35 per cent;  $n=32$ ) of the sample were born in the UK, and there was a booster subsample from the Chinese and Polish communities. The remainder were drawn from 30 different countries of origin, but with a particular focus on settled migrants rather than new arrivals. See Appendix A for demographic details of the interview sample and Appendix C for profiles of some of the key communities in the study areas.

Although the sample was small, our goal was to capture a sufficient breadth of experience and cultural diversity to be able to draw meaningful conclusions. The project was primarily interested in how networks help people to move out of poverty, so the research sample was constructed to include interviewees known to be living in poverty or at the margins of poverty and others with significantly higher income levels. Participants with different sources of income (employed, self-employed or receiving benefits) were included and their assets, debts and liabilities were noted. Some 40 per cent of those interviewed ( $n=37$ ) had a household income below £15,900 and could therefore be deemed to be in poverty. A further 19 per cent ( $n=18$ ) were in the margins of poverty, with household incomes between £15,900 and the median annual income, and the remaining 42 per cent ( $n=36$ ) had higher levels of income. Since 70 per cent of the sample ( $n=64$ ) were either in employment or self-employed, in-work poverty (Aldridge *et al.*, 2012) was a key characteristic of the sample.

In addition, representatives of 28 public, private and voluntary sector agencies were interviewed to gain an insight into both their use of networks in service provision and their understanding of the networks of those who use their services.

## Report structure

The remaining chapters set out the main insights before drawing out key implications for policy and practice. Given the limited scope of this project, there is no claim to statistical significance. Rather, the findings suggest themes and trends from which implications for policy and practice can be suggested.

Drawing on the conceptual framework described above, Chapter 2 looks at individual and agency awareness of networks and the capabilities needed to use them. Chapter 3 explores how networks are developed and accessed, and the factors that facilitate or hinder networking. Chapter 4 examines how networks are used, and how useful they are in addressing issues of poverty and ethnicity. The concluding chapter draws together the findings, identifying key themes and their implications for policy and practice.

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## 2 AWARENESS OF NETWORKS AND THE CAPACITY TO USE THEM

“It’s not so much having networks. It’s recognising them sometimes. I think people are not really aware of their networks consciously and don’t recognise how powerful they can be.”

Faith group interviewee

This chapter explores people’s awareness of their social networks and how they use their skills, knowledge and resources for networking.

### Personal attributes

The majority of those interviewed did not talk about the nature or usefulness of their social networks. Rather, they spoke of family, friends, neighbours and colleagues. Some who were more conscious of or strategic about their networks referred to three different types of connections: family, friends and contacts:

“I would use three very important networks. The very important one is my family ... because they are the ones that matter more ... I value friends a lot, so any networking there is a very good thing, because they always have some good interest for you. The third one, work colleagues are very important, because it’s always something beneficial to my work environment. So all three of them, I would say, are very important. But I get three different things from them.”

Somali man

Respondents used their memory of people in and around their networks:

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“I know that when I need something generally there’s somebody that I know that might be able to get it or knows somebody that can get whatever it may be ... I tend to just give them a call, be cheeky. If you don’t ask, you don’t get, do you?”

British Pakistani man

Individuals and agency representatives interviewed saw personal confidence and extrovert tendencies as essential in the networking process, influencing the ways in which people presented themselves:

“We were always encouraged when speaking to people within our networks to be very positive, very upbeat, very matter of fact about our situation, to not give off, I don’t know, an air of desperation to listeners. People are more likely to help the person that’s, ‘Yeah, I’m quite interested in doing that, I might do that at some point,’ other than, ‘I’m desperate to do something, give us a job, please,’ that sort of thing.”

African-Caribbean man

Networking was seen as requiring more than the social skills needed to make connections. Individuals and agency representatives stressed the “importance of someone being confident, having the self-belief that they have something to offer others: some skills or knowledge that others will need” (Community group interview).

For older respondents, ‘having something to offer’ was closely related to the status afforded by work:

“It’s weird how much your identity can be tied in to what you do, to the point where people will introduce themselves and be like, ‘I’m such and such and I do this,’ as if that’s all there is to them as a person. But if all of a sudden you haven’t got that employment thing it’s like, oh, hang on a minute ... What’s interesting is how their perception of you can change.”

British African-Caribbean man

For those from minority ethnic groups, particularly those with strong religious affiliations, confidence and a sense of personal belief as a basis for networking were located in a wider sense of cultural identity: the understanding of community histories, traditions and language:

“Without mother tongue, your heritage disappears. As a western society the model that we keep pushing is integration ... but you can only integrate when you are strong as an individual. If you are not strong in your own identity then it’s the old adage, if you do not know where you are going, any route will do.”

Faith group interviewee

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## Family and friends

The starting point of people's networks, irrespective of ethnicity, class or age, was their immediate or extended family. Family provided a foundation for a sense of personal and cultural identity. It acted as a receptacle for shared experience, knowledge and information, and played two important roles. First, it offered emotional, instrumental and financial support, and encouragement in times of difficulty (see Case Study 1).

### Case Study 1: Family support

"Of course, I was only 18 [when I became pregnant] so that's very young and lots of people thought I would just give up ... I was encouraged by my family and I couldn't have done it without them.

"I wouldn't have been able to afford to go to university because I wouldn't have been able to pay for everything that I would have had to pay for ... along with having a baby. I think my mum and dad really would have been, 'Oh well, you're pregnant now, you probably won't finish your exams.' They probably would have been a bit like that. But then when I started going through and saying, well I still want to go to university, they supported me and encouraged me 100 per cent ...

"So I was just about OK, but ... only because my mum didn't expect me to pay for childcare, full time. Without them, I wouldn't have been able to become a teacher."

White British woman

Second, there was practical support, which enabled family members to enter the labour market:

"Immediate family is obviously one of the greatest supports, and one of the things that my mother does is look after my little boy for me ... If we didn't have that, then it would be very, very difficult, because ... I speak to friends and colleagues and they're spending, sort of, £600, £700 a month on childcare."

Pakistani man

The practice of 'pooling' money was common amongst minority ethnic interviewees (and particularly those from the same kinship group, village or district of origin). This was done to support a family member without work, if someone needed access to capital (whether for housing or to start up a business) or to provide care for older or disabled relatives. Kinship obligations could act as a drain on the household income and could disrupt career aspirations; for example, helping in the family business at times of crisis resulted in some of those interviewed postponing, or dropping out of, higher education.

Remittances and the duty to support family members in the country of origin added a global dimension. Respondents at the margins of poverty in the UK played an important role in relieving family poverty in their country of origin. This was often at a significant cost to themselves, whether in the form of regular money transfers or savings from low wages being put away for (often expensive) return visits and the bringing of substantial gifts for relatives in countries of origin.



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Interviewees from different cultural backgrounds consistently referred to their families, both in the UK and overseas, as “the place where I feel safe”, “where I feel needed”, “where I belong”. The family was more than a safety net. It was referred to in phrases such as “where I got the confidence to go out in the world”, “they gave me ambition and believed I could make something of myself” and “they sacrificed things so that I could get an education, get ahead and do the things they could not”.

Conversely, families (whatever a person’s social networks) could hold members back. In rural Cumbria, younger interviewees and agency respondents mentioned parental expectations that children would stay in the family business, often in low-paid employment, for example in the hospitality sector or hill farming. One young Chinese woman interviewee felt that pressure to interpret for family members who did not speak English had disrupted her college studies. As the expectation placed on her by the family was that she would ‘help out’, saying no and protecting study time was difficult. For another, these expectations to help out in the family business meant that:

“You don’t get a proper wage because it’s counted as you are just helping out. So you get your meal, for example, and then you get a bit of money for your transport, that sort of thing, but it’s not a proper wage.”

Chinese man

Similarly, a British Indian man interviewed in Liverpool commented:

“My dad fell ill and basically it was my mum and my two sisters running the shop, and I was going through my A levels and I decided ... I’ll put them on the back burner for a year and I’ll come into the business and help out and then I’ll go back to do my A levels ... I did resent it ... I’d see my friends who’d gone off to university or college or whatever ...”.

For women – particularly, though not exclusively, from South East Asian or Chinese backgrounds – family constraints could be different. The expectation that their primary responsibility would be childcare or looking after elderly relatives limited their networks outside the family, as could the attitudes of a partner:

“My husband feels that I am a ‘housewife’ and I should stay at home, do housework, and I want to go out, to learn English, to learn more ... I like to go out with friends and I have to come back in time and cook for him. If I didn’t cook for him, he would be unhappy with me.”

Chinese woman

## Network disruption

Social relationships and networks change over time. Some are fragile and susceptible to disruption. On occasion, that disruption can be positive. Personal networks can be reconfigured deliberately in order to move away



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from harmful or limiting influences. Several younger interviewees cited leaving friendship networks that were seen as holding them back:

“I was working in a chicken factory and I told my friends that I am not going to spend my life in here, but it was just for a second, just for a while until I would learn English and then I’m going to escape ... They started to treat me like, ‘Who do you think you are? Why do you think you are any better than we are and why you don’t want to stay in the factory with us?’ and I just say, ‘Oh right, you are not friends for me, you’re just pulling me down, actually,’ so I tried to quit from that friendship as soon as I could.”

Polish man

For others, the breakdown of relationships could be devastating, personally and because of the loss of honour. One Pakistani woman reported that divorce had not only cut her off from her immediate and extended family, but also resulted in her being ostracised by the wider community and left unsupported. Another woman described her experience of an abusive relationship, going to prison and the consequent loss of her social networks, compounded by moving to a new area (see Case Study 2).

### **Case Study 2: Network disruption**

Mary is in her mid-30s. She described herself as having had a wide circle of friends and acquaintances prior to an abusive relationship, a short custodial sentence and the birth of her first child. Following her release from prison, she reflected:

“I came back home and I had a little wall up, no one could get in, and there was just me and the baby. But even when I was pushing [my daughter] when she was a baby, I’ve been spat at because I had a black kid ... When [I left] that abusive relationship I moved. But I was scared to go out the area because I didn’t want to see him. Because I’d be walking down the street and a car would go past and abuse shouted and things getting thrown out the car at me ... So for safety and because I’m, if I’ve got kids, where I go, my kids go, when they were growing up, I didn’t venture out the area. I went where I needed to go, the shops, back, so I was safe and my kids were not open to that abuse and whatever else. So I’d do a weekly shop, then I’d be stuck in for the rest of the week with no one to talk to. So I was depressed and even tried to kill myself ...”

White British woman

## **Ethnicities and cultural attitudes to networks**

Issues of confidence and identity were closely related to attitudes to networks. This contributed to certain stereotypes about networks within different cultural groups. For instance, “I can see that, for example, the Chinese community or Pakistani, they are like a close one. I can’t say the same thing about the Polish community in Liverpool. They are not close” (Polish woman) and “I think it’s English culture. In Mongolia, they share everything. Here, you don’t even know your neighbours” (Mongolian woman).

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The realities, however, were more complex. The view that ‘some communities look after their own’, with close and supportive networks, contrasted with the social isolation experienced by some (particularly women) within those communities. Both within and between communities, different patterns emerged reflecting a continuum from individualised to collective attitudes to networks. This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Interviewees spoke of the importance of self-reliance, of developing broad social networks that could be useful in terms of “getting ahead; but you can’t rely on them. the person you rely on is yourself” (Business association interview). One Polish woman stated: “If I have a problem, I tend to first sort it out by myself, and I try not to rely on other people, I try to be independent.”

Others placed greater emphasis on deep networks (bonding capital), often as a means of survival in a world that “is hostile to us” (British Pakistani interviewee).

The range of individualised and collective attitudes might be explained by migration histories. Economic migrants appeared to fall into the category of using wider networks to ‘get ahead’. Those interviewees who had experienced forced migration tended towards collective, ‘within-community’ attitudes to networks. Further research would be needed to confirm this.

### **Summary remarks: network awareness and capacity**

What emerged from the community interviews was a complex picture of networks related to class and gender, as well as ethnicity. Social relationships were based on family and friendship rather than being thought about in terms of their strategic usefulness. Network awareness, therefore, has implications for people’s capacity to both access and use networks.

Some people were clearly more adept and strategic than others when it came to maintaining and making use of contacts and connections. Commitment to friends and family was widely shared, but there were noticeable differences in the extent to which people actively fostered and sought out useful connections. These did not seem to relate convincingly to particular cultures; they may, rather, reflect variations in tendencies to be self-reliant and in whether people professed to be ambitious for themselves or were more oriented towards community. Quantitative data would be needed to map this continuum from individualistic to collectivist culture onto countries of origin. In the following chapters, we explore the propensity of people of all backgrounds to use networks, which varied according to their circumstances.

However, even when people are aware of the existence and potential of social networks, they may lack the necessary contacts, time and resources to make good use of them. These obstacles, along with the barriers thrown up by unfamiliar conventions or xenophobic and racist attitudes, appear to create particular difficulties for some ethnic minorities living in this country.

Restricted choices and cultural expectations have implications in terms of people accessing wider networks and using the advice, information and support to be found beyond immediate family and community boundaries.

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# 3 ACCESS TO NETWORKS

“The English people have job centres, they don’t do it between themselves.”

Chinese man

This chapter presents evidence on how people access different kinds of networks, identifying opportunities and barriers. We consider how different types of connection and the strength of ties influence people’s opportunities to participate in and benefit from networks, especially those that cross social and economic boundaries (Granovetter, 1973; Woolcock, 2001).

Access to useful networks is not evenly distributed across society. It depends on factors in people’s lives that may in turn be affected by their economic status and livelihood. These include the availability of time, resources and the opportunities that can be afforded by employment status (these factors tend to be particularly problematic for those in low-paid work). The availability or otherwise of these resources and opportunities broadens or, conversely, curtails the range of possibilities, as well as influencing expectations of reciprocity entailing a balance between gift and gain. Networks often require an invitation to join, such as being asked to come along to specific events or being introduced to key individuals.

## Resources for networking

Networking is neither cost-free nor straightforward. Developing and maintaining social connections takes time and money. Those in the hospitality or restaurant trades cited long working hours as a key factor limiting their capacity to develop relationships beyond the immediate workplace. Restaurant owners in Chinese and Bengali communities felt that the times when business associations met (breakfast or early-evening sessions) excluded them.

The social nature of many networks can involve spending money, for travel to networking events, for example, or participating in sporting or cultural activities, or, “put cynically, it’s about throwing the drinks reception and the expensive evening meal” (Higher Education interviewee).

In rural networks, distance and access to affordable transport were mentioned. Travelling to network events took more time than in the urban research areas. As a result, those without their own transport tended to have highly localised, village- or town-based networks rather than relationships across the county.

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## Places and spaces to network

While individual characteristics, cultures and attitudes play a role in networks, there are also broader social factors. Other forms of capital come into play: knowledge, economic and environmental (Field, 2003) in a complex relationship with social and cultural capital.

Level of education was a key factor affecting access to some networks because of the nature of participation and membership characteristics.

Community organisations and faith groups were seen by interviewees as playing three important networking roles. They provided contact with people with shared interests and identities in ways that were experienced as safe, neutral and ethnically 'comfortable'. Interviewees referred to significant **places** where people could come together with their own ethnic group to share information, sustain cultural identity or reduce the pressure of living in a foreign land:

“That shop was kind of centre of information for all Poles around, because as we came to England at the very beginning the social networks such as Facebook and Twitter wasn't very strong as they are now, so most of Polish people hasn't had connections to internet those days. So my shop was like a central place for sharing information, job offers, mini-market for buying and selling things, sharing information where you can find jobs, and we even helped people with filling the forms and claiming for jobs or making simply phone calls for them as an addition to our shop ... It meant that a lot of people found a job because of my shop ...”

Polish man

Ethnic-specific, faith-based and multicultural organisations were mentioned frequently as creating **spaces** where diverse groups could come together to network and build connections, through English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, social events or community festivals, in ways that were culturally sensitive. This need was articulated by a Bangladeshi woman working towards a qualification in the fashion industry, who felt excluded from social relationships at work and college that were based around alcohol.

An attribute of networks is that they allow people to recognise and access **faces**: the individuals with the skills and knowledge to bring others together, support network development, offer emotional support and signpost people.

Interviewees spoke positively about places and people who shared network information and promoted access to networking opportunities. But they also recognised the exclusive nature of some networks; those that were closed, that privileged the few and that were difficult, if not impossible, to break into:

“It's about corruption ... it is about who you know and what you know, sort of thing, rather than, well, what's your skills and what's your capabilities.”

Pakistani man

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## Equalities and racism

Social networks across ethnic groups are complex. As indicated earlier, personal relationships can be shaped by wider social factors: education, social class and gender as well as ethnicity. One factor, however, markedly limits participation in 'mainstream' social networks: the experience of racial prejudice and discrimination. Racism manifests itself consistently towards black and minority ethnic groups, from long-established African-Caribbean and South East Asian communities through to refugees and other more recent arrivals.

People in the Somali community in Liverpool, for example, talked of being confined to living, socialising and working within a particular postcode area, as other neighbourhoods were seen as threatening. Others talked of the impact of racially motivated bullying (see Case Study 3).

### Case Study 3: The impact of racist bullying

"When my daughters were growing up, I owned a restaurant, so did not see them that often. They are both really successful. They work now for big London firms. But they are really isolated. They have sort of cut themselves off from the Chinese community, but on the other hand they do not have English friends. So loners, really. Over the years, I did not understand why, but looking back now I'm convinced it was because they were bullied at school. You know the kind of thing: 'Chinky-chinky China girl.' So as adults they do not want to be really identified with the Chinese community, but on the other hand they cannot trust white people."

Chinese man

Ethnic minority women referred to being ignored or rejected by neighbours and at the school gate:

"We had a bad experience when we moved in because the children – it's not from the older people but from the younger ones, you know – they discriminate us in a way. Like the small children knocking at door and then when we open they say words sounding like Chinese, 'Ching, ching,' you know, just random words, or throwing stones or throwing glasses and apples, eggs."

Filipino woman

It was observed that those from less visible minorities, such as Gypsies and Travellers, talked of "keeping our identity hidden at work" for fear of the consequences, either in terms of direct abuse or reduced opportunities for progression. Even those who were successful found that there were limits to how far social networks could take them in moving on. For a successful African-Caribbean woman:

"In terms of things that have prevented me getting ahead, it's really just been, well, really, for want of a better word, racism, you know, in that, the company in its, with all its power, were not happy to appoint black people at the top of [the company] because it's something that, you know, they wanted to at least, you know, have some white people there first. So, yes, racism."

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## Ethnicities and cultural attitudes to networks

Interviewees clearly appreciated opportunities to network and spend time with their families and people from their own ethnicity, and they accessed these through a variety of events and organisations. This was relatively easy in the large cities, where there were sufficient numbers for a critical mass to exist within the local population, allowing mono-ethnic activities to flourish. However, in rural areas or where there were few people from one ethnic group, people had to travel to celebrate their traditions or faith practices. There was a tendency to organise around other forms of shared interest, such as migrant working (for eastern Europeans) or through social activities.

Minority ethnic interviewees felt strongly that they would like to meet people from all ethnicities, and in particular the British, so that they could integrate more effectively and find occasions to practise their English. Marriage to British spouses allowed a few to develop links through family and friends, and this was seen as positive, though these connections seldom led to employment or business advantages. Instead, people tended to favour their co-ethnic networks when looking for work, recruiting staff or seeking potential customers or suppliers.

Respondents from a variety of ethnic groups described the benefits of having people around them who could support them to find a job or advance their career. Some felt that the ‘culturally specific’ nature of those networks was what helped them to be so effective. For example, a national director of an international company described the ability of her African colleagues to secure a higher level of sales than other colleagues:

“You need to be African, mate, because the African consultants in [the company] have got it down to a T. Culturally, at five or six they get sent to school ... that’s their network and it does everything, I am in complete and utter envy. They don’t have to do anything because I would know you because your brother, three times removed, went to school with somebody who is remotely connected to you, but because of that I’ve got access to you and all your friends and family. I am just amazed at how the network works, it is absolutely amazing.”

African-Caribbean woman

Nonetheless, respondents’ descriptions of networks that help them could have as much to do with the class or occupation of their peers as with their ethnicity. The following case study describes how one respondent’s peers have helped him improve his professionalism and employability.

### Case Study 4: Professional networks

“I don’t think many people in my community or, really, or in my wider family do the same thing as, as I do. But I would suggest that the majority of them are professionals in some form or the other. So again, as I’ve said before, whether that is in IT, whether that’s in medicine, in dentistry, in pharmacy, in accountancy, it’s pretty wide the kind of roles that they are in. But I’d say 80 per cent are probably professional. And, I think I would be underplaying it if I didn’t mention that just being around people that are professional has an impact on how you behave, and therefore on how you’re perceived, and

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therefore on how people trust you to deliver something. So I do think just, not networking – I was doing inverted commas with my fingers – not networking but just being with people who are professional makes you more professional, and therefore more employable, and therefore opens up opportunities which you might not have had.”

British Pakistani man

Gaining higher-level qualifications was seen across cultural groups as ‘a way out or of getting ahead’ and important in its own right.

“My parents are from an African background, which is through education, education, education, and they’ve always drilled that through to us in order to ... a way of making, a way of bettering yourself is basically through education, in that sense, because they’ve had to do it that way.”

African British man

Education was seen as a space to create access to networks and diversify them:

“I went to school here so my networks are wider than my parents’. But at school my relationships were all around where we lived and it wasn’t a wealthy area by anyone’s imagination. So it was only when I got to university, and since, that my networks have included different professionals.”

Business Association interviewee

Economic migrants and long-established refugee groups who had moved out of the margins of poverty into well-paid employment attributed their success to educational attainment in their country of origin accompanied by ‘top-up’ qualifications in the UK. This was especially the case when qualifications from other countries were not recognised in the UK (Phillimore and Goodson, 2008).

Level of education was closely allied to social class and status. Speaking of organising cultural events in Cumbria, one respondent noted that:

“There’s a hierarchy depending on what jobs they’re in, and a lot of them were doctors and we were too lowly. We’re just shopkeepers so we were just too lowly to mix with.”

British-born Pakistani woman

This contributed to a ‘stratification’ of network relationships, resulting in ‘like mixing with like’ based on educational history or professional status. Thus socio-economic advantages were multiplied and disadvantages reinforced. For example, a number of people without post-16–19 qualifications had secured employment through their networks with peers, neighbours and relatives. However, as these contacts were in low-paid employment, this situation was ‘passed on’ to those young people (Fenton *et al.*, 2009). In contrast, those with professional or academic qualifications acknowledged how networks could enable them to access expert advice and ‘privileged information’.

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Those who were unemployed or in low-paid work lacked connections with social networks that could help them move on and up. This was exacerbated for minority groups and those from working-class backgrounds, restricting both opportunities and aspirations.

What was weak, therefore, across the spectrum of interviewees (whether unemployed or in low-paid jobs) was social connections that could help people in moving on.

The workplace was seen as crucial in developing networks:

“Before I worked, I sat at home with the kids and then as I’ve worked I’ve got more friends, I’ve got more money, so I’ve got the means to see more people because I know more people and I’ve got more money to do more things with more people ... That’s what it was, I got a job.”

White British woman

However, for migrant workers and refugee communities, learning English (and the network opportunities offered through ESOL and a diverse workplace) was crucial in opening up networks, accessing employment and staying in work. The lack of language skills and networks beyond the immediate community could restrict employment opportunities and potential routes out of poverty: “Most of the Nepalese people, they don’t have proper communication in English and that might raise a health-and-safety issue, that’s why I think they are cutting down on numbers of the Nepalese people there [at my workplace]” (Nepalese man).

The workplace could also serve to keep someone in work:

“There’s many things that could have made me go away from the workplace other than the pay as well, and there’s many things that kept me, and one of the things that kept me was my immediate support network, which in the form of my colleague, colleagues, they were a godsend.”

Chinese man

Where employment was lost, interviewees spoke of the impact on their lives of losing long-term relationships. A representative from one charitable organisation noted:

“What we found was that people who finished work did not just lose their income. They could handle that because most of them were at an age where they had paid off their mortgages, kids were married ... What they could not replace was that social interaction and some of them ended up getting depressed ... What they really missed were those social networks.”

Faith group interviewee



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## Summary remarks: access to networks

There are powerful cross-currents of ethnicity, class, culture and education that influence the ways in which social networks can alleviate the experience of poverty. All these forces influence people's social identity and affect their ability to access and make good use of networks. There are also significant differences within as well as between ethnic groups. In interviews, social and employment status, caste and educational attainment were seen, alongside ethnicity, as important determinants shaping people's networks. Social networks tended to be 'like with like', with very little opportunity, particularly for those out of work or in low-paid employment, to access and therefore use the vertical networks (or bridging and linking capital) that might move people out of poverty rather than mitigating its impact.

There are costs associated with networking: time, energy, finance and other resources. This had an impact on all interviewees who were in or at the margins of poverty. However, for those who were also experiencing xenophobia and racist discrimination, establishing networks beyond the immediate community was problematic and acted as a further barrier to securing employment or progressing in the workplace to higher-paid positions. Social networks, therefore, have their limitations, particularly in the current economic climate.

But, for all the costs, potential limitations and difficulties of networking, the absence of strong and extensive social networks can be even more damaging (Phillimore and Cheung, 2013).

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# 4 THE USE, USEFULNESS AND LIMITATIONS OF NETWORKS

“Yes, people are disadvantaged by not having networks. But sometimes you could have networks and still not take advantage of them.”

Faith group interviewee

This chapter sets out how and why people use, or do not use, their connections to get on in life, and what outcomes emerge for them individually and collectively. We ask how people use their networks to tackle poverty. Does this differ between ethnic groups? How useful are networks in either alleviating or moving on from poverty?

## Surviving poverty

For those in receipt of benefits or in low-paid employment, social networks proved to be important for surviving financial crises and coping with poverty (Batty and Cole, 2010; Garner and Bhattacharyya, 2011).

Interviewees talked of using networks to access information on low-cost clothing and food, free exchange services (e.g. plumbing repairs in return for painting and decorating), sharing food and exchanging fuel cards:

“There seemed to be an arrangement where they would ensure that one of the neighbours would have noodles in, and another neighbour would have, like, hot-dog sausages in, and so they would feed all their children between the two of them. I think they had six children between the two of them.”

Chinese woman

“For example, if the gas was running low, my friend will say, ‘Pass me your card,’ and she’ll top it up for me because she’s got a shop as well. She’ll top it up for me and then I’ll say to her, ‘I’ll owe you

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that.’ ‘No, you don’t. I come to your house and you’ve put the heating on for the kids and things.’ Silly little things like that.”

Yemeni woman

For those excluded from mainstream financial services, social networks were an important means of accessing capital or loans. It is perhaps in this area of networking that the most significant ethnic differences were evident. Within white communities, money exchange through small-scale loans amongst friends and relations was common practice, “to tide you over for a couple of days” (white British interviewee). There was an understanding that such loans would be paid back as soon as possible. Within black and minority ethnic populations, community-level arrangements were apparent on a more substantive scale. They operated through semi-formalised arrangements, such as the pardoner and committee schemes, mainly within groups of people sharing the same ethnicity and known to one another. They were based on trust and long-established cultural norms designed to assist community members to overcome straitened circumstances, realise an ambition – for example, to set up in business – or fulfil family commitments such as a dowry payment or the repatriation of a family member’s body after death:

“Within the Kashmiri community ... we have lots of self-help, self-support groups which support people in terms of committee systems, you know, financial support, when they borrow, and they don’t have interest, without interest, they share ... Interest free loans and all the rest of the things comes along with it. And the groups are organised on the basis of, you know, sometimes the village the people come from.”

Kashmiri man

“You’ve got ten people, each person puts £100 in a month, OK? So, every month, you’ve got £1,000 sitting there. One of those ten people will take that £1,000.”

Pakistani man

Interviewees reported that informal access to finance had its limitations. Failure to contribute or to repay loans on time could result in permanent exclusion from such schemes, thereby limiting further access to affordable credit. White British and Pakistani respondents noted that:

“If you get into debt, you can maybe borrow off your family or friends once. Maybe twice. But if you keep going back, you soon find your circle of friends shrinks. So it helps once, twice ... but not in the long run.”

White British man

Social networks were also used to understand and negotiate complex systems, for example the health service, the benefits system and the education system. Interviewees, and not only those who were relatively recent arrivals or with limited English, mentioned using family, friends and children as interpreters with the general practitioner, with hospital services

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and in job centres. Those unfamiliar with the English education system, in particular arrivals from A8 countries (the 'accession eight' countries that joined the European Union in 2004), used their contacts to "find out where the good schools are for our children" (Polish interviewee).

"When we first rented the house, the lady was a consultant in a hospital. We became very good friends. So she gave me a lot of support, really, whatever I wanted to know I asked her and she told me ... I didn't know how to approach people to ask for help, and I asked her, she said, "Oh, for these people you should say this and that" ... I made all notes and how to find a school for my son, and how to do research to find league tables, and then compare the different schools, talk to the teachers."

Chinese woman

Questions can be raised about the quality and reliability of advice and information accessed informally: this is a fundamental tension in networks. There were some examples of false or misleading advice being provided and some interviewees preferred to go directly to official websites rather than relying on community sources of information and help.

Social networks were seen as an important means of supporting and building individual and community resilience (Wilding, 2011). For some, this was about sharing a message that difficulties can be survived:

"People ... go through things and they could be bad things or they could be good things, but they'll strengthen you and help you to help other people. And that's important, I think, using everything that you've been through to help other people instead of letting it make you bitter."

Mixed-heritage African-Caribbean and white British woman

For agencies, this was about preventing extreme social isolation and the associated health risks, as well as helping those in poverty to adopt a positive attitude:

"When you are in poverty and just feel overburdened, it is very difficult to get up and go in a positive sense ... You feel that everything is getting at you and it is quite difficult to be resilient in those situations ... and you need to be resilient to get out of poverty."

Advice agency interviewee

In the interviews with individuals, there were numerous examples of people using personal relationships and connections with agencies to get help in a crisis, financially and with practical support. Networks were a source of advice and encouragement for moving on and maybe 'changing tack'. Reaching out for help might entail using social or work connections to obtain resources or information from sources outside familiar community networks, for example to gain knowledge about the more mainstream forms of support available in the UK, such as Citizens Advice Bureaux or credit unions.

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To 'get up and go' carried risks for interviewees. Relocating to a new place for work, often with no guarantee of security, could mean leaving behind the deep social networks that had enabled survival in the first place. Resilience can mean both the capacity to 'bounce back' and the ability to withstand even more difficult circumstances (Norman, 2012). It is about recovery and adaptability: learning lessons from negative experiences, either directly or vicariously, through the stories of people in one's social networks, how they dealt with hardship or emergencies and evolved new survival strategies. In this respect, links with others sharing similar experiences and 'journeys' were often to be found within one's own ethnic community, amongst those who had also faced racist prejudice or had experienced parallel difficulties adjusting to life in the UK. For first-generation immigrants and more recent arrivals, the empathy and solidarity created through ethnically based social networks were vital ingredients for life in a culturally challenging and sometimes hostile environment.

## Change in networks

People's networks were not static. A key theme for interviewees was how relationships change, and had changed, over time, although there was no widespread agreement on the nature of that change. For some, their parents' networks were much more constrained than their own. In part, this was due to the use of social media, which, as it evolves, can be expected to help people to expand their networks:

"The networking of my parents was very limited, first of all because my parents spent most of their life in Communism and there is nothing to compare really because they were quite limited to the place where they lived, and there was no chance to do anything ... We are different, we are using Facebook, we are using other social media, but I think this is only a trial, this is only a beginning of the social media ..."

Polish man

For others, the dispersal of networks could be at the cost of deeper, more meaningful bonds:

"Nowadays, family seems to be less important ... You think, you know, when you used to have big families all living together and they met up at certain times, whereas now it's catch one another when you can, and again, like phone mobiles, the fact that I can just ring my dad from here, there, everywhere, it means that I don't need to go and see him all the time."

White British man

"I just don't like moving all the time because then you lose everything and you have to make new friends and everything."

White British man

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For those whose parents had migrated, the changing shape of networks was seen as inevitable:

“We’ve been raised or born here. And because of that, we mix with the larger community more ... And we’ve gone through the education system, whether it’s reception, nursery, all the way up to university. And because of that, we have a bigger social network than my parents.”

Bangladeshi man

## Social technologies

The power of digital technologies, and the fact they are widely applicable in everyday life, was universally recognised, and most participants felt that such technology could be used to address poverty. We use the term ‘social technologies’ broadly to cover digital media that facilitate social connections.

A number of comments about these technologies concerned the use of the internet simply as a source of information, especially when it came to negotiating complex social systems:

“If, for example, I need to find out something about the maternity, I’ll just go on the internet, find it and if there’s any support, helplines that I need to call and do this, or tax returns and things like this, or Inland Revenue.”

Polish woman

Although this is not about using technology to develop social connections, it reminds us that the resources of the World Wide Web are sometimes seen as a disincentive to social interaction. As another respondent put it:

“There’s a lot of things that you don’t even have to ask people. It’s at your fingertips, isn’t it?”

Chinese man

Interviewees referred to the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn for both interacting with others *and* information gathering. As with face-to-face interactions, it can be very difficult to distinguish where one is happening but not the other. Social relationships depend heavily on the exchange of information, and efficient communication is a fundamental characteristic of well-functioning networks.

Few of the respondents appeared to see social technologies in relation to face-to-face interaction as an ‘either–or’ issue, but, if comparisons are to be made, workshop participants felt that, when it came to investment of time, energy and other costs, online was cheaper than offline.

Against that, it was noted that the online environment is characterised by a higher proportion of irrelevant information (‘noise’) that requires time and/or skills to deal with. People felt that they were more likely to be able to trust information that was shared face to face through the ‘community network’ but acknowledged that this implies a comparatively limited network: depth versus breadth. This balance can be seen in a slightly different way:

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“Dependency on community network only for information and advice holds you back. The quality and adequacy of information and advice may be poor ... Online you have a bigger reach, a large range of potential contacts, and you may be more likely to find someone who can help you.”

Carlisle social technologies workshop

This was illustrated by an interviewee from a recruitment agency:

“Messages get tweeted around and passed on. If you’re part of that network, you could suddenly see something that was just right for you ... And there are lots of jobs advertised, there are training opportunities advertised, jobs fairs advertised, you know, ways that people would never have heard about an opportunity for them in their area they could find through those social networks.”

Several respondents were unambiguous about the entrepreneurial benefits of Facebook:

“You know how it works with Facebook ... I spoke to somebody about my problems with the shop supply and they immediately were telling me they’ve got an accountant ... There is an accountant, a lawyer, they have got many contacts. So whatever I want, the people immediately have got a contact.”

Agency interviewee (community centre-run shop)

This could even amount to disparaging the social value of such connections altogether:

“I’m not on Facebook to make friends. I’m on Facebook to sell my concept and to give myself more brand exposure. Facebook is a means to an end for me ... I’m not cultivating friendships.”

Mixed-heritage Irish-Ghanaian interviewee

The self-promotional potential of social media can help some people address the circumstances of poverty in an entrepreneurial way. But others were uncomfortable in an environment that appears to present “happy perfect lives, designer labels, going out, new clothes. You can’t do this if you’re poor” (Breslin Public Policy, 2013). Further, some respondents found that Facebook challenged their understanding of how social relationships are valued:

“The notion of friendship clearly is out of the window in those terms. In Facebook terms, anyone can be a friend. All you have to do is say, you know, send a message over, ‘I want to be your friend.’ ‘OK, you’re my friend.’”

Black British/African-Caribbean man

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Social technologies can be used to strengthen or challenge cultural traditions, which in turn can affect participation in networks. Participants discussed the impact of online dating in Asian communities, which, in combination with rising divorce rates, was said to be eroding the traditional system of marriage brokerage. This was identified as a distinct cultural trend that was ‘very empowering’, with women acting independently. It was also challenging to existing networks and threatened to undermine the caste system.

The global reach of social technologies has enormous value for migrant communities. We heard of families keeping Skype connections more or less constantly open so that they could see into each other’s homes from a distance of thousands of miles. Members of the Nepalese community in Carlisle welcomed the power of digital technologies to affirm transnational community, referring to YouTube recordings of traditional wrestling in their villages: “internet enables you to connect to your forefathers”. Nonetheless, this seems to reflect only a partial embracing of the technology, mainly limited to broadcasting for cultural reinforcement. As yet, in this community, there seems to be only cautious recognition of the potential impact on social networks of social media platforms for connection, discussion and enterprise.

Participants recognised the contribution of technology to the durability of social ties. Several examples were offered of re-establishing lapsed ties:

“I went away to Australia for a couple of years and ... I’d only been back about two weeks, and I wasn’t in touch with this lady in any other way, didn’t have a phone number or anything, she found me on Facebook.”

White British woman

Connections that are established or confirmed online are relatively easy to revive. As a consequence, people are more likely to appreciate their connections and therefore, in time, be more strategic in their networking.

## Education, employment and employability

This research echoed the findings of research into workplace practices (Hudson *et al.*, 2013). There was a strong relationship between social networks and access to employment, particularly in the more informal labour market. Employers used chain recruitment techniques:

“We used to advertise through the job centre, we used to put little local newspaper ads in, and to be honest all that’s just a complete waste of time now ... The biggest way which we recruit at the moment is, once we have recruited somebody, what happens then, through their use of Facebook, emails, all those social networking sites, they then inform lots of other people, particularly their direct and indirect family, or friends, really. So what we tend to see, and it’s not just ourselves, I know other hoteliers have said the same thing, once you get one person you tend – being flippant – to get the whole family.”

Private sector employer



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This resulted in concentrations of some ethnic groups in particular employment sectors: eastern Europeans in the rural hospitality industry, or Lithuanians and Nepalese in food-processing plants. Further, such informal processes could serve to keep people in poverty, with long hours, limited job security and low wages, for example in restaurants. While interviewees actively used networks to access these types of jobs, this reinforced in-work poverty, which meant that “Their networks help them to sustain at a level which is the, you know ... minimum well-being” (Kashmiri man).

For those people with relatively closed networks, using social contacts to obtain work was, therefore, not necessarily a means of moving upwards out of low-paid and often insecure employment. Further, the increasing use of social technologies in recruitment, and by mainstream employment agencies, may exacerbate the exclusion of those without access to or unable to use those technologies. There is a risk that they become further disadvantaged even in those parts of the labour market where literacy and English language skills, let alone digital fluency, are not essential.

## Community, faith and voluntary organisations

Respondents consistently referred to voluntary, community and faith-based organisations. At one level, this related to a sense of belonging and, in the case of faith groups, identity. For people in poverty, the organisations offered a range of valued services. These included providing free or low-cost meals and food parcels, signposting to other services, and access to information and advice. These organisations were also seen as spaces for networking and integration, within and between ethnic groups:

“The most important one for me is, of course, [X] Multicultural Forum, because since I got involved that gave me an opportunity to do, to integrate into the community and be known in the community.”

Filipino woman

Where they consciously developed networking opportunities beyond the immediate family and ethnic community, these organisations could sometimes provide vital links between those living in poverty and those with access to power, opportunities and influence (see Case Studies 5, 7 and 8).

### Case Study 5: DIY tenants' days

A registered social landlord with large stocks of housing in villages and estates along the west coast of Cumbria works to counter the isolation and low aspirations found amongst many of its tenants by arranging ‘Do It Yourself’ days, during which the tenants take over the agency’s local offices. This scheme is deliberately designed to widen informal networks by offering adults and young people a chance to meet with others beyond their family and friends. The organisation also runs a programme of internships so that young people have a chance to broaden their horizons with a ‘taster’ of what other kinds of jobs might be available to them.

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Voluntary and community organisations were seen as flexible, responsive and non-judgemental. Further, by offering opportunities for volunteering, they could be a route into paid employment:

“I think it also helped me to grow as a person, as well, because it’s given me the chance to meet different types of people through volunteering, and from that I’ve met other people ... just like social networking. They introduce me to one group of people, and this set of people introduced me to another group.”

Chinese woman

## Moving on

Three themes emerge from the interviews in terms of the nature of social networks that help people move out of poverty and progress in life.

First, minority ethnic communities (particularly those members in low-paid employment) lack access to and involvement in the more influential networks:

“Networks [in the Kashmiri community] are about surviving ... there is a huge gap between that and the mainstream service providers ... There’s no connection, so they rely on people who are willing to help who’s in touch, you know, with the predominantly white mainstream, you know, society.”

Kashmiri man

Second, there were few examples of access to people and agencies able to act as mentors or role models. Although interviewees often had strong networks within their own communities, these were typically with others experiencing poverty or on a low income, sometimes exacerbated by racialised exclusion. Those in poverty did not have links to people with power and influence.

Third, awareness of networks and of their potential power, together with a capacity to use those networks, is fundamental.

We note also that volunteering offered a potent route into both work and wider networks. There were examples of people gaining jobs through first offering to volunteer and then meeting people who were able to link them to mainstream opportunities and information sources. Volunteering alone was insufficient. What appeared to make a difference was volunteering outside particular ethnic-based organisations (see Case Study 6), the quality of the experience offered and the type of training and support available (Gaskin, 2003; Russell Commission, 2008). However, ‘mainstream’ voluntary organisations have frequently been criticised for failing to address issues of diversity in the volunteer workforce, and further development work is required to address this barrier (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2004).

### Case Study 6: Using networks to move on

Amy arrived in the UK 15 years ago, with her young son, to join her husband. At this time, she spoke no English. Prior to leaving China, she had an office job in a large commercial company. The landlady in the first

house the family rented encouraged Amy to access ESOL classes and advised her on a good school for her son. She got to know her tutor, who recommended her as a volunteer classroom assistant. Staff at the school encouraged her to gain a teaching qualification. On qualifying, she was recommended by her tutor for a part-time teaching assistant's post in a local secondary school. When a colleague took up a promotion at a neighbouring school, they alerted her to a vacancy and provided references. Her application was successful. She has subsequently been promoted to head of department and her son is about to go to university. Amy also teaches English at the local Chinese community centre as a volunteer.

"The [Chinese community] here has been supportive. But when it came to getting a job, it was definitely English colleagues that helped and I used their connections ... But all my connections in China ... we maintain a level of friendship. We are not trying to get anything out of that. It's natural, pure friendship."

Chinese woman

Yet even amongst those who had successfully used their networks to move on, there was a concern that in the current economic climate networks alone were insufficient. One interviewee reflected on the impact of the economic downturn on networks that enabled access to and progression in work:

"I had people calling me last time, 'Have you thought about doing this? This company would love to have you ...' I was like that for years, you know, would constantly have recruitment consultants calling up saying, 'I know that you're working in this particular job, but you do realise you could get more money working here?' I did a little bit of it, left companies, went to other companies and got a pay rise and that sort of thing ... it was a completely different job market ..."

British African-Caribbean man

So the idea of actively exploiting networks as a means of moving on from poverty needs to be treated with caution. The conscious manipulation of social networks for advantage brought additional transaction costs (such as gifts and entertainment) that could damage trust and reciprocity, the very characteristics that make networks function. Reciprocity remains fundamental: "If you want to get something, you've got to give something, that's what it is. It's very simple" (Lithuanian woman).

Indeed, the establishment of reciprocity and trust (rather than manipulation) was more than altruism; it was seen as a social investment and even made good business sense:

"The crucial point was to establish the Polish shop in Carlisle, and that gave us an advantage for years and years and years, because people knows me since 2006, most of Polish community in Carlisle knows who I am, and I think that was very important. And then we started to help people and people were satisfied, they came back, and that's how we're still existing."

Polish man

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## Summary remarks: use, usefulness and limitations of networks

People from different ethnic groups can use social networks to move out of poverty. Networks play an important part in mitigating the impacts of both out-of-work and in-work poverty. But they can also keep people in poverty.

Interviewees talked about networks in emotional, not strategic, terms: family, friends, trust, respect, affection. While agency representatives spoke of networking as a tool for supporting and enabling service users, there was also suspicion around the conscious use of networks to 'get ahead': "We need to be very clear when we are doing this networking stuff what we think the difference is going to be and what we think the value is" (Campaign group interviewee).

Further, especially in austere times, networks might be more likely to operate as reservoirs of information and power than as conduits. In attempting to shape people's social relationships consciously, there is a risk of benefiting further those who are already privileged.

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## 5 MAKING THE LINKS: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Interviewees from all ethnic backgrounds talked of their social networks primarily in terms of family and friends. To some extent, people's abilities to use networks to cope with poverty or move on from it were dependent on individual confidence, attitudes, skills, knowledge and awareness of social networks. These personal traits and capabilities are developed over a lifetime of social, work and business experiences, some more positive than others. However, broader social factors influenced how and whether people acquired and used connections effectively. In addition to ethnicity, the networks of many interviewees seemed to be configured according to gendered expectations of women, educational background and perceived employment status (Sumption, 2009). Age and disability also affect people's opportunities and capabilities for networking, but these were less prominent factors in this research.

However, social class was a critical factor. Even when networks spanned different ethnic groups, they were likely to function within the same social group rather than connecting middle-class professionals with working-class groups (Fenton *et al.*, 2009). The networks described were, therefore, often stratified, with limited opportunities for those who were unemployed or in low-paid work to develop the kinds of connections that had the potential to help them move on from poverty. For minority communities, there were additional considerations. Confidence within visible minorities was complicated by the real fear of stepping outside their cultural 'comfort zone' and possibly facing racism. There were also the dimensions of language fluency and the impact of caste and clan loyalties.

Across all ethnic groups, the key characteristics of social networks were trust and reciprocity. They were cited as important aspects of cross-community cooperation and communication, vital for developing support mechanisms, integration and language skills. However, in terms of moving out of poverty, it was not necessarily the frequency of contacts within and between ethnic communities that was important (Vervoort, 2012) but access to ties for bridging and linking. Creating opportunities for networking across social and economic boundaries is necessary not only for delivering outcomes around integration, but also for equality and social mobility.

Certain patterns emerged from the research regarding ethnic differences and access to and use of social networks. First, for established Pakistani and Bangladeshi and more recently arrived minority ethnic communities, informal and semi-formal networks were important resources for savings and loans. In contrast, white British respondents tended to access formal finance

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systems (whether banks or 'pay-day loan' companies) or occasionally borrow from immediate family members rather than regularly using semi-formal finance systems.

Second, across ethnic groups, interviewees had used social networks (in particular immediate family, relatives and friends) to access employment. As noted, informal labour market processes, word of mouth and online recruitment resulted in the concentration of particular minority communities in certain industries and low-paid jobs.

Third, for those without English language skills, social networks tended to be restricted by intra-community connections. Further, working long hours in the restaurant trade (particularly in the cases of Chinese respondents) meant that networks were confined to the immediate workplace, with limited opportunities to go beyond this particular business sector.

Fourth, while the use of international social media networks, such as Twitter and Facebook, was widespread – and paralleled by the use of Tango in the Yemeni community, QQ by the Chinese and Nasra Klasa amongst Poles – it was apparent that digital media can contribute to the reinforcement of cultural traditions as well as to their erosion. The internet enabled people to maintain communication with friends and family across the globe and was also used for business purposes, especially to develop international markets and supply chains.

Finally, cultural backgrounds and migration histories play their part in attitudes and access to networks. Some ethnic communities appeared to espouse a more community-oriented approach to mutual help, though there were exceptions to these conventions. Economic migrants tended to adopt a more individualistic approach to networking, whereas forced migrants (refugees) tended to have more collectivist networks with an emphasis on 'community'. Given the current sample size, further research would be needed to confirm this.

## Typology of networking

It is helpful to consider different approaches in terms of a common typology of social networking, reflecting people's tendency to be more or less *individualistic* in outlook and more or less *proactive* in their social relations.

The findings indicated that people of all ethnic backgrounds varied in their awareness of and propensity to use their networks, ranging from very active and strategic to a more 'passive' approach that appeared more accepting of circumstance (or 'fate') and position in society. In other respects, people referred to attitudes and behaviours within their own communities that could be described as more or less oriented towards collective or, conversely, individual interests. To simplify this model, it can be characterised by four 'types' of people (Figure 1).

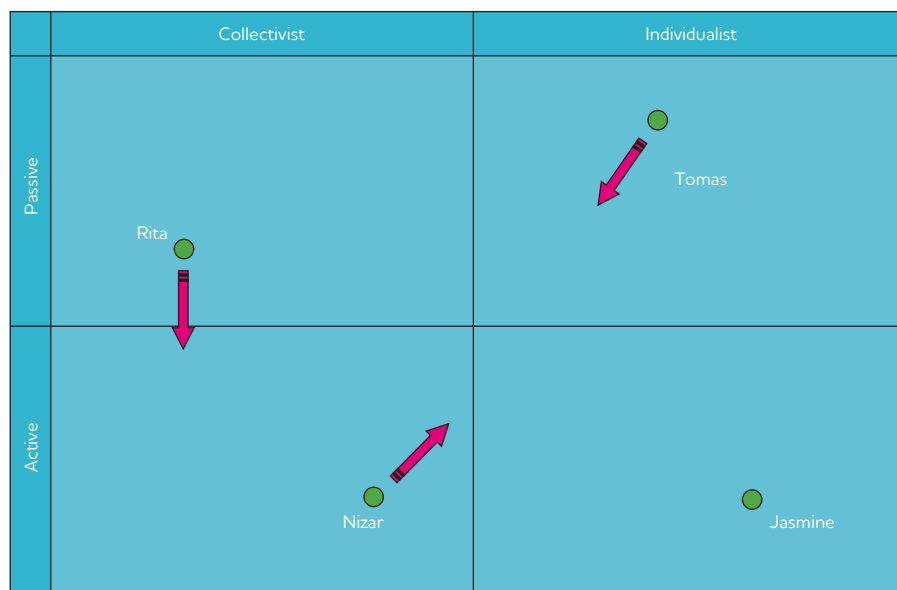
This is not a device for categorising ethnic groups. Rather, the typology could be used as a tool, either with individuals or in groups, to develop a greater awareness of social networks and encourage people to reflect on how they use them – or how they might develop more effective networking strategies, for example by moving from a passive to a more active stance – and what difference this might make in their lives.

In the example (Figure 2), it could be that Tomas wishes to become more collectivist and more active; a mentor or community group might help him articulate and achieve those aims.

**Figure 1: Networking typology**

	Collectivist	Individualist
Passive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>The passive collectivist</b></li> </ul> <p>Rita comes from a culture where the emphasis on collective resources is strong and the assumption is that people will help to provide for one another. She helps out when members of her own community need it, passing on children's clothes or bringing food to joint meals. She tends to go along with the social norms she is familiar with, saying, "I prefer to stick with people from my own community because I know where I stand with them and it's easier to just be myself." Apart from some conversations at the school gates, she has not invested time in making connections with other people in the town. She attends religious or cultural gatherings within her community, knows who to turn to for support and consistently offers emotional and practical support to others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>The passive individualist</b></li> </ul> <p>Tomas recently lost the first job he had, losing touch with the few colleagues he spoke to there. He has no family here and few connections either with eastern European immigrants or with others in the city. His friends and family back home want him to return, but he is determined to prove his independence, saying, "I will be OK as long as I can find work." He hopes that sooner or later someone will let him know about employment possibilities in the area and he is registered with the local employment agencies. Meanwhile, he is just about coping, but his savings are dwindling. Tomas does not see how he can overcome poverty and is resigned to it. He feels isolated but lacks the confidence to interact socially and his limited English also makes this difficult for him.</p>
Active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>The active collectivist</b></li> </ul> <p>Nizar spends a lot of time as an interpreter and adviser to others in his community. He has good links with various community organisations, housing agencies, the health service, the police and local government departments, and he makes it his business to find out what's going on in his own community as well as in the wider society. He uses this position to ensure that others get the information and help that they need so that people can do this for themselves. Through his contacts, Nizar is usually able to find out how things work or what opportunities are available. He is committed to and enjoys helping his community but sometimes finds this role distracts him from achieving his personal objectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>The active individualist</b></li> </ul> <p>Jasmine's attitude is that you have to take responsibility for your own fate and live within your means rather than depending on others. Before moving to the UK, she used websites to obtain a job and contacted people already living here to find accommodation with friends of friends. She is happy to help people she knows personally and will approach others to identify people or organisations that could provide her with useful information or support. She expects favours or loans to be returned and invests time and effort in developing new relationships, for example by joining a local choir. She is an active member of the multicultural women's forum. She does not feel she has to contribute to the interests of her ethnic community and takes no part in traditional celebrations. Because of her entrepreneurial approach, Jasmine envisages that her experience of poverty will soon be over.</p>

**Figure 2: Applying the networking typology**



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## Developing social networks: the role of agencies

Awareness of networks and attitudes towards them varied amongst agency interviewees. They fell into three broad categories:

- Statutory agencies, while recognising the importance of social networks, expressed concern that the use of staff and management interpersonal networks as an approach to recruitment and service delivery could favour certain individuals or groups and ran counter to their equal opportunities policies. There were also restrictions on the use of social technologies within statutory sector bodies, which constrained the development of online interaction with service users.
- Businesses tended to be relatively 'network savvy' and aware of the power of face-to-face and online networking for business promotion, opening up market opportunities and staff recruitment, particularly in more informal economies such as the hospitality and catering trades. This, however, had the potential to exclude those without access to digital technologies (White, 2013) or who were not aware of social media-based recruitment methods.
- Community and voluntary organisations, while less restricted than statutory bodies in their use of social media, tended to be less media aware in terms of the potential of these platforms to extend people's social networks. There were some exceptions to this (e.g. an organisation that supported fledgling social entrepreneurs to build their networks in order to grow their social enterprises). However, the organisations we spoke to tended to prioritise face-to-face interaction in helping members to access networks that could make a difference in their lives, and they were instrumental in providing networking opportunities and support and signposting services that could help them do this (see Case Study 7).

### Case Study 7: Furness Multicultural Forum

The forum was established initially as a support group for asylum seekers and refugees from Kosovo in the late 1990s. It has since evolved to become an important social and educational space for people from a range of ethnic backgrounds living in South Cumbria. Because of the relatively low numbers of any specific minority community, the organisation has prioritised a multicultural approach, supporting a lively women's network, a regular 'One World' club for children, and youth work sessions. It emphasises the value of preserving and learning about 'home' cultures alongside activities that promote integration with the local white British community. As a result of this approach, it has provided an important platform for networking amongst different ethnic communities and is a source of information, support and advice concerning employment and benefits entitlement. However, its current position is precarious, relying on committed volunteers and ad hoc project funding.

Representatives from statutory agencies (as well as private sector providers of public services) were sceptical about the capacity of social networks to lift people out of poverty. Their focus was more on fiscal policies operating within local and national economic contexts. A common view was that moving on from poverty was particularly difficult where low-wage labour markets were dominant. Other than private sector employers who used networks to recruit, very few agency interviewees had reflected on how they



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themselves used networks or how the networks of service users might be used to beneficial effect.

Various reasons were given for this by statutory agency staff. Social networks could be seen as a breach of organisational equal opportunities policies and as favouring some service users over others. There were constraints on using social media in the workplace at a time when social media was reported as increasingly important in recruitment processes.

Indeed, informal recruitment procedures and workplace networks had negative aspects. Minority ethnic interviewees reported instances where informal boundaries and limitations were placed on their progression as a result of the way in which social networks operate within and across organisations. 'Who you know' rather than 'what you know' could determine whether a person got a job or whether they were promoted within an organisation, and this could discriminate against minority ethnic respondents (see also Hudson *et al.*, 2013).

Practice in terms of using social networks in addressing poverty could not therefore be described as systematic. However, there were some examples of interesting practice. These included encouraging young people to think strategically about their use of 'real' and 'virtual' networks (see Case Study 8).

### **Case Study 8: Mentoring, peer support and access to work**

Bliss4All is a faith-based organisation that also manages a local community hall on a peripheral estate in South Birmingham. It offers a wide range of activities, from dance and Zumba classes through to apprenticeship schemes, DIY projects, life coaching and computer literacy. Its starting point is 'giving young people, who often have nothing, something fun to do'.

"Then we will try and get them into some kind of learning. And we are really asking what are this young person's strengths? What can they do, rather than what can't they do. And we try and get them to think about their networks, who they know ... but also how they can use social media to market themselves rather than just for chat.

"So Paul here ... he's a graduate but has had nothing for two years. But he was interested in photography, so we got him a camera and he did a digital record of the local Arts Forum trail, so filming 30 different arts activities. And from talking with people there he got work with another arts trail and then Age UK. And then we knew some local firms that wanted some digital marketing, so we introduced him and he's getting some work and using Facebook to get more business."

Other organisations, for example the UpRising youth mentoring scheme, ensured that young people going through their programmes not only had peer mentors in the area of employment that they were interested in, but also had direct access to or contact with employers themselves.

For employment agencies to assist the most disadvantaged, it may be necessary to develop staff skills to encourage service users to consider how their social connections might help in a return to employment (see Case Study 9).

### Case Study 9: Networks, advice and access to employment

A large private sector employment agency is planning to carry out research to understand the role that social networks can play in helping or hindering people's ability to find and maintain employment. They recognise that many long-term unemployed people will have quite weak networks for finding work. But they also recognise that, at times, their clients are not using the networks they do have to best effect. As one staff member put it, clients "often don't have a strategic understanding of networks". Some will proactively ask their brother's friend, their wife's family or people who they are in the pub with, 'Are there any jobs going at your place?', but others will not. This agency is recognising that advisers should be asking clients, 'What are your friends doing? What is your family doing? Who's in work? Where are they working?' Many advisers do this, but there is not yet a networks-related module as part of the employment adviser induction process.

What these examples have in common is the development of links between service users and those in positions of some power or authority. Yet such practice was rare, and where it did exist it was dependent on the attitudes of individual staff, rather than being systematic agency policy and practice.

There are, then, some interesting and emerging examples of practice from agencies that aim to increase or use the power of social networks in their service users' lives. Yet is there an interest in expanding this type of activity amongst UK social policy-makers?

### Social networks: the role of policy

There has been increasing policy interest in the role of social networks as a means of positively influencing individual behaviours and strengthening community resilience (Batty and Cole, 2010; Rowson *et al.*, 2010). Although the role and efficacy of state involvement in shaping or influencing people's social networks has been questioned (6, 2004), nonetheless various government departments have been exploring whether people can be influenced or 'nudged' through 'network effects' in ways that will be beneficial for them and society as a whole. Given that citizens have only a limited amount of time to process a large amount of information about what is the best thing to do, they use social cues and observation of the behaviours of those around them to frame their choices and make decisions (UK Behavioural Insights Team, 2010; John *et al.*, 2011).

However, governmental interest in social networks and their capacity to effect change has not been translated into either policy statements or legislation. For example, the 2012 Integration Strategy makes no reference to social networks as a means of connecting diverse communities. Reference is made to networking only twice in the Social Mobility Strategy (HM Government, 2011): once in terms of encouraging greater links between schools and employers (p. 38) and once to acknowledge that networks operating informally in recruitment may disadvantage certain young people (p. 41). This latter point is reinforced in the Social Mobility Business Compact (HM Government, 2013, p. 1), which notes the need to 'ensure that recruitment processes don't allow people to be inadvertently screened out because they went to the wrong school or come from a different ethnic group'.

Clearly, there are tensions between, on the one hand, encouraging the use of social networks to shape and choose options that will help people

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find jobs, obtain financial support or grow business and, on the other hand, seeking to build a 'level playing field' and equality outcomes for all. The extent to which 'softer' intervention tools of this kind can be used to respond to some of the 'harder' or structural challenges of poverty and inequality associated with labour market structures or racism remains a matter of debate (Afridi, 2011). Policy does have the potential to promote social mobility by supporting the role of public, community and voluntary services in providing access to all kinds of networks, especially the cross-cultural networking that was seen by research participants as important in opening up avenues to sources of reliable information, business advice and employment options.

In addition to these practical insights, various agency representatives and seminar attendees stressed the need for a cultural shift in the media and political discourse on poverty and ethnicity. Blaming those in poverty for their situation and 'poor social networks' in minority communities for a lack of employment opportunities (NAO, 2008) was viewed as increasing divisions within society and between ethnic groups. This further marginalises already vulnerable groups and undermines any policy direction towards a fairer, more equal or socially mobile society (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010; HM Government, 2011).

Ethnic diversity (in particular super-diversity) should no longer be regarded as problematic but rather recognised as strengthening society and resulting in an economic boost to UK-based global trading (Vertovec, 2007). Minority ethnic interviewees reported a better quality of service in cases where agencies themselves had a linguistically diverse workforce. Many interviewees had considerable language skills and strong networks with people in their countries of origin. These contacts are likely to prove advantageous to firms seeking to develop their business in emerging markets such as Africa, China, Latin America and South East Asia.

It is on the basis of a complex and incomplete evidence base, alongside a shifting debate on the role of social networks, that the following recommendations are offered.

## Recommendations

In making these recommendations, the report draws on agency and community interviews as well as on the feedback and review workshops in which we asked participants to reflect on the interim findings and suggest how these might inform policy and practice. They are primarily aimed at addressing poverty and improving social mobility. They are primarily based on the key research finding that people who had moved out of poverty were able to make use of family support and assets as well as having access to and using connections that are associated with bridging and linking social capital. Recommendations are intended to be feasible, targeted and evidence based.

There are two main challenges that need to be tackled in order for social networks to become a more effective tool for tackling poverty.

First, many people are not using their existing networks as effectively as they could to help them move out of poverty. For some, this is because of a lack of awareness about using networks, while others lack the confidence and personal capacity to do so. Organisations in all sectors, including community groups, should develop systematic ways of encouraging people to reflect on their networks and consider how best to use them. Where confidence and capacity are an issue, this can be addressed through piloting schemes for mentoring, training and informal encouragement.

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Second, most people's networks consist mainly of connections with others in similar circumstances to themselves or with shared social identities. For those in poverty, this can restrict their opportunities to improve their situation and widen their options. Organisations need to consider specific work to facilitate people in poverty to develop links with people outside of their normal settings who might act as role models or provide life-changing advice.

**Mentoring** was seen as potentially key to promoting the positive use of networks for both gaining work and progressing to better jobs (see Case Study 8). Some agency interviewees suggested that 'pre-network mentoring' would give people the confidence to step outside their comfort zone and form relationships beyond their immediate community and with people from other ethnic groups. Formalised mentoring can be expensive, and evaluations with children and young people to date, while recognising that mentoring was valued by participants, have been inconclusive in terms of outcomes (Parsons *et al.*, 2008). Nonetheless, there would be value in piloting peer mentoring with a particular focus on building people's capacity to use and develop their networks for those finding a return to the labour market particularly problematic (e.g. those not in education or training and those experiencing long-term unemployment). Such schemes could be built into any future Work Programme contracts, with appropriate evaluations.

Black and minority ethnic respondents currently in employment felt that there was an absence of peer mentoring and role models in the workplace, which prevented progression:

“There is a gap in terms of professional development. There is no network I'm aware of who helps you in your professional development. You know, I, as I said, in my career I'm now stuck in a, in one place, you know, I have to move on, but there is no support and no network available.”

Kashmiri man

Peer mentoring in the workplace could be implemented by public services, larger voluntary organisations and the private sector as part of workforce development and diversification plans. Such schemes already exist in some NHS trusts and police forces. Research indicates that such schemes can play an important role in workforce diversification and staff progression (Esmail *et al.*, 2005).

As online access increasingly becomes the default for service provision, the need to promote **digital fluency** becomes more urgent. For people in poverty or at the margins of poverty, this means being able to use digital media to converse with contacts and agencies, promote their own skills or experience, find information and negotiate complex systems.

Conventional social media clinics or surgeries (such as those pioneered by Podnosh in Birmingham<sup>1</sup>) could be developed by local and regional partnerships and linked to adult and informal education, as well as being promoted by Digital Champions in Jobcentre Plus. It seems important to use such opportunities also to promote awareness of the power and value of social networks.

**The networks of those using services** were recognised by employment agencies as an underused resource in identifying potential employment opportunities, yet there was no systematic agency practice in terms of network awareness and development. Standardised 'toolkits' should be

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://podnosh.com/social-media-surgeries/>

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developed within Jobcentre Plus, Work Programme providers and careers services, as consistency of practice will be critical to ensure equality of opportunity. Such toolkits should include materials on enabling people to identify their networks more comprehensively, strategies for extending and using those networks to access employment, and signposting to agencies that can assist individuals in developing bridging capital. These should include basic questions such as 'Do any of your family, friends or other contacts you have work?'; 'Do you think any of them – or their contacts – could help you to find a job?'; and 'Is there anybody you can think of whom you may not have seen for a while but who might be able to help you find a job?'. These would be useful additions to employment advisers' interview questions. Not only might these questions result in tangible information about job opportunities, but they might also offer an alternative way of thinking about employment and the job market to people who are out of work. As noted, at present some advisers ask about these types of things, but not systematically, and, as a result, opportunities to track people's progress in 'using' their social networks between employment advice sessions can be lost.

This would require some additional training for employment advisers, teaching them to enable service users to see their networks as means for developing different strategies for obtaining work. However, such an approach would require careful evaluation to track progress and assess whether social network advice translates into jobs or other livelihoods.

**Employer action** is also required to address the less positive role of networks in recruitment and promotion in the workplace. While equality legislation is designed to respond to indirect and direct discrimination, the legal framework has always faced challenges in identifying and responding to 'informal' processes or workplace 'cultures' that limit people's progression. Social networks are a strong case in point. This research suggests that (in addition to the implementation of a standard equality checklist – for example, ensuring that people reviewing applications are not aware of candidates' ethnic backgrounds) employers/managers should also actively consider the potentially unfair effect of people's use of social networks on their recruitment or progression. For example, if somebody has got a job, an internship place or a promotion through 'who they know', not 'what they know', then employers need to be aware that this is a form of unfair recruitment.

Given the emphasis on English as a common language, access to **ESOL classes** is vital for promoting integration and developing inter-ethnic networks and routes to employment. The current labour market calls for literacy as well as language skills. ESOL can and is being delivered at little or no cost over the internet, but there is a role for statutory and voluntary education institutions in enabling people to identify quality e-learning opportunities. However, this is not a substitute for the provision of places within the education system and in the voluntary and community sector for 'actual' ESOL provision that includes literacy skills and enables 'real-time' networking. This requires funding from central and local government, which may be problematic in the current economic climate but is key to integration and social mobility strategies.

**Volunteering** offers a basis for both developing cross-cultural links and opening up potential routes into employment. The quality of the volunteering experience and access to support, supervision and training are, however, critical in terms of personal and, potentially, professional development, and organisations need to be sensitive to diverse motivations for taking up unpaid work in the community (Russell Commission, 2008).

More could be done by government, for example extending the National Citizen Service programme to adults returning to the labour

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market and promoting good practice in multicultural volunteering. Barriers, however, remain for minority ethnic communities in terms of volunteering opportunities within 'mainstream' organisations (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2004). Councils for Voluntary Service, Volunteer Bureaux and volunteer managers in larger organisations should therefore develop outreach programmes with minority ethnic and 'hard to reach' groups, while at the same time promoting anti-racism and diversity awareness within the sector.

**Voluntary, community and faith organisations** were seen as key locations not only for service and advice delivery and mitigating against poverty, but also for informed signposting and for networking cross-culturally and within ethnic groups. They were also the spaces that enabled access to the bridging and linking capital that both community and agency respondents saw as having the potential to build stronger, more diverse networks and support people in moving on from poverty. Voluntary and community groups, in particular, are vulnerable to cuts in central and local government funding, especially in the current economic climate (Marcus *et al.*, 2011).

In austere times, the role that such organisations play as 'network hubs', building social integration and strengthening community resilience, is critical. Such services need to be nurtured and developed in the contracting culture and their significance in mitigating poverty and promoting social mobility recognised. The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 should be incorporated into public service commissioning and procurement procedures, so that contractors are required to demonstrate in the tendering process the added social value of their proposals created through connections with organisations that can promote access to networks operating within and between communities.

There is an established evidence base suggesting that a lack of social networks can be detrimental to people's health and well-being (Windle *et al.*, 2011). In particular, literature has focused on how an absence of networks can affect older people and the role social relationships can play in improving mental health and preventing ill health (Patsios, 2006; Hoff, 2008). In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the effectiveness of peer education and social networks in improving take-up of health care services by ethnic minorities (e.g. Alzheimer's Society, 2010). However, this is an emerging field of practice and more research is needed. There is still limited evidence concerning the implications of network poverty for black and ethnic minority communities and how this might be affecting the provision of health and social care services in terms of direct delivery costs, formal care arrangements and informal support to people in their homes through family, neighbours and community networks.

## Conclusions

This research supports the assertion that social networks can play a role in shaping people's daily choices, which may in turn affect their capacity to move out of poverty (Saegert *et al.*, 2001; Christakis and Fowler, 2010). Yet social networks alone do not explain the inequalities and differential employment outcomes for different ethnic groups highlighted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (Kenway and Palmer, 2007; EHRC, 2010).

This research has considered how social networks influence people's relationship to poverty and has explored the role that networks play in responding to related patterns of inequality and discrimination. It has also



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shown that there are costs for individuals in maintaining and developing their social networks. For someone experiencing poverty, the time, energy and money required to invest in weak ties may not be affordable if they come at the cost of maintaining their strong ties. Research has shown that people living in poor, disadvantaged neighbourhoods who experience discrimination in the labour market can lack the 'vertical' networks to help them move up the job ladder (Fenton *et al.*, 2009). The current research shows that some respondents have been able to use their contacts (e.g. a friendly colleague at work) to find better jobs and secure increased support from the educational or health system for their children.

Whether or not social networks can reliably help people to overcome broader patterns of inequality and discrimination in society remains unanswered. Respondents talked about how networks could help them to get 'so far' in their careers, but they found that, when they reached a certain level in their organisation, the effect of race and/or gender discrimination became more dominant in preventing their progression. For some respondents, these patterns of discrimination were reinforced by even more exclusive social networks within society and within their company.

This raises important questions about the extent to which social networks can be expected to counter structural inequalities in the economy. Many of the most powerful and influential social networks in the UK are based on processes that foster exclusivity and inequality (exemplified by the 'old boy network'). The informal and private nature of many people's social networks can make it much harder to identify mechanisms for intervention, and network activities themselves are rarely subject to equality law. In principle, legal regulation of recruitment, staff promotion and delivery of public services should help to curb inequalities caused by unfair advantage through social networks, but in reality this is not always the case. Many of the interviewees mentioned the old adage 'It's not what you know but who you know', tacitly accepting the nature of inequalities and stratified networks in society (Dorling, 2010).

In policy terms, these challenges are not new. Yet, arguably, the current policy framework established to respond to them is ill equipped to identify and respond to inequalities of this type. The UK Government's Equality Strategy (HM Government, 2010), for instance, focuses on 'equality of opportunity' as opposed to 'equality of outcome', suggesting that if everybody has the same *opportunity* to access and use networks and succeed in life, then those who choose to get ahead will be able to do so, and this will occur on the basis of merit. Yet, what this research has shown is that, even if given the same opportunities (such as fair recruitment practices), people do not have the same starting point in life, and some of their networks are determined from birth or from the moment they enter a particular school or university. As a result, people do not enjoy the same outcomes in life as others who have specific advantages. Further, people do not enjoy the same level of choice or autonomy to do what they want to in their lives. A number of our respondents referred to the role peer networks and familial expectations can play in limiting people's choices around post-school education and employment.

With this in mind, a model of equality that focuses only on equality of opportunity appears unnecessarily one dimensional. This could be addressed by continuing to develop a more sophisticated equality measurement framework that covers opportunity, outcome and autonomy (Alkire *et al.*, 2009). This research suggests that this more nuanced framework should be resurrected to help respond to the types of inequalities that social networks can create and reinforce in UK society.

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Previous research (Lupton, 2003) has demonstrated that social networks help people of all ethnicities, and any ethnicity, to cope with the effects of poverty. They are also powerful tools for staying out of poverty and retaining advantage, but at the same time they may keep people in low-wage employment in ways that reflect different ethnic backgrounds and the operation of racism in UK society. The challenge is to create a policy environment and real opportunities for developing connections (bridging and linking capital) that can help lift people out of poverty through accessing educational or employment opportunities and establishing sustainable livelihoods.



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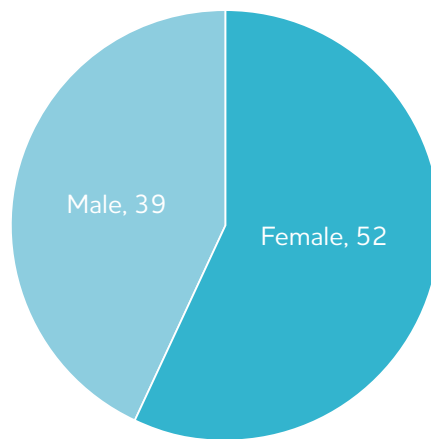
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# APPENDIX A

## Summary profile of the interview sample

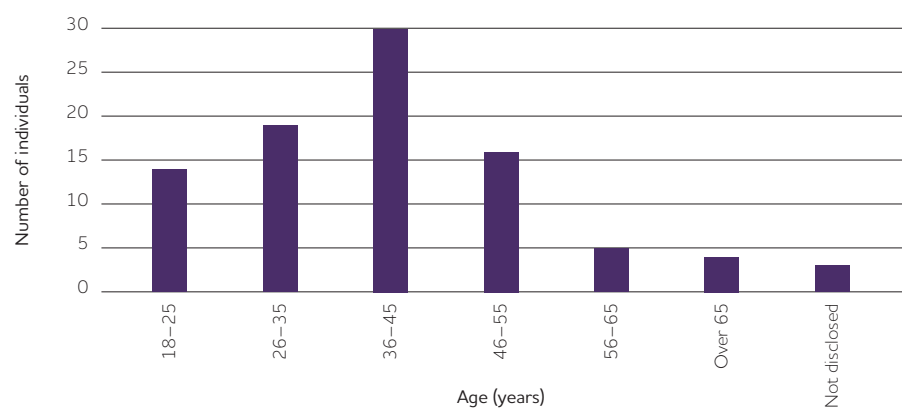
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**Figure A1: Gender**

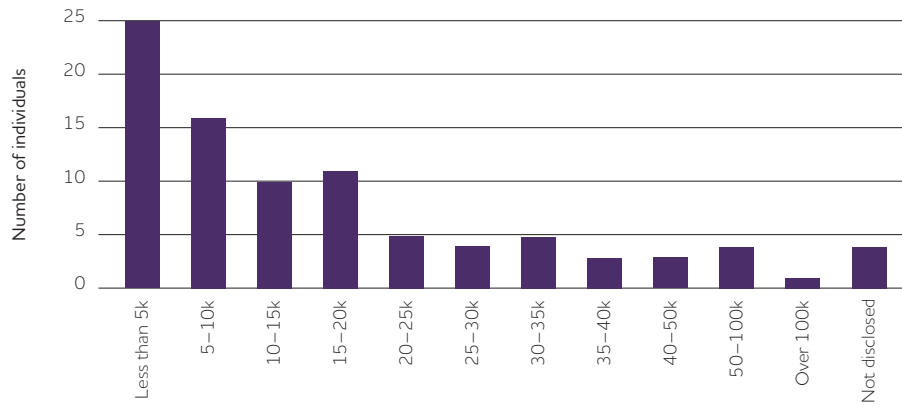


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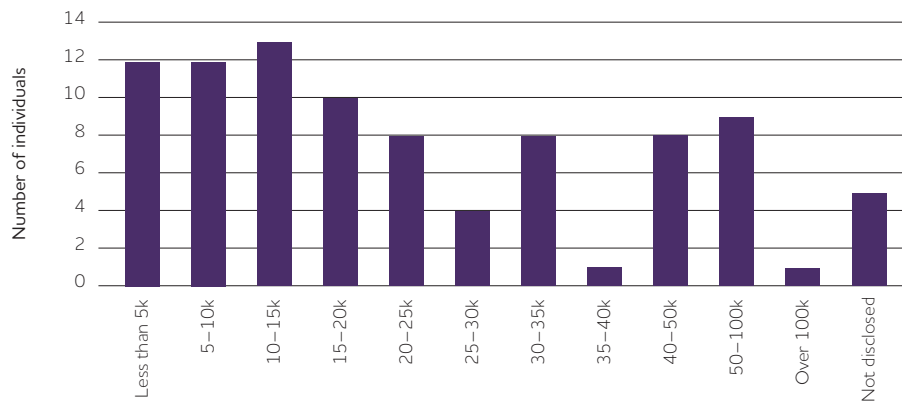
**Figure A2: Age**



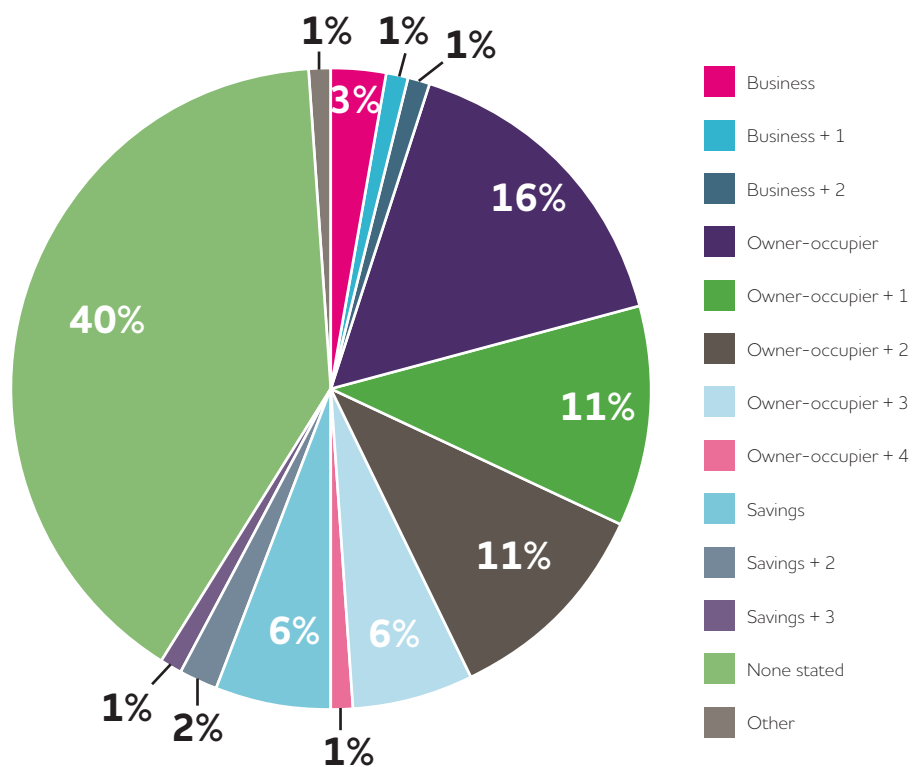
**Figure A3: Individual income**



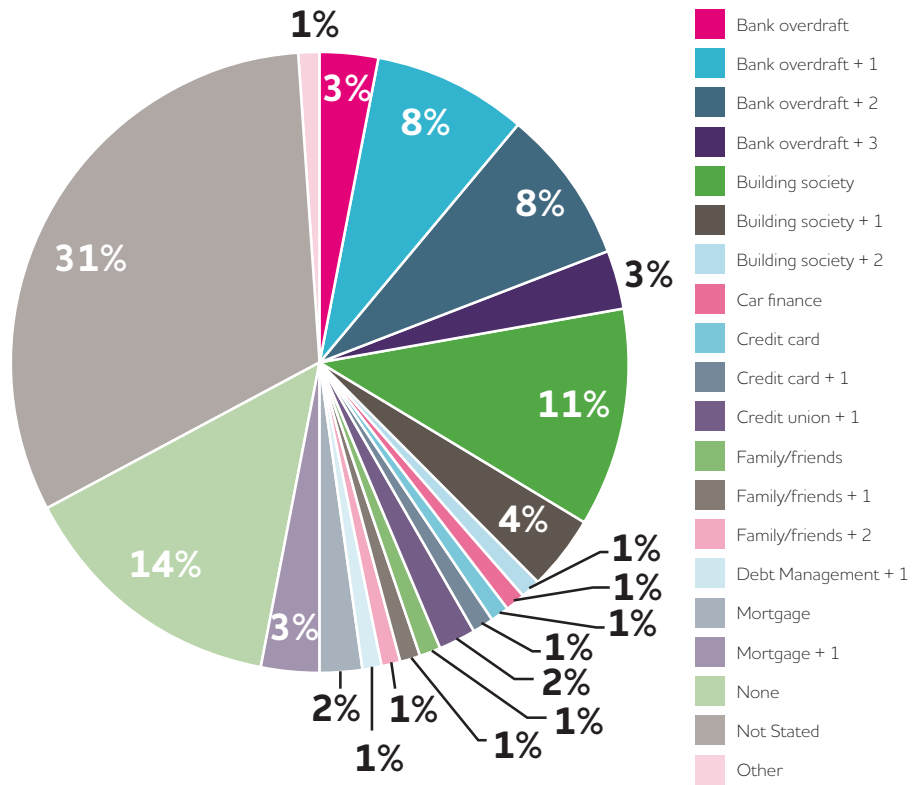
**Figure A4: Household income**



**Figure A5: Assets**

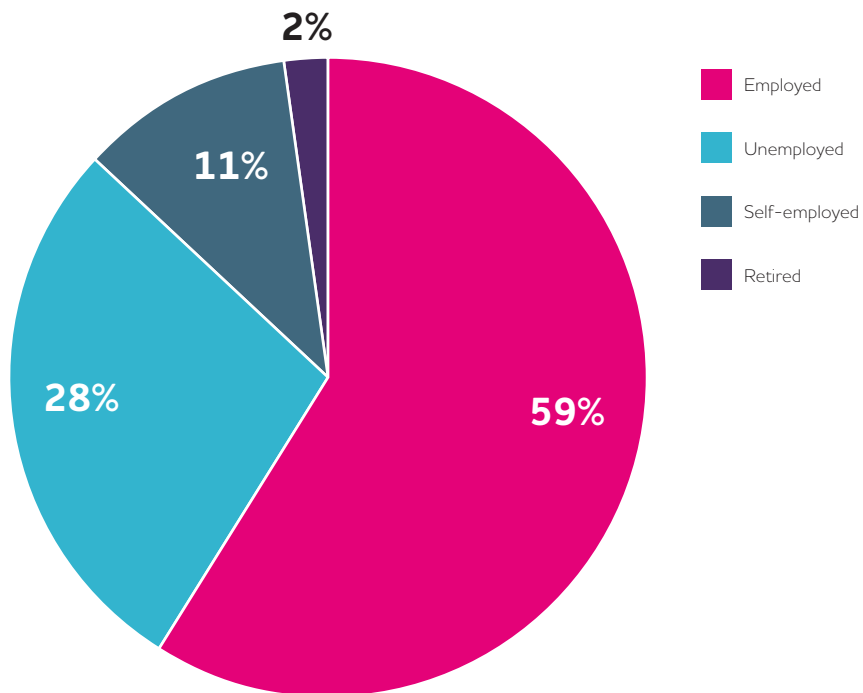


**Figure A6: Outstanding loans/debts**



NB Percentages have been rounded to the nearest 1%

**Figure A7: Employment status**



**Table A1: Country of birth of respondents**

Country of birth	Number of individuals	Country of birth	Number of individuals
Argentina	1	Mongolia	1
Bangladesh	2	Nepal	5
Bulgaria	1	Nigeria	2
Cameroon	1	Philippines	1
Canada	1	Poland	10
China	8	Romania	1
Congo	1	Slovakia	1
Guyana	1	Somalia	4
Hong Kong	2	South Africa	1
Ivory Coast	1	Sri Lanka	2
Jamaica	1	Thailand	2
Kashmir	1	UAE	1
Lithuania	1	UK	31
Malawi	1	Vietnam	1
Malaysia	1	Yemen	3
Mauritius	1	Total	91

**Table A2: Ethnicity of respondents: self-described**

Ethnicity: self-described	Number of individuals	Ethnicity: self-described	Number of individuals
White British	13	British Indian	1
White other	16	British Bangladeshi	3
Chinese	10	Pakistani	3
Black African	10	Asian other	12
Black African-Caribbean	8	Mixed ethnicity	3
Arabic	4	Other	1
British Pakistani	3	Not disclosed	4
		Total	91

**Table A3: Length of UK residence**

Length of residence	Birmingham	Cumbria	Liverpool	Total
Born in UK	16	5	11	32
0–5 years		7		7
6–10 years	4	15	7	26
11–15 years	4	0	3	7
16–20 years	2	0	3	5
More than 20 years	5	3	6	14
Total	31	30	30	91

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**Table A4: Profile: agency interviews**

<b>Agency role</b>	<b>Number interviewed</b>
Culturally specific network organisations	5
Advice agencies	4
Employment agencies	5
Faith groups	4
Enterprises/businesses/business associations	3
Education institutions	2
Finance institutions	2
Housing	1
Other (mentoring and campaign groups)	2
Total	28



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# APPENDIX B

## Descriptions of the three research areas

### Context for Birmingham

More than one million people live in Birmingham and it is a particularly young city, with 47 per cent of residents under the age of 30, compared with 38 per cent in England overall. The 2011 census found that 53 per cent of the population are 'White British', 14 per cent 'Pakistani', 6 per cent 'Indian', 5 per cent 'White other', 4 per cent 'African Caribbean', 4 per cent 'Mixed heritage', 3 per cent 'Bangladeshi', 3 per cent 'African', 1 per cent 'Chinese' and 7 per cent 'Other ethnicity'. This compares with a national average of 80 per cent White British.

Ethnic minority groups have been living in Birmingham since at least the eighteenth century (e.g. African-Caribbean and Indian people working in industry). Immigration from Africa, the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent increased considerably following the Second World War as people came to support delivery of public services, infrastructure rebuilding and manufacturing. Large-scale Chinese migration began in the 1960s. However, there were small numbers of Chinese people in the Birmingham area from at least the 1900s. The 2011 census recorded people of more than 150 nationalities living in Birmingham.

In Birmingham, ethnic minority groups are more heavily concentrated in 'elementary occupations', 'process, plant and machine operatives' and 'administrative occupations' compared with white British people, who are more heavily concentrated in 'professional', 'technical' and 'skilled trade' occupations (ONS, 2012b).

### Context for Liverpool

Liverpool grew and prospered through the slave trade and its development as a global seaport. In the nineteenth century, it was described as 'the second city of empire'. It has the longest established black and Chinese communities in Britain, while migration from Wales and particularly Ireland, as a result of the Great Famine, saw rapid growth in its population. By the 1930s, its population was more than 800,000. After the Second World War, the city went into rapid population and economic decline, which accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s. The 1950s saw migration from the West Indies, along with the settlement of Yemeni and Somali seamen, the latter population being significantly enlarged in the 1990s as a result of the Somali civil war.

Today the population stands at just under 440,000. Liverpool has not been especially ethnically diverse, though in the last decade the non-UK-born white population has doubled from 6.9 per cent in 2001 to 13.8 per cent in 2011, mainly because of migration from eastern Europe, especially Poland.

Historically, there has been a ghettoisation of black and minority ethnic communities in the Liverpool 8, or Toxteth, area. Although this is less true

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today, there is still a north–south divide, with the north part of the city predominantly white working class. Liverpool’s high levels of deprivation and unemployment have had a disproportionate impact on black and minority ethnic communities. The city still has a wide network of black and minority ethnic community and voluntary organisations, though they are threatened by funding cuts.

### Context for Cumbria

The 2011 census figures give Cumbria a population of approximately 500,000, with only 1.5 per cent of residents describing themselves as ethnically non-white or non-British. It is England’s least diverse county, but the numbers of non-UK-born residents are increasing, mainly as a result of eastern European migration and settlement.

Although Cumbria has relatively low levels of unemployment, it is a low-wage economy with median household income below national levels. Much of the local labour market is seasonal, dependent on tourism, with high levels of in-work poverty to be found in farming and food processing, as well as in the catering and hospitality industries. Recent European migrants have taken up many of these job opportunities while, anecdotally, the majority of the takeaway and restaurant food outlets are black and minority ethnic-led businesses whose owners live outside of Cumbria.

The county is mainly rural, with scattered black and minority ethnic and migrant populations but some concentration of Asian (especially Nepalese) and Polish families around the main town, Carlisle. Consequently, it has proved difficult for ethnic-specific community organisations to find sufficient membership. However, there are thriving multicultural initiatives, including AWAZ, a campaigning body set up to tackle racism in all forms; women’s groups; and an annual festival, the Cultural Bazaar, bringing together members of diverse communities.

Until recently, the county council operated a successful multilingual interpretation and advocacy service, but this has been outsourced and much reduced in function. However, statistics indicate that inward migration to Cumbria will continue to rise, as will patterns of settlement, ensuring that Cumbria gradually becomes more like the rest of the UK in terms of its ethnic diversity and the challenges it faces around integration and equality.

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# APPENDIX C

## Community profiles

These profiles describe some of the key communities in the three study areas.

### The Somali community in Liverpool

Seamen were the first Somalis to come to Liverpool, with small numbers settling after the Second World War. The community gradually increased in the 1960s and 1970s with migration from British Somaliland. There was then a significant increase from 1988 onwards as a result of the civil war, with many coming as refugees. There is no entirely reliable figure for the current size of the population: a 2007 Communities and Local Government estimate was that it ranged between 3,000 and 5,000.

The community has been centred on the Granby Toxteth area of Liverpool 8, which has consistently ranked amongst the council wards in England experiencing the highest levels of multiple deprivation. This is reflected in the experience of the Somali community. Language difficulties amongst first-generation migrants and racism compound the problems faced by this group. Within the community itself, there are particular concerns about the position of young Somali men and the problems they face, including very high rates of unemployment, mental illness and the excessive use of khat (a legal stimulant derived from chewing the leaves of the khat plant) by some.

The mosque is a centre for religious and cultural activity for Somalis in the city. Several community organisations exist, usually reflecting historical and clan divisions within Somalia, though an umbrella organisation has been developed to represent the community as a whole.

### The Chinese community in Birmingham

Chinese people began to settle in Birmingham mainly from the 1960s onwards, though there is evidence that Chinese workers were starting to arrive in Birmingham by 1917 (when they were employed in the lowest paid sector of the metal trade).

The 1960s saw a rapid increase in the number of Chinese restaurants in Birmingham. This was followed in the 1970s by the setting up of Chinese business and community associations. The Chinese Community Centre, Birmingham, was formed in 1977 to meet the social needs of this new population, and by the 1980s a number of supplementary schools had been established to teach Chinese languages to British-born Chinese people. In the 2011 census, there were 12,702 Chinese people living in Birmingham (1.2 per cent of the population) and Chinese students, on average, consistently achieve the highest GCSE attainment figures for the city. Chinese people are the least likely of all ethnic groups to claim

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unemployment benefits in the city (Birmingham City Council, 2012). One major recent change in the local community has been the arrival of younger, mainland Chinese people, whereas the settled community largely originates from Hong Kong.

### The Nepalese community in Cumbria

There are approximately 50 Nepalese families living in and around Carlisle, many of whom work in a local poultry factory, having been recruited through family and friends from elsewhere in the UK. The community mainly comes from the Gurkha tribe and consists of retired army workers attracted by Carlisle's reputation as a former garrison town, strong employment prospects and affordable living. The geographical similarities between their homeland and the mountains of the Lake District are a bonus.

Nepalese people began to migrate to the UK in increasing numbers following the 2009 ruling that granted all former Gurkha soldiers, their wives and younger family members the right of settlement. On retirement from the army, many have taken up British citizenship and pursued civilian careers, often in fairly low-paid jobs (Mai Sims, 2008). The next generation, however, have often been well educated back home or schooled here, and they are increasingly seeking professional careers.

In Cumbria, the Nepalese community forms a highly visible and economically active minority, but the older generation of adults faces language difficulties, resulting in cultural isolation, especially for wives and elderly relatives. The majority of the population is Hindu and, because of the community's low numbers in Cumbria, members tend to travel outside the county for the celebration of religious festivals.

Nevertheless, community members are organising themselves locally to create opportunities and spaces to enjoy and preserve their own culture and pass on Nepali language skills. A Nepalese Association for the area has recently been incorporated (March 2013) and some members are active in multi-ethnic forums such as AWAZ.

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- All those who participated in the research either as individual interviewees or as contributors to focus groups.

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Asif Afridi is Deputy CEO at brap, a national equality and human rights advisory organisation based in Birmingham. brap adopt an inclusive and rights-based approach to equality, drawing on their ten years of practical experience addressing inequality and promoting social justice in Birmingham. They avoid approaches that rely on promoting the needs of one group over another, as they think this approach tends to restrict, rather than enable, the progress of equality. Their approach, above all else, recognises the freedoms that all people should be able to enjoy.

Asif is a published researcher and an activist with national and international human rights experience. He is Co-Chair of the English Regions Equality and Human Rights Network. In recent years, he and colleagues at brap have produced papers on a wide range of subjects relating to equality, human rights and poverty, including poverty and social networks (JRF); cohesion and deprivation (Commission on Integration and Cohesion); history of the black and minority ethnic voluntary sector in the UK (Capacitybuilders); intercultural dialogue and practice (Baring Foundation; Dialogue Society); and human rights standards for cancer care (Macmillan).

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Alison worked for many years as a community development worker in inner-city neighbourhoods and has been active in various local and national networks. She lectured in community and youth work at the University of the West of England for several years and then worked for the Community Development Foundation (CDF) between 1999 and 2009; she was responsible for CDF's work with regional levels of government and for practice development.

In April 2009, Alison embarked on a freelance career as an independent consultant offering skills in research, training, group facilitation, organisation development and policy advice. She is now based in the Lake District but undertakes work throughout Britain and Europe. She combines work as a practitioner, researcher, writer and trainer, and has particular areas of expertise in community development theory, empowerment, equalities practice, social inclusion and networking.

## Kevin Harris

Kevin Harris has 25 years' experience in community development, with a particular emphasis on how people communicate, share information and interact at local level. He has worked with community groups at neighbourhood level, carried out research for a wide range of agencies and contributed advice to government on various issues, including community online networks, social inclusion, public libraries and communities, and citizen participation. Kevin is an experienced facilitator and has developed

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Paul was previously manager of Liverpool City Council's Community Resources Unit and principal Community Care Development Manager for the council's Social Services, as well as having been a researcher and tutor in Liverpool University's Social Policy Unit. He has worked with the community sector in the city for more than 30 years and has substantial experience of undertaking research involving black and minority ethnic communities. His recent work includes reporting the findings of the Liverpool Fairness Commission; a review of the equality and diversity work of Liverpool Primary Care Trust; and research into the use of khat in Somali and Yemeni communities in Liverpool.

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Angus is a Senior Research Fellow at the Third Sector Research Centre (University of Birmingham), where he leads the Centre's below-the-radar research, exploring the experiences of small community-based organisations and black and minority ethnic and refugee/migrant groups.

Angus has a background in community development work, both in inner city areas and on peripheral estates. His research interests include urban regeneration, health and crime, as well as community-based education. Angus was previously Knowledge Manager with the National Evaluation of the Children's Fund (NECF) and worked with the Centre of Excellence in Interdisciplinary Mental Health at the University of Birmingham.

Angus is a board member of the international *Community Development Journal* and an associate of the Federation for Community Development Learning, and he has been involved in training and development work with non-governmental organisations in the UK, eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

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