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London Borough of
Tower Hamlets

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PROMOTING EMPLOYMENT EMPLOYERS' FACTSHEET



TOWER HAMLETS

Key Messages from our Research

1. Women want to work – an absolute figure for the number of women wanting to work is difficult to get to but our research found many Bangladeshi and Somali women in Tower Hamlets with primary school age children wanted to work and are actively seeking work. Despite this, Tower Hamlets has the second highest proportion of economically inactive working age women in Great Britain at 44% compared to 30% for Great Britain.¹
2. Girls in Tower Hamlets are achieving better A-level results than boys. Within the Bangladeshi community girls are achieving 47 points score higher than Bangladeshi boys and 81 points higher than score than boys in general.
3. Both childcare and caring for disabled or elderly family members, often presents as a significant factor constraining Bangladeshi and Somali women's ability to take up paid work and restricts the range of employment options available to them.

Background

Reducing poverty and tackling inequality are central aspirations of the Tower Hamlets Community Plan. For many individuals, moving into employment is a key mechanism for raising household income.

Almost 78%² of the borough's Bangladeshi women are economically inactive. Accurate local data on Somali residents is limited but research by the GLA in 2005 found that in London only 16% of the Somali population are in employment.³ It is estimated that amongst women the level of employment is even lower.

To help strengthen our understanding of the barriers these women face when accessing employment, the council commissioned two research projects (Life Chances, Life Choices and Women and Worklessness in Tower Hamlets)⁴ in 2011. The council consulted women from both communities and the support agencies that work with them on the findings of the research. Following this funding was secured for the Overcoming the Barriers projects which sought to draw on the findings of the research to devise new models to support women to move towards the labour market. Through the project three community organisations were commissioned to work with women of different ages from these communities to get them job ready and help them into employment. The findings from the research, the consultations and the pilot projects have been used to inform this Factsheet designed to brief and support employers and employment service providers who might work with Bangladeshi and Somali women.

¹ ONS, Nomis, September 2012

² ONS, Annual Population Survey (four year average, 2008-11)

³ Understanding workless people and communities: A literature review, by IES (Institute for Employment Studies) on behalf of DWP, (2005)

⁴ "Life chances, life choices: exploring patterns of work and worklessness among Bangladeshi and Somali women in Tower Hamlets by Naila Kabeer and Peroline Ainsworth (June 2011) and Women and Worklessness in Tower Hamlets A multi-factor risk analysis by Les Mayhew and Gillian Harper (January 2011)

What the evidence shows?

- Many women want employment that will give them 'work life balance' and part-time, term-time, home working or job-share posts are particularly attractive:
"Most mothers want to raise their children as well as work, so their life wasn't restricted to just their home and children".⁵
- High child care and travelling costs prevent some women from working. Our research also found that many Bangladeshi women were also caring for their elderly or disabled in-laws. 3.7% of the population in TH (mainly women) provide more than 20 hours of unpaid care per week.
- Qualifications gained outside of the UK are not widely recognised and this affects both Somali and Bangladeshi community. It was one of the major obstacles to gaining employment in their professions.
- Even when women had completed training courses and gained qualifications they were still not able to secure employment because they lacked direct work experience.
- For newly arrived and older Somali and Bangladeshi women lack of confidence in English language skills was one of the key barriers to employment. Even in professions where they feel fluency in language is not necessary such as cleaning jobs. *"Now even to be a cleaner you need to speak English fluently and have experience. It was much easier before".*
- Typically lack of language skills had a multiple impact in that it reduced

women's self confidence in English speaking environments. Even with good English skills they lacked confidence in using them in unfamiliar environments.

- Many Somali and Bangladeshi Women attributed their failure to find work to discrimination including their perceived Islamic identity. The recent APPG inquiry into Ethnic Minority Female Unemployment: Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage women (Nov 2012) found discrimination was present at every stage of the recruitment process – when assessing applications, during interviews, at recruitment agencies and also in the workplace itself. Discrimination based on name and accent was also uncovered both in data received and from personal testimony⁶. Also in 2005 Equality and Human Rights Commission found that 1 in 5 Bangladeshi women under 35 experienced negative comments about wearing religious dress:⁷

"There are not many girls in the company that wear hijabs and there are 10,000 employees. I've had a lot of people come up to me and say 'I don't mean to be racist, but....' "I think some retail places didn't take me because of my headscarf"⁸.

How employers can support women into employment

⁶ All Party Parliamentary Group on Race and Community, Ethnic Minority Female Unemployment: Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi Heritage Women, First Report of Session 2012–2013.

⁷ Promote People and Stereotypes, Busting the myths about ethnic minority women at work, 2007, Equal Opportunities Commission

⁸ Life chances, life choices: exploring patterns of work and worklessness among Bangladeshi and Somali women in Tower Hamlets (June 2011), Naila Kabeer and Peroline Ainsworth

⁵ Poverty and Ethnicity Study, April – June 2010 in Tower Hamlets and Haringey

- **Could your firm offer flexible working?**

It may be worth considering the business case for this. The Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2006 survey found that over 90 per cent of young people surveyed, both boys and girls, wanted to balance career and family life in the future.⁹ Flexible working can be a way of retaining valued employees and their skills. You don't want your best people to have to choose between their job and their family life. Evidence suggests that when firms are able to accommodate their employee's needs, they feel extra loyalty. BT, for example, introduced flexible working 20 years ago as part of their business strategy. They reported that absenteeism fell by 20%, accommodation costs down by £500m, and productivity up by 30%.

- **How can your firm support parents and carers?**

Even if your firm cannot offer child care your company can sign post women to organisations that can. Alternatively you can be creative and have other things in place for example, an agreement with local or community childcare facilities to prioritise your employees or to offer reduced rate because you are able to pay them directly out of your employee's salary – thereby guaranteeing income for them.

- **Is your recruitment policy and approach to workforce development flexible enough to spot talent?**

People with overseas qualifications and experience might have transferable skills. Most people are very willing and happy to get on the job training. Kabeer and Ainsworth¹⁰

research found that the support and in job placement and training facilitated many women's entry into work.

"I know a woman who was a qualified midwife in Somalia, she had a hard time getting work but with the help of Praxis she is now working at the Royal London Hospital. But it's a single organisation and not big enough of help everybody".

- **Do you consider whether the vacancies you have require someone with fluent English or can it be filled and performed by someone with limited English?**
- **Can your company offer English or language development as part of training for staff?** Evidence shows people tend to learn faster and better as part of on the job training.
- **Can your company offer voluntary work experience or apprenticeships?** Kabeer and Ainsworth's (2011) research found that voluntary work provided a crucial stepping stone for a number of women. It provided much needed work experience before they could find paid work. Some were able to transfer their voluntary status into paid employment by proving their competence in the workplace.

"I am doing voluntary work with a local co-op, selling fruit and vegetables. It is all about selling stuff and now I think I can work in Waitrose and Sainsbury's. They are similar things...I can use the till and things...."

Poverty and Ethnicity Study (2010) found that for newly arrived people one of the major obstacles to securing employment is not being able to provide references from someone

⁹ Sex and Power (2008), Equality and Human Rights Commission

¹⁰ Life chances, life choices: exploring patterns of work and worklessness among Bangladeshi and Somali women in Tower Hamlets (June 2011), Naila Kabeer and Peroline Ainsworth

within UK. Voluntary work will not only increase access to work experience but will improve their chances of getting references.

- **Can your organisation offer work experience and voluntary work placement for women needing support with language and confidence?**

Our consultation with Bangladeshi women in Tower Hamlets found that many of the young newly arrived Bangladeshi women left Bangladesh to marry and came to England in mid education. Many missed opportunities to work in Bangladesh. Women say that work experience will give them an opportunity to practice their English outside the classroom, build confidence, and learn about the 'world of work' and work ethics.

"I'd like to work, to do something for myself. I am ready for work but I am scared of interviews. I don't have any work experience, work will help me with English and I am shy. I need support, I am not afraid of work..."

- **Does your company / organisation have an inclusive culture which is transparent and is communicated well?**

Being proactive in communicating that you are keen to open job opportunities to people whatever their background can help address concerns that women may face discrimination in recruitment or progression.

- **Does your company / organisation recognise that the things that facilitate ethnic minority women being in work maybe different to what the company offers to other staff, although it may be no more costly to address?** You might want to consider developing the cultural intelligence of line managers so they

are able to confront discrimination and support a diverse team. In 2006 Equality and Human Rights Commission found that of those in employment Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean women are more likely than white women to be graduates but despite their qualifications they are five times more likely to be unemployed than white British women with a degree. The APPG inquiry (Nov 2012) recommended organisations to adopt a policy of blank name job application forms.

- **Do you have a mentoring scheme in your company? Can you offer your time, skills and knowledge and be a mentor?** Mentors can be key in providing support to new employees to keep them in employment by supporting and guiding them through new environment and by continuing to build their confidence.

Useful Contacts:

National agencies

Ethnic Minority Employment Group (DWP)
<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/emag/>

Business in the Community

http://www.bitcdiversity.org.uk/research/rfo_bame_women/index.html