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Mapping ethnic minority women entrepreneurs' support initiatives: Experiences from the UK

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by

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on mapping the support initiatives available to ethnic minority women entrepreneurs in the UK. It also compares the support provided by targeted initiatives to mainstream programmes in order to identify possible gaps. The study draws on evidence from previous research focused on promoting diversity and inclusion in business innovation, and adapts the entrepreneurial ecosystem model to frame its analysis. Our findings highlight the fragmented nature of existing ethnic minority women's support networks, and emphasize the need to further develop *intermediaries* and *networks* (as well as to clarify the distinction between them) within entrepreneurial ecosystems. Furthermore, there is a need to pay greater attention to the interdependence of different elements within ecosystems, including the impact of broader socio-economic factors on minority groups. Recommendations for policy and practice are also highlighted.

1. Introduction

Government departments and agencies including those which support innovation and entrepreneurship have clear policy statements on equality of opportunity by protected characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and in some cases ability status. Ethnic minorities and women entrepreneurs have captured the particular attention of policy makers, with successive governments introducing a range of policy initiatives designed to increase their enterprise levels (Carter et al., 2015; Marlow et al., 2008). This has been a gradual process since 2003, when the UK government introduced the Strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise (SFWE) (Forson, 2006). Subsequently, the UK Equality Act of 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (Advance HE 2019¹), has made equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) mainstream in UK policy making.

Part of the context to these initiatives has been the increasing percentage of women entrepreneurs (UENI, 2021), as well as the significant impact that minority businesses

¹ [Public sector equality duty | Advance HE \(advance-he.ac.uk\)](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/public-sector-equality-duty) (accessed July 2nd 2021)

make to the UK economy (Legrain and Fitzgerald, 2021; Roberts et al., 2020). For example, Innovate UK (the UK government's innovation agency) with a role to drive productivity and economic growth by supporting businesses and encouraging diversity within innovation commissioned a report on women in innovation in 2016, which led to the launching of the “Women in Innovation” awards to showcase successful women innovators and to inspire others (Lawton Smith and Vorley, 2021).

However, entrepreneurship policies still tend to perceive women entrepreneurs as a homogenous group (Forson, 2006). Similarly, research on entrepreneurial diversity has focused on specific dimensions of diversity. Studies on ethnic entrepreneurs have emphasized the impact of ethnic culture on entrepreneurial motives (Romero and Valdez, 2016), while studies on women's entrepreneurship has focused on the experiences of white middle class founders (Knight, 2016; Pettersson and Lindberg, 2013). The experiences of ethnic minority women entrepreneurs have therefore received limited attention by both scholars and policymakers. Moreover as evidenced by the recent pandemic, those situated at the intersections of identity categories such as age, race, ethnicity, class, etc. tend to be more vulnerable in times of crises (Martinez Dy and Jayawarna, 2020).

This chapter contributes to this knowledge gap by analysing the type of support available to ethnic minority women entrepreneurs in the UK. It maps the support initiatives available to this minority group, and examines the specific needs that existing initiatives are providing e.g. networking events, trainings, mentorship, in comparison with mainstream programmes, in order to identify possible gaps. The chapter draws on evidence from two previous studies. This first is a 2019 study implemented by the Innovation Caucus² on behalf of Innovate UK that adopted an intersectional perspective to understanding the challenges to supporting diversity in business innovation (Vorley et al., 2020). The second is a study examining the geography of support for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and entrepreneurs with disabilities (Lawton Smith, 2020-21³).

² <https://innovationcaucus.co.uk/>

³ [Making Business Innovation Accessible to Diverse Groups — Birkbeck, University of London \(bbk.ac.uk\)](https://www.bbk.ac.uk/business-innovation-accessible-diverse-groups)

Additionally, we draw on the entrepreneurial ecosystem model (Stam, 2015) to frame our analysis of the support initiatives available to ethnic minority women entrepreneurs. Our findings highlight the fragmented nature of existing support networks, and emphasize the need to further develop *intermediaries* and *networks* (as well as to clarify the distinction between them) within entrepreneurial ecosystems. The need to pay greater attention to the interconnectedness of different elements, including wider structural factors, within ecosystems is also highlighted. The rest of the chapter is organized as follows. We discuss the context for women's entrepreneurship support initiatives, as well as the entrepreneurial ecosystem model framework in the following section. The research methodology is discussed next, before presenting the main findings and analysis. Recommendations for policy and practice are also highlighted.

2. Exploring women's entrepreneurship support initiatives

2.1 Context

While the gendered nature of entrepreneurship and innovation is widely acknowledged (Alsos et al., 2013; Jennings and Brush,, 2013), entrepreneurship policies still tend to focus on women entrepreneurs' inadequacies or extraordinariness (Ahl and Nelson, 2015; Coleman et al., 2019). A systematic review carried out on women's entrepreneurship policy over a 30-year period (1983 – 2015) indicates that policy implications from women's entrepreneurship research are mostly vague, conservative, and centred around identifying and fixing skills gaps in women entrepreneurs; resulting in the isolation and individualization of problems faced (Foss et al., 2019).

In the UK, ethnic minorities and women entrepreneurs have for a long time captured the attention of policy makers, with successive governments introducing a range of policy initiatives designed to increase their enterprise levels (Carter et al., 2015; Marlow et al., 2008). However, a coherent national strategic approach to the

development of women's enterprise policy was missing from the UK policy landscape until the launch of the Strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise (SFWE) in 2003 (Forson, 2006). This umbrella document formed the basis for all initiatives aimed at supporting women's entrepreneurship, and had four action priorities: business support provision, access to finance, childcare and caring responsibilities and transition from benefits to self-employment (Forson, 2006).

Majority of these policy initiatives treated these two minority groups as distinct, as can be seen in the simultaneous establishment of the Ethnic Minority Business Task Force and the Women's Enterprise Task Force (2007–2009) (Carter et al., 2015). Women's entrepreneurship was valued for the potential impact on the economy, while ethnic minority businesses were valued for their role in promoting social cohesion and multiculturalism (Carter et al., 2015). Furthermore, most initiatives perceived women entrepreneurs as a homogenous group, and assumed that ethnic minority women entrepreneurs would automatically benefit from all gender-based policies (Forson, 2006).

Similarly, research on entrepreneurial diversity has focused on specific dimensions of diversity in isolation. On the one hand, studies on ethnic entrepreneurs have historically emphasised ethnic culture as the main motivation for these communities' engagement (or lack thereof) in entrepreneurship (Romero and Valdez, 2016). Research on women's entrepreneurship on the other hand has homogenized women entrepreneurs by focusing primarily on the challenges faced by white middle class women (Pettersson and Lindberg, 2013). As a result, the experiences of ethnic minority women entrepreneurs has been largely underestimated by both academics and policy makers (Knight, 2016).

Greater attention to the heterogeneity of women entrepreneurs is therefore necessary, given that the entrepreneurial process is influenced by the privileges and disadvantages created by intersecting identity categories such as gender, race, age, ethnicity and class (Martinez Dy, 2019; Wingfield and Taylor, 2016). Besides, as evidenced in the recent Covid-19 pandemic, the impact of these differences can be amplified during times of crises, especially for those positioned at the intersections

(Martinez Dy and Jayawarna, 2020). A more integrated approach that recognizes the myriad of economic and social relationships in which ethnic minority businesses are embedded is vital (Edwards et al., 2016; Owalla et al., 2021; Ram and Jones, 2008). The working lives and experiences of ethnic minority women entrepreneurs is influenced by their race, ethnicity and class (Forson, 2006).

2.2 Entrepreneurial ecosystems, equality, diversity and inclusion

Even though self-employment and entrepreneurship are important aspects of the labour market experience for minority groups in the UK (BEIS, 2018; Jones and Latreille, 2011; ONS, 2018), public policies within this area are characterised by a number of unresolved tensions such as the presence of perceived or actual discrimination; the quantity and quality of diverse enterprises; and the potential market failure in the support provided to these communities (Carter et al., 2015).

Research suggests that when it comes to many aspects of entrepreneurial ecosystems, women entrepreneurs are at a disadvantage (Brush et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial ecosystems can be defined as a set of interdependent actors and factors that are mutually reinforcing in such a way as to facilitate entrepreneurial activity (Stam, 2015). The ecosystem elements include the social (formal and informal institutions) and physical conditions impacting human interactions, as well as the systemic conditions (i.e. networks, leadership, finance, talent, knowledge and support services). The presence of these elements and the interaction between them play an important role in the success of an ecosystem (Stam, 2015). While this provides a general framework for policy analysis, at issue is the degree to which ecosystems are open to and supportive of all forms of entrepreneurship (Kruger and David, 2020).

In focusing on ethnic minority women entrepreneurs, our study aims to highlight possible gaps and specificities that need to be taken into account when policy interventions are proposed. Key elements specific to inclusive (ethnic minority women) entrepreneurial ecosystems and the relevant geography are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Elements specific to ethnic minority women entrepreneurs

Ecosystem elements	Ethnic minority women entrepreneur support
<i>Intermediaries</i> – supply of support services by a variety of intermediaries can substantially lower entry barriers for new entrepreneurial projects, and reduce the time to market of innovations.	Ethnic minority specific support networks or networks that have a high level of BAME women members.
<i>Knowledge</i> - from both public and private organizations.	Access to localised or national specialised support or to support which has a high representation of ethnic minority women entrepreneurs.
<i>Access to financing</i> - preferably provided by investors with entrepreneurial knowledge.	Financial support that has a high understanding of the specific issues faced by ethnic minority women entrepreneurs.
<i>Demand</i> -Strong potential market demand. Good access to customers in domestic and foreign markets.	Not necessarily ethnic minority specific market demand.
<i>Talent</i> - Broad, deep talent pool of employees. Both technical workers and business-oriented workers (sales, marketing etc.).	Talent availability, particularly locally.
<i>Leadership</i> - A strong group of entrepreneurs who are visible, accessible and committed to the region being a great place to start and grow a company.	Role models, leaders of influential organisations which can shape advocacy on behalf of ethnic minority women entrepreneurs.
<i>Formal Institutions</i> - Good quality government and friendly regulatory framework for entrepreneurship.	How government and government agencies provide support for specific groups – is it understood to be sympathetic and accessible to ethnic minority women entrepreneurs – is the language welcoming?
<i>Connectivity infrastructure</i> - Good road, rail, air, and broadband connections giving access to customers, suppliers, collaborators.	Not specific to ethnic minority women entrepreneurs.
<i>Entrepreneurial culture</i> - Positive social attitudes to entrepreneurship and extent to which it is common.	Positive attitudes towards ethnic minority women entrepreneurs at local, regional and national levels.
<i>Networks</i> - Large number of events to which entrepreneurs can connect. A well-connected community of start-ups and entrepreneurs along with engaged and visible investors, advisors, mentors and supporters.	Local networks and events that profile and support ethnic minority women entrepreneurs.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Stam (2015) model

A key theme in understanding barriers within entrepreneurial ecosystems for ethnic minority women relates to degrees of openness. The assumption that all entrepreneurs have equal access to resources, support and success outcomes within an ecosystem rarely holds in practice (Brooks et al., 2019; Brush et al., 2019). Substantial evidence indicates that women entrepreneurs differ significantly from their male counterparts in terms of participation, access to resources and outcomes within ecosystems (Berger and Kuckertz, 2016; Brush et al., 2019). This applies particularly at the local level, but also applies nationally.

Furthermore, inequalities existing within ecosystems do not occur in isolation, which means that there is a need to address the broader socio-economic factors influencing women entrepreneurs participation and access to resources within ecosystems (Marlow and McAdam, 2013; O'Brien and Cooney, 2019). While challenges in accessing finance is common for all start-ups, the challenge increases when examining women entrepreneurs' access to equity capital (Brush et al., 2019; Klingler-Vidra, 2018), with ethnic minority women entrepreneurs facing the largest disparities. Wright et al. (2015) argue that if women-led businesses had the same access to resources, this would eliminate the pervasive gender gap in business performance. However, in reality women entrepreneurs typically start with lower resources and perceive higher barriers in accessing finance than their male counterparts (Wright et al., 2015). For example, a report on venture capital funding in the UK during the period 2009 to 2019, indicates that Black female founders received only 0.02% of the total amount invested (Brodnock, 2020).

A report by the British Business Bank (2020) also finds that more Black (37%) and Asian and Other Ethnic Minority background (36%) female business owners were likely to report zero profits in 2019 compared to White male business owners (16%). Even when societal inequalities and established gender roles, such as having primary caring duties for children and elderly relatives, are taken into account, women entrepreneurs still experience less success (British Business Bank, 2020). Location also plays a role. There is uneven geography of access to finance irrespective of ethnicity and gender. While the majority of venture capital investments are made in London (72%), this area was found to be the toughest place in the UK to be as an entrepreneur, with just 71% of business owners in London reporting a profit in 2019

(British Business Bank, 2020; Diversity VC and OneTech, 2019). Differences between London and other regions are linked to a higher density of start-ups, tougher market competition, higher costs of living and greater disparity between poorer and wealthier neighbourhoods (British Business Bank, 2020). The role of place in influencing access to resources and entrepreneurial opportunities therefore needs to be further examined (Blake and Hanson, 2005). Mapping the landscape for ethnic minority women entrepreneurs' support initiatives in the UK regions will help to shed light on these geographical specificities (Berglund et al., 2016).

Female founders' access to networks and social support is also influenced by perceived discrimination. A study by Davidson et al. (2010) of 40 ethnic minority women entrepreneurs found that majority had experienced some sort of discrimination either due to their gender, ethnicity or both. As a result, many respondents reported difficulties in accessing different types of formal social support, e.g. business and financial support. Informal support by respondents' families was therefore a key source of both emotional and instrumental support (see also Fielden and Davidson, 2012).

It therefore follows that policy initiatives aiming at improving entrepreneurial ecosystems require a more holistic understanding of the individual stakeholders involved, as well as the institutional environment within which ecosystems are embedded (Foss et al., 2019; Henry et al., 2017). Information on the role of media and advocacy as a function of ecosystems is also missing explicitly in these analytical frameworks. This calls for a greater awareness of the complex challenges that intersecting categories of gender, ethnicity, class, nationality etc., might present for ethnic minority women entrepreneurs in different regions of the UK – often for different reasons. Implementing policies that go beyond simply reducing gender inequality will ensure that ecosystems fulfil their true potential (Berger and Kuckertz, 2016). Besides, there is a need to shift focus from purely boosting women's participation in entrepreneurship to focusing on improving the sustainability of women-led firms (Marlow et al., 2008).

3 The geography of initiatives supporting ethnic minority women entrepreneurs

3.1 Methodology

This study builds on evidence that formed the report published by [Innovate UK](#) in 2020 (Vorley et al. 2020) which identified the barriers, challenges, opportunities and support needs for minority ethnic groups and disabled people to participate in business innovation. While this report provided insights into motivations and challenges of the entrepreneurs, the purpose of the follow-on research project was to understand and explain where support for innovators in BAME and disabled groups is available in the UK.

The focus is on the networks that exist to provide direct support such as mentoring and raising access to finance. The study addresses three research questions through three empirical stages, the first of which provides the evidence for the analysis of ethnic minority women entrepreneurs. First, what are the national and regional institutional contexts in which support organisations for BAME and disabled innovators operate and to what extent do they affect their ability to function? Second, how does UK business innovation support compare with that in other countries such as the USA? Third, in what ways could public policy initiatives be improved to help such organisations in delivering support for business innovation?

4 Findings and analysis

The mapping exercise identified outside of London 34 networks, 18 BAME ~~and 13 for disabled entrepreneurs~~. Two of these cover both and there are a further two which are now defunct. The highest concentration is in the West Midlands - 5 BAME. In London another 29 organisations were identified. Of these 16 support BAME entrepreneurs and ~~8 disabled entrepreneurs~~, and 5 more offer general business services for BAME and disabled entrepreneurs including for social enterprises.

Table 2: Geographical distribution of support initiatives

Region	BAME	General support for BAME & those with disabilities
Scotland	3	0
Northern Ireland	0	1
North East	0	1
North West	1	0
Yorkshire and Humberside	1	0
East Midlands	1	0
West Midlands	5	0
East of England	1	1
South East	2	0
Wales	2	0
South West	2	0
London	16	5
Totals	34	8

Source: Adapted from Lawton Smith (2021)

Only a small number are ethnic minority women-led entrepreneurial networks (Table 3). In addition, there are influential ethnic minority women leading initiatives to support ethnic minority entrepreneurs in general. These will be included in the discussion of ethnic minority women entrepreneurs.

Table 3: Initiatives directed at ethnic minority women entrepreneurs

<i>BAME network organisations</i>		
Hatch Female Founders London	<p>https://femalefounders.london/</p> <p>Run BAME female founders programme. Focus on under-represented entrepreneurs. This selective 4-month programme is for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women who want to explore new revenue streams, cost structures and ways to market. Expert-led sessions on core business areas (including sales, finance, marketing, branding, and leadership). One-to-one technical support, business coaching and expert consulting. Access to networks & a supportive community of female founders.</p>	Practical programmes and support for female founders to succeed at business and life.
One Tech Capital Enterprise London	<p>Diversity & Inclusion CE (capitalenterprise.org)</p> <p>Weareonetech.org</p> <p>Aim is to boost access to investment and entrepreneurial support opportunities for tech startups founded by women and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.</p>	Investment and entrepreneurial support.
WCAN London	<p>WCAN Professional & Personal Development for Black Women</p> <p>WCAN is a young social enterprise dedicated to the personal and professional development of black women. Hosts events for black women entrepreneurs.</p>	Event specifically for black women who have an interest in starting a company or venture capital. www.wcan.uk/bwii
Black Young Professionals Network (BYP)	<p>byp-network.com</p> <p>The BYP network was founded by the need to connect Black professionals and students from all over the world for role model visibility, career opportunities, business support and ultimately to solve our own problems.</p>	Business support including brand promotion, visibility, role models, networking.
AMINA - Muslim Women's Resource Centre Scotland	<p>(mwrc.org.uk)</p> <p>Empowerment via Enterprise (EVE) Project offers innovative and interactive enterprise support to Muslim and Minority Ethnic women across the city of Dundee. We aim to help women utilise their skills, experience and ideas to explore and ultimately start their own business.</p>	Start-up support.
Empower women for Change – Scotland	<p>What we do – Empower Women for Change</p> <p>Supporting African youth and women entrepreneurs.</p>	training, workshops, advice sessions, coaching and mentoring.
<i>Organisations with leading roles played by BAME</i>		

<i>women</i>		
Yorkshire Asian Business Association (YABA) Yorkshire	YABA was created to provide a voice for the Yorkshire Asian Business Community, research has shown that the community makes an enormous contribution to UK. yabauk.com	Advocacy, networking bespoke events, mentoring and support services.
ABCC Birmingham	ABCC are here for all businesses. It aims to champion their successes, be firm in the face of adversity, and supportive through tough times. ABCC acts as an advocate for Asian businesses and speaks as an influential voice for the views and opinions of its members, aiming to represent their business needs. ABCC respect for women pledge.	Advocacy Networking and training Marketing support, Networking, Signposting to other organisations e.g. universities and government schemes. Commitment to women entrepreneurs.
We are Tech women	Over the past four years has helped thousands of women in tech enhance their careers through our events, conferences and awards. They have also worked with over 40 multi-sector corporate organisations helping them to attract, retain and develop their female tech talent. WeAreTechWomen currently has a membership of 15,000 diverse female members women working across a multitude of industries and tech disciplines.	Advocacy, networking, upskilling.
Bright Futures Women's Leadership and Enterprise Programme Scotland	Funded by Scottish Government and The European Social Fund this program provides support to Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants who wish to develop their leadership and enterprise skills. Program brings together women from all walks of life into a shared learning environment where their leadership and entrepreneurial skills are not only recognised and developed but also applied to inspire others.	Enterprise support for ethnic minority women entrepreneurs.
<i>National organisations</i>		
The National Black Women's Network	http://nbwn.org/about_nbwn.html NBWN is a non-profit organisation dedicated to raising the status and position of women in all walks of life. It provides dynamic initiatives, enabling women from diverse backgrounds and occupations to develop strong professional and social contacts; high quality training and education programmes; leadership and national recognition through the forum of networking.” It brings together entrepreneurs, peers, industry experts and specialists for inspiring,	Networking, training, advocacy.

	professional and valuable networking opportunities to generate leads and expand your referral and contact base.	
APPG for BAME business people Secretariat, Diana Chrouch, Chrouch Consulting	<p>Home APPG BAME (appgbamebusiness.co.uk)</p> <p>The All Party Parliamentary Group for BAME Business Owners aims to promote the advancement of businesses owned by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people for the overall benefit of the UK economy. We support economic growth and social mobility through inclusive entrepreneurship and leading an evidence-based business case for greater integration of BAME owned businesses into industrial planning and policy making.</p>	Advocacy.
<i>Awareness raising initiatives</i>		
Forward Ladies	<p>50 Must-Follow BAME Female Entrepreneurs, Influencers & Speakers in 2020 - FL (forwardladies.com)</p> <p>It is still not clear to many outside of the BAME community how racial biases can manifest themselves in the workplace and one way you can educate yourself is to follow outspoken BAME female leaders who are doing great work to level the playing field.</p>	Advocacy.
Real Business	<p>5 inspirational black female UK entrepreneurs - (realbusiness.co.uk)</p> <p>Highlights that firms owned by women of colour have grown at more than double the rate of all women-owned businesses, and women-owned businesses in general have grown twice as fast in the last year than they have over the previous five. Often going unnoticed, the women who start and run these businesses are making waves in a number of industries as they put their skills, knowledge, and motivation into building successful businesses and brands.</p>	Advocacy.

Source: Lawton Smith (2021)

4.1 What does the evidence tell us?

We now take each element of the modified entrepreneurial ecosystems approach shown in Table 1 above to assess the state of support for ethnic minority women entrepreneurs. The mapping exercise identified 13 ethnic minority specific entrepreneurial networks. Of these very few were ethnic minority women specific. Of these three were in London and two in Scotland. This suggests that the ethnic minority women entrepreneurial ecosystem with regard to *intermediaries* in the UK is under-developed and very geographically fragmented.

This is in spite of the growing national recognition of the prevalence of ethnic minority women entrepreneurs in the economy, the increasing number of reports highlighting the importance of ethnic minority and ethnic minority women entrepreneurs to the economy (for example British Business Bank, 2020; Brodnock, 2020; Roberts et al., 2020) and recent growing political interest (see for example Vorley et al., 2020). Taking a broader view, the entrepreneurial ecosystem includes *networks* which are in fact *intermediaries* as they fulfil intermediary functions (led by BAME women), two national organisations and a series of awareness raising initiatives such as blogs (e.g. Forward Ladies and Real Business). However, overall this is still not very much activity and in some places it is non-existent or virtually non-existent.

Looking at the geography of support for BAME entrepreneurs as a whole, many support organisations have a high percentage of ethnic minority women. *Networks* are scattered throughout the country, with the highest incidence in the West Midlands which in the 2011 census was shown to have a high proportion of Asian residents (10.8%) and 3.3% Black. London had 40.2% of residents identified with either the Asian, Black, Mixed or Other ethnic group (18.5% Asian, 13.3%)⁴. London's 15 networks and other support organisations reflect the dominance of London for support activity, in line with its population demography.

⁴ [Regional ethnic diversity - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures \(ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/regional-ethnic-diversity-uk-ethnicity-facts-and-figures) (accessed June 22nd 2021).

Overall, there is a lack of dedicated activity for ethnic minority women entrepreneurs except to a limited extent in Scotland and London. This represents a seriously under-developed localised entrepreneurial ecosystem in most of the UK. However, other organisations either led-by women or part of national programmes, potentially lower entry barriers for start-ups and help with growth ambitions. Activities include training (including in entrepreneurship skills), workshops, advice sessions, mentoring e.g. in marketing, and signposting to other relevant organisations. Evidence from the larger study suggests that the last is a particularly important function of entrepreneurial ecosystems. However, the overall fragmentation of support is a major inhibitor of this function (Lawton Smith, 2021).

While most networking organisations provide practical support for starting and growing a business, one is targeted at women in tech (*knowledge*) (One Tech) which also helps to provide access to investment funding. The geography shown in Table 2 reinforces a picture of an uneven *access to financing* for BAME entrepreneurs (British Business Bank, 2020). This appears to be a critical weakness in the ethnic minority women entrepreneurial ecosystem. Access to finance is a major problem faced by women and an even bigger problem for ethnic minority women entrepreneurs (Wright et al., 2015).

There is little evidence of increasing the *supply of talent*. However, this could be part of the networking function that is a basic function of 9 of the 12 organisations shown in Table 2.

Where there is evidence of a greater significance is leadership. As well as the five women only networks, at least two others –Yaba (Yorkshire) and ABCC (Birmingham) - are led by BAME women. In all cases the leaders of these networks are role models. In the cases of Yaba and ABCC they are leaders of influential organisations and are strong advocates for ethnic minority women entrepreneurs. This is also the case with the national organisation: the National Black Women's Network.

Indeed, advocacy is a very important component of the ethnic minority women entrepreneurial ecosystem. This is both through the networks themselves and through the online media where blogs submitted for example by *Forward Ladies* and *Real*

Business highlight the success of ethnic minority women entrepreneurs. Publicity is also given to ethnic minority women entrepreneurs with particular attention paid to the *Alone Together* report (British Business Bank, 2020) in the national press and in online articles.

A further indication of entrepreneurial ecosystem change at the national level is in formal institutions. As well as policy advance by Innovate UK on women innovators and BAME entrepreneurs and innovators, the government has established the All Party Parliamentary Group for Black Business people. The secretariat is provided by Ms Diana Crouch, herself a BAME entrepreneur. Indeed, all the organisations in government with business facing interests have formalised equality, diversity and inclusion commitments. These include BEIS, the Intellectual Property Office⁵ and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) (a non-departmental public body of the Government of the United Kingdom that directs research and innovation funding and is funded through the science budget of BEIS) as well as the Cabinet Office which has separate units for disability and race disparity.

An outcome of this project is a website that connects all of the participants in the research⁶. This is thus an example of “engaged scholarship” (Ram et al., 2012) which involves sustained and continuous interaction between researchers and practitioners in the field. One of the issues raised in the current research is the nature and accessibility of support for BAME and Disabled entrepreneurs. The study is actively informing Innovate UK and Cabinet Office policy, specifically on gaps in knowledge about the geography of support for minority entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurial culture and networks form the last line in Stam’s (2015) entrepreneurial ecosystems elements. What this evidence has shown is that there is an emerging entrepreneurial culture among ethnic minority women entrepreneurs as demonstrated by the range of activity within ethnic minority women networks. However, Stam’s approach does not recognise clearly the interdependence of the

⁵ [Inclusion and diversity report for 2019-2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/inclusion-and-diversity-report-for-2019-to-2020) (accessed June 22nd 2021)

⁶ [Making Business Innovation Accessible to Diverse Groups — Birkbeck, University of London \(bbk.ac.uk\)](https://www.bbk.ac.uk/business-innovation-accessible-diverse-groups) (accessed June 22 2021)/

different elements and hence the drivers of change in the system: rather it emphasises compartmentalisation of activity. This research therefore highlights the issue of degree of openness and extent of support to all forms of entrepreneurship (Kruger and David, 2020).

5 Conclusions

Previous studies have shown that ethnic minority-led firms make a significant impact of the UK economy (Legrain and Fitzgerald, 2021; Roberts et al., 2020) and are more likely to engage in innovation activities (Owalla et al., *in press*). It follows that there is a demand for an entrepreneurial ecosystem that provide resources for start-ups and scale-ups. However, even though there is growing publicity, policy interest, advocacy and academic research on ethnic minority women entrepreneurs, there still remains the need for a more integrated understanding of the different experiences in different parts of the country. Most relevant in the adapted Stam (2015) framework of support for ethnic minority women entrepreneurs are intermediaries (networks), access to finance, leadership, and formal institutions at the local and national levels.

Overall our results draw attention to the lack of dedicated activity for ethnic minority women entrepreneurs, except to a limited extent in Scotland and London. Besides, the fragmented nature of existing targeted support initiatives is an impediment to achieving greater diversity and inclusion within entrepreneurial ecosystems (Lawton Smith, 2021). Given that existing ethnic minority women entrepreneurs' support initiatives are scattered and few in between, one of the Lawton Smith (2020-2021) project's outcomes is to provide a website⁷ that connects research participants. Policy makers and support institutions could adopt this "glue" function and extend it further by providing more platforms and/or avenues through which different support networks can connect and interact.

⁷ [Making Business Innovation Accessible to Diverse Groups — Birkbeck, University of London \(bbk.ac.uk\)](https://www.bbk.ac.uk/business-innovation-accessible-to-diverse-groups)

Our findings also highlight the need to further develop *intermediaries* and *networks* (as well as clarify the distinction between them) within ethnic minority women entrepreneurial ecosystems that are able to support them in addressing existing barriers to accessing finance and markets (British Business Bank, 2020). This is especially true outside of London where insufficient attention is currently paid to the issue.

Furthermore, both academics and policymakers need to gain a better understanding of the broader socio-economic factors that constrain ethnic minority women entrepreneurs to gendered spaces and feminized sectors that are highly competitive and with low growth prospects for their businesses (Carter et al., 2015; Marlow and McAdam, 2013). Once greater understanding is in place, there is a need for a shift in policy to recognise and provide relevant support for this group. The aim should be not only to increase the portfolio of entrepreneurs, but also to better support existing founders (Marlow et al., 2008). Given the geographical nature of the need this can be viewed as part of the UK government's much vaunted "levelling up" agenda for regions and groups of people.

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