Chapter 7

Self-employment amongst ethnic and migrant groups in the United Kingdom

by

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Summary

The United Kingdom's recent immigration history has been quite complex. Diverse immigration flows to the country since the late 1940s have resulted in the establishment of a very heterogeneous immigrant population. As a consequence of these migration patterns and the rising proportion of many ethnic minority groups who are native-born, analysis of self-employment among ethnic and immigrant groups in the United Kingdom has tended to focus on ethnic differences rather than those by immigrant status. However, the latter aspect does have an important role to play in influencing self-employment rates across ethnic groups.

The early literature on ethnic minority self-employment in the United Kingdom was typically sociological in nature, and focused mainly on Asian groups, who tended to display higher self-employment rates. More economic-oriented research, looking at the push and pull factors that are behind migrants' entrepreneurial decision, started in the late 1990s. Among the results of the latter, strong evidence was found to support the notion that low earnings from paid-employment push ethnic minority workers into self-employment, especially for less educated individuals. Another finding – which contrasts with the situation observed in other OECD countries – was that in the United Kingdom the probability to be self-employed is significantly lower from individuals from ethnic minority groups living in ethnic enclaves. Those results suggest that the local economic conditions have an important impact on rates of entrepreneurship among ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom.

More recent researches have pointed out to the evolution over time of the characteristics of migrant self-employment in the United Kingdom. Among other aspects, the determinants of the evolution of the self-employment propensity by ethnic groups have been analysed. In addition to the heterogeneous migration patterns, the evidence that has been surveyed also emphasises that the self-employment experience of immigrant and ethnic groups in the United Kingdom has varied considerably over time.

Only a relatively small fraction of self-employed from most ethnic minority groups in the United kingdom employ others, the exception being Chinese and Bangladeshis, who are heavily concentrated in the restaurant sector. Although governments tend to view high

levels of self-employment as a healthy indicator of entrepreneurial activity, large numbers of self-employed minorities is not by itself a good thing. Therefore, government policy needs to pay attention to both the quantity and quality of self-employment.

7.1. Recent migration patterns and composition of the immigrant population in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's recent immigration history has been quite diverse. Evidence of this is clearly displayed in Table 7.1, which shows the population of working-age immigrants at the end of 2009, by period of arrival and area of origin. Large scale immigration to the United Kingdom in the post-war period, mainly emanating from the New Commonwealth, began in the late 1940s, initially from the West Indies.[1] Flows from this area peaked in the 1960s, as shown in Table 7.1 by the relatively high proportion of working-age immigrants from the Americas who arrived in this decade and who are still resident in the United Kingdom. Asian immigrants also started to arrive around this time, especially from India. Notable inflows from Asia continued through the 1970s and 1980s as immigrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and China began settling in the United Kingdom in fairly large numbers.[2] Immigration from Asia has become more widespread in the last decade, with the result that around a half of working-age Asian immigrants residing in the United Kingdom at the end of 2009 had arrived since 1999. Cumulatively, these movements have resulted in an estimated working-age population of over 1.8 million Asian immigrants at the end of 2009.

The second largest group in Table 7.1 is immigrants from Africa, who are dominated by those arriving after 1990. Unsurprisingly given the geographical proximity of pre-2004 EU member states, EU-14 migrants have a noticeable presence in the United Kingdom, with arrivals from this area being fairly constant over time. European migrants have been split into two further categories to highlight the scale of immigration from new EU member states from central and eastern Europe (the EU-A8) to the United Kingdom since 2004. Flows from EU-A8 countries have been substantial, with an estimated 573 000 working-age migrants living in the United Kingdom at the end of 2009, having risen from a very small level at the start of the decade. More specifically, over 90% of EU-A8 migrants currently living in the United Kingdom have arrived in the last decade, the vast majority of these after 2004. The majority of recent EU-A8 migrants have found work, since the estimated number of EU-A8 migrants in employment at the end of 2009 was 481 000. The rapid growth in labour migration from central and eastern Europe is again demonstrated by an estimated workforce of just 61 000 EU-A8 migrants in the United Kingdom at the end of 2003.

Table 7.1. Period of arrival in the United Kingdom for working-age immigrants, Q4 2009

Percentage

	Pre-1960	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000-04	2005-09	Estimated working-age population
EU-14	4.8	9.1	11.3	16.3	24.6	12	21.9	849 000
EU-A8	0.1	0.3	0.3	1	4.5	12.3	81.5	573 000
Other Europe	3.8	9.6	7.3	5.7	22.9	21.1	29.6	353 000
Asia	1.1	6.3	11.3	11.5	18.7	18.8	32.2	1 830 000
Americas	2.1	14	9.3	10.4	23.3	12.9	28.2	502 000
Australasia	1.7	4.9	13.6	14.5	16.8	19.7	29	178 000
Africa	0.9	5.6	10.9	9.5	21.8	24.4	26.9	1 056 000
All immigrants	1.8	6.9	9.7	10.4	19.4	17.7	34.2	5 341 000

Note: The working-age population in the United Kingdom relates to men aged between 16 and 64 and women aged between 16 and 59.

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.

One of the main implications of these complex flows has been the establishment of a very heterogeneous immigrant population in the United Kingdom. This is particularly true for the large cities, most notably London, but also in other parts of the United Kingdom, especially following migration from the new member states since EU enlargement in 2004. The previous inflows of immigrants from the New Commonwealth have also produced a large and growing population of native-born offspring of immigrants. This can be seen in the final two columns of Table 7.2, which report the percentage of each ethnic group's working-age population who were born in the United Kingdom in 1991 and 2001. Apart from Whites, Black Caribbeans have the highest proportion of native-born individuals, whilst the percentage who were born abroad is highest amongst Bangladeshis and the Chinese. Clark and Drinkwater (2009b) also provide details of the rapidly expanding youth population of some ethnic groups. For example, the number of Black Africans and Chinese aged 16-24 increased by 52% and 49%, respectively, between 2001 and 2005.

Table 7.2. Self-employment by ethnic group in Britain

	Self-employment rate			Percentage UK-born	
	1991	2001	2003-06	1991	2001
Men					
White	16.6 (31.1)	17.0 (35.6)	17.3 (23.7)	95.4	94.9
Black Caribbean	9.1 (17.9)	13.0 (32.3)	15.8 (14.5)	44.1	54.6
Black African	12.2 (28.4)	13.5 (40.7)	10.5 (24.7)	23.3	19
Indian	23.7 (44.9)	21.4 (52.0)	18.3 (34.7)	15.1	27.2
Pakistani	26.6 (38.3)	26.5 (46.4)	31.3 (27.0)	15.2	27.3
Bangladeshi	18.8 (75.3)	19.1 (62.6)	15.7 (56.5)	6.8	13.4
Chinese	34.1 (58.8)	27.8 (68.1)	26.7 (67.0)	9.6	17.4
Other	13.4 (40.0)	16.2 (47.3)	16.0 (33.7)	_	_
Women					
White	6.0 (34.8)	7.3 (34.5)	7.4 (21.3)	95	94.2
Black Caribbean	2.0 (16.7)	3.3 (40.4)	3.8 (17.1)	44.6	58.7
Black African	4.4 (16.7)	4.5 (38.5)	3.8 (12.5)	22.2	18.3
Indian	11.5 (37.3)	10.3 (51.4)	7.7 (28.9)	14.7	27.2
Pakistani	17.6 (50.0)	9.9 (56.3)	8.0 (40.4)	18.3	31.3
Bangladeshi	9.1 (28.6)	5.9 (58.1)	8.3 (36.4)	8.1	14.4
Chinese	20.3 (54.9)	18.3 (62.1)	15.9 (50.0)	8.1	13.4
Other	5.5 (28.0)	7.3 (36.8)	6.8 (29.6)	_	_

Note: All figures relate to non-students of working age (16-59/64). The self-employment rate is calculated as the number of self-employed over the total in employment and expressed as a percentage. The percentage of the self-employed employing others are reported in parentheses. The percentage UK-born refers to just those living in England and Wales.

Source: Clark and Drinkwater (2010a), Clark and Drinkwater (2009a).

7.2. Main determinants and characteristics of self-employment amongst ethnic groups in the United Kingdom

As a consequence of these complex migration patterns and the rising proportion of many ethnic minority groups who are native-born, analysis of self-employment amongst ethnic and immigrant groups in the United Kingdom has tended to focus on ethnic differences rather than those by immigrant status. However, the latter aspect does have an important role to play in influencing self-employment rates across ethnic groups since more recent migrants can be capital constrained, whilst migrants may be more entrepreneurial in general because they are self-selected or if they are attracted to such activities by particular immigration policies.

The early United Kingdom literature on ethnic minority self-employment was typically sociological in its nature. Much of it also tended to focus on Asians groups (Aldrich *et al.*, 1981; Metcalf *et al.*, 1996), who have tended to display the highest self-employment rates. These studies emphasised the impact of ethnic geographical concentration and cultural factors on self-employment. Other studies such as Daly (1991) noted the rapid rise in self-employment amongst ethnic minority groups in the United Kingdom during the 1980s, a time when the Thatcher government introduced several policy initiatives in an attempt to create an enterprise culture, in a time of high unemployment. These and other factors combined to increase total United Kingdom self-employment from 2.70 million in 1984 to 3.54 million in 1990. This was followed by a period when the number of self-employed in the United Kingdom was fairly constant and even decreased in the late 1990s, falling to 3.26 million in 2000. Since then, self-employment has grown fairly steadily, reaching 3.85 million in 2009.

More economic-oriented research began in the late 1990s, with a series of papers by Clark and Drinkwater. In addition to incorporating cultural aspects into the theoretical background, since these forces may pull members of ethnic communities into self-employment, these papers also emphasised the role that economic factors might play in pushing such individuals into setting up their own businesses, especially because of the lower relative earnings that ethnic minority workers may achieve in the paid labour market due to discrimination. These issues were explored in a simple theoretical framework by Clark and Drinkwater (1998) and subsequently built upon by Clark and Drinkwater (2000), with the influence of cultural factors particularly emphasised in the latter paper.

Allied to their theoretical models, Clark and Drinkwater (1998, 2000) also examined large scale survey data, from the General Household Survey and the Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities, as well as microdata from the 1991 census, to test the importance of push and pull factors. Strong evidence was found to support the notion that low earnings from paid-employment push ethnic minority workers into self-employment, especially for less educated individuals.[3] Clark and Drinkwater (1998, 2000) examine the effect of enclaves but rather than ethnic minorities living in more ethnically concentrated parts of the United Kingdom having higher self-employment rates, by providing entrepreneurs with niche markets, they find that self-employment is depressed in such areas because of higher levels of competition and deprivation. Similarly, those with poorer English language skills had lower self-employment rates. Clark and Drinkwater (2000) also investigate the impact of religion on self-employment and find that individuals practising religions which place a high value on entrepreneurship, such as Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, had higher self-employment rates, even after controlling for ethnicity.

Research in this area was continued by Clark and Drinkwater (2010a and 2010b) using census microdata from 2001, in addition to 1991, and the labour force survey (LFS). 1991 was chosen as the starting point as an ethnicity was included in the United Kingdom Census for the first time in this year and ethnic minority self-employment had risen quite considerably over the 1980s. This enabled researchers to examine relatively large samples from each minority group using census microdata and also by pooling together several quarters of data from the LFS, as undertaken by Clark and Drinkwater (2010a) for the period between 2003 and 2006. These papers particularly focused on changes over time and the role that demographic factors, such as rising levels of educational attainment, the younger age profile and the higher proportion of native-born, have had on the evolving ethnic self-employment rates since the early 1990s. These trends are summarised in Table 7.2.

The table reports that self-employment is much higher for men than women for all ethnic groups, and the only group which has a notable proportion of self-employed women are the Chinese. For men, rates have been highest for the Chinese and Pakistanis. However, self-employment has fallen for some ethnic groups since 1991, especially for Indians and the Chinese. The self-employment rate for Whites has remained fairly steady. This group includes European immigrants, who have experienced some interesting recent changes in their self-employment rates. In particular, Drinkwater *et al.* (2009) report that only a very small percentage of recent EU-A8 migrants are self-employed, preferring to work in the paid labour market, which seems to dispel the myth of huge numbers of Polish migrants setting up as plumbers and builders in the United Kingdom following enlargement. This does however contrast with the position in the immediate period before enlargement since EU-A8 migrants could enter the United Kingdom as self-employed before the labour market was open to the majority of EU-A8 workers. For example, Drinkwater *et al.* (2009) report that amongst Polish migrants resident in the United Kingdom between 2004 and 2006, the self-employment rate was 32% for those arriving between 2000 and 2003, compared to just 4% for entrants after 2003. Clark and Drinkwater (2010b) report that whilst self-employment rates are similar for immigrants and natives for Whites, they are considerably lower for UK-born members of ethnic minority groups. Most notably, in 2001 the self-employment rate of Chinese men was 27.8% for immigrants but only 13.3% for natives.

Clark and Drinkwater (2010b) examine the changes that took place between 1991 and 2001 in greater detail by applying decomposition analysis to the census data. This reveals that the majority of the reduction in self-employment rates observed for Chinese and Indian men was due to their changing characteristics (endowments). In particular, further decomposing the characteristic effect into its constituent elements indicates that the main driving forces behind these changes were an increase in educational attainment as well as a higher proportion of unmarried individuals. For the combined group of Pakistani and Bangladeshi men, the small overall reduction in self-employment was caused by a positive coefficient (unexplained) effect, more or less offsetting the negative effect of characteristics.[4] Clark and Drinkwater (2010b) argue that this may be caused by the more limited opportunities for this group in paid-employment, possibly due to higher levels of discrimination, as well as possibly different preferences over issues such as isolation from the majority labour market.

Clark and Drinkwater (2010b) also undertake a detailed investigation of spatial differences in self-employment between ethnic groups in the United Kingdom. In common with their previous findings, they report that the probability of being self-employed is significantly lower for individuals from ethnic minority groups living in

areas which have a higher percentage of co-ethnics, with this effect being largest for the Chinese. This contrasts with the situation observed in some other OECD countries, where self-employment amongst ethnic or immigrant groups can be based around an "enclave" economy, in which self-sustaining communities are supported by a shared ethnicity, culture, language or religion. For example, Le (1999) reports a positive relationship between self-employment and the existence of ethnic enclaves in Australia and the United States. The role that the deprived nature of many ethnically concentrated areas in the United Kingdom may play in generating these results is further examined by analysing the effect that measures of unemployment and deprivation have on self-employment. It is found that the percentage of their own ethnic group and the unemployment rate in the area are positively correlated for each of the main ethnic minority groups in Britain and that both of these variables are negatively related to self-employment. Furthermore, the self-employment rate is found to fall significantly for Indians and a combined Pakistani/Bangladeshi group in areas which have higher levels of deprivation, with the largest effect observed for the latter grouping. Taken together, these findings suggest that local economic conditions have an important impact on rates of entrepreneurship amongst ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom, especially for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis.

Clark and Drinkwater (2009c) also explore differences in male self-employment between the native and overseas-born members of ethnic minority groups in the United Kingdom. In particular, they examine the self-employment adjustment of immigrant groups by focusing on two main issues. Firstly, they investigate how the probability of self-employment varies according to the amount of time that immigrants have spent in the United Kingdom relative to those who were born in the United Kingdom. Secondly, they analyse differences in the probability of self-employment between immigrants and native-born members of ethnic minority groups by estimating how much of the difference in self-employment rates can be explained by endowments of human capital. Their results indicate that the predicted probability of self-employment increases faster over the life-cycle for immigrants from Asian groups (Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Chinese) than it does for the native-born members of these groups. There are smaller differences for Whites and Blacks, with higher self-employment probabilities reported over the life-cycle for the native-born for Black Caribbeans and Black Africans. No significant differences are found between the self-employment rates of native and overseas-born members of ethnic minority groups once human capital is taken into account, despite large differences seen in the raw data for the Asian groups. They argue that the lower self-employment rates that are observed for native-born members of ethnic minority groups is largely accounted for by differences in human capital.

Table 7.2 also reports the percentage of self-employed men and women who employ others in their businesses. It can be seen that Chinese and Bangladeshi men are most likely to employ others and the propensity to work on their own is highest amongst Black African and Black Caribbean men. These differences are heavily influenced by the industrial distribution, which is also important for a number of other aspects of self-employment, including hours of work, which are found to be highest for the Chinese and Indians (Clark and Drinkwater, 2010a). Therefore, Table 7.3 shows changes in the industrial distribution of self-employment for men.[5] There are noticeable concentrations of self-employment for some ethnic groups. In particular, Bangladeshis and the Chinese are heavily clustered in Distribution/Hotels/Catering. This combined sector contains restaurants, with around three-quarters of the latter ethnic group involved in such

activities. There is also a high fraction, almost a half in 2003-06, of self-employed Pakistani men working in transport, which predominantly relates to taxi driving. The industrial distribution of self-employment is more evenly dispersed for other groups, although around a third of White and Black Caribbean self-employed men worked in the Construction industry in 2003-06.

Table 7.3. Industrial distribution of self-employed men in Britain by ethnic group

Percentages

	Manufacturing	Construction	Distribution, hotel, catering	Transport	Finance	Other
		1991				
White	8.6	31.5	21.7	6.7	12.5	19
Black Caribbean	5.3	38	20	13.5	9.4	14
Black African	4.4	5.9	27.9	22.1	13.3	26.5
Indian	9.8	8.4	55.5	4.3	10.5	11.4
Pakistani	5.4	2.9	56.3	25.4	5.1	4.9
Bangladeshi	3.9	0	79.2	3.9	5.2	7.8
Chinese	0.9	0.5	85.5	0.9	6.8	5.5
Other	6.3	9.7	40	4.9	20.8	18.4
		2001				
White	10	27	18.2	7.2	19.4	18.4
Black Caribbean	10.6	27	17.7	9.5	21	14.2
Black African	7.8	8	14.5	17.4	33.9	18.4
Indian	7.4	8.2	46.5	9.1	15.6	13.2
Pakistani	8.6	5.2	36.1	32.7	11	6.5
Bangladeshi	2.6	2.6	63.7	13.2	11	7
Chinese	4.3	4.5	72.8	0.7	11.4	6.3
Other	7.2	12.9	31.6	11.4	18.4	18.5
		2003-06				
White	7.1	33	13.9	8	19.3	18.7
Black Caribbean	6.4	34.9	18.3	10.3	15.9	14.3
Black African	3.7	11.1	18.5	19.8	37	9.9
Indian	6.8	8	43.5	11.4	17.4	13
Pakistani	2	2.5	34.2	46.2	10.3	4.9
Bangladeshi	0	1.6	65.6	26.2	3.3	3.3
Chinese	3.1	0	75.5	3.1	5.1	13.3
Other	3.6	13.9	34	11	22.8	14.8

Source: Clark and Drinkwater (2010a).

7.3. Conclusion and policy recommendations

In addition to the heterogeneous migration patterns to the United Kingdom, the evidence that has been surveyed above also emphasises that the self-employment experience of immigrant and ethnic groups in the United Kingdom has varied considerably. Self-employment rates have typically been very low for the Black groups, although these have increased slightly over time. In contrast, self-employment rates have been much higher for Asian groups but have decreased quite noticeably for some groups, such as the Chinese and Indians. It has been argued that this has been caused by demographic factors, namely the transition of young and well-educated second generation immigrants into the paid labour market, whereas first generation immigrants often

became self-employed because of restricted opportunities elsewhere in the labour market. Self-employment rates have remained high for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, and these groups also tend to be concentrated in particular sectors, such as retail, restaurants and taxi driving, often working long hours for relatively low incomes.

Moreover, only a relatively small fraction, typically a third or less, of self-employees from most ethnic minority groups employ others.[6] Thus, apart from a few high-profile examples, ethnic minority entrepreneurs tend not to create large numbers of jobs but are usually sole traders. In terms of ethnic groups, the exceptions to this are Chinese and Bangladeshi men, who are heavily concentrated in the restaurant sector. Therefore, although governments tend to view high levels of self-employment as a healthy indicator of entrepreneurial activity, large numbers of self-employed minorities and immigrants is not necessarily a good thing. This may be due to higher educational attainment opening up new opportunities in the paid labour market for some groups, whereas these remain limited for others, possibly because of higher levels of discrimination or differences in preferences. Therefore, government policy needs to pay attention to both the quantity and quality of self-employment.

Notes

1. See Hatton and Wheatley Price (2005) for further information on United Kingdom immigration history.

2. A substantial amount of Asian migrants have entered the United Kingdom through reuniting with family members rather than as labour migrants themselves. More recently, the number of overseas students has risen sharply and this has been particularly boosted by those arriving from China.

3. However, Clark *et al*. (1998) report that self-employment incomes are lower for ethnic minorities in comparison to Whites, possibly due to consumer discrimination. Clark and Drinkwater (2000) also find substantial variation in self-employment incomes between ethnic groups, with the Chinese and Indians having relatively large proportions with high incomes and Pakistanis and Bangladeshis relatively high proportions with low incomes.

4. The coefficient or unexplained effect in a decomposition relates to the amount of the differential that cannot be attributed to differences in observable characteristics. It therefore refers to unmeasured factors, which include discrimination and preferences.

5. These are not reported for women since sample sizes are too small.

6. However this is also the case for Whites, and given the types of industries in which the different ethnic groups typically work, it is only the Black groups where a lower percentage of the self-employed tend to employ others amongst ethnic minority groups.

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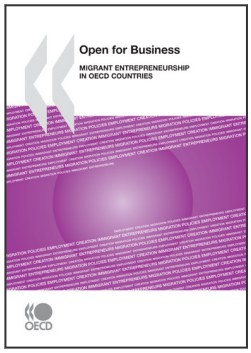

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