



## Report Annual CREME 21<sup>st</sup> Ethnic Minority Business Conference

### Event report

The 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Ethnic Minority Business Conference was held at the [Nishkam Civic Association Handsworth](#) in Birmingham on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017. The event was organized by the Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority and Entrepreneurship (CREME) and sponsored by Lloyds Bank. Over 100 practitioners, policy makers, academics, entrepreneurs, business owners and financiers were in attendance.



The conference provided an opportunity to highlight CREME's wide-ranging initiatives on minority businesses. The event was followed by a gala dinner at [Zen Metro Restaurant](#), which was attended by 100 local business owners as well as conference delegates

The Conference focused on four key themes:

1. Developing an Agenda for Minority Enterprise Research and Practice
2. Building an Inclusive Business Support System
3. Rethinking Refugees: The Role of Entrepreneurship
4. Valuing Enterprise in Diverse Communities

**Professor Monder Ram**, Director of [CREME](#), kicked off the event by giving a warm welcome to the audience and highlighting what has been accomplished as well as the areas of opportunity after the 21 years of CREME's work. Then, the newly appointed and very first female Dean of the Birmingham Business School **Prof. Catherine Cassell** took half an hour of her busy to address the audience about the importance of engaged research done by CREME for the University of Birmingham in promoting a research agenda in ethnic communities. Afterwards, **Baroness Lorely Burt of Solihull** discussed about the importance of forward the discussions on ethnic minority enterprises in the West Midlands, while emphasizing how diverse work teams are more innovative and better at performing.

### Session 1: Agenda for Minority Enterprise Research and Practice

Professor Ram opened the session by stressing the importance of a clear agenda for supporting minority entrepreneurship. He said that this was important because: i) minority firms are important contributors to the economy; ii) the current policy emphasis on 'growth' is often inattentive to diversity issues; and the need for strong advocacy for minority business issues. Professor Ram outlined the different ways in which influences practices by working in collaboration with non-academic stakeholders, including the Banks, civil society organisations like Citizens UK, and social enterprises like Ashley Community Housing Association. CREME's current priorities include: supporting initiatives to promote migrant entrepreneurship; developing exemplar approaches to engaged scholarship; and examining employment issues in migrant firms.



The above resonates with what **Dr. Idil Osman** from [SOAS, University of London](#), who talked about how business owners -particularly those of the Somali diaspora that her research focuses on- have shown remarkable resilience in adaptation to challenges such as insecurity, travel restrictions, the lack of a formal banking sector and absence of a formal investment climate.

## Session 2. Building an inclusive business support system

**Saidul Haque**, Regional Organiser of [Citizens UK West Midlands](#), emphasised the importance of business owners to civil society. He presented a [video](#) about the Business Leaders Project, a pioneering project to support migrant business owners in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the city. This project is managed by an innovative partnership between the GBSLEP, CREME, Citizens UK and Natwest whose ultimate goal is to develop an inclusive culture of enterprise which engages the talents of all our communities.

Also from [Citizens UK Birmingham](#), Community Organizer **Mosese Dakunivosa** - the man on a mission- talked about building an efficient ecosystem for businesses as well as the challenges and struggles migrant business owners face accessing start-up capital and the

right mentoring. To face those challenges it is key, he emphasized, to bring the city together

through business where entrepreneurs play a significant role in strengthening civil society.

**Ian Mclaughlan**, [Growth Hub Manager at the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership](#) stated that their mission is to enable a more inclusive focused on widening the delivering of benefits with a clear impact. This is key he stated, to bring together multi-community business networks and making people feel welcomed to join those business arrangements so they can better access business resources and opportunities.

*“Success is a by-product of doing the right things for the right reasons”*  
*Paul Faulkner, CEO Chambers of Commerce*

From [Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce](#) CEO **Paul Faulkner** highlighted the importance of a collaborative work in order to improve business support for ethnic migrant businesses. He emphasized the importance of initiatives such as this conference as they inspire people and thus are easier to support. He then highlighted the Chamber of Commerce’s independence, which allows them to do what is right. Paul underscores that one of the important things about Birmingham is its people and their capacity to organize and bring about change: *“it is time to smash all those glass ceilings”*. During the Q&A section, he reminded the audience that *“success is a byproduct of doing the right things for the right reason”*

Last on the panel was **Andy Lee**, Strategic Lead for Diversity in Business for [NatWest](#), who engaged on a rich reflection on the importance of building relations of trust with



ethnic minority business in order to fight discrimination and enhance their chances of accessing formal sources of finance as well as other forms of tailored support. As a professional working in the banking sector, his insights were refreshing and shed light on how important it is to make inclusion everyone's business, particularly given the need to trigger policy change rethinking the mainstream approaches towards ethnic minority entrepreneurs.



### 3. Rethinking Refugee: The Role of Entrepreneurship

**Steven Pegg**, Director of Competitive Markets and Business Policy at [Lloyds Banking Group](#), chaired the session on the role of entrepreneurship and thinking refugees anew. He paid tribute to Lloyds 21 year association with CREME conference. He spoke of the importance of diversity in the policy environment and service provision for ethnic minority entrepreneurs. He then mentioned the importance of refugees' entrepreneurial drive in overcoming barriers, which include: discrimination, a lack of resources and limited access to networks. As such, he emphasized the need to change the discourse that holds refugees back from realizing their entrepreneurial ambitions.

*“We need to be thinking about moving refugees into work and into entrepreneurship”*  
*Fuad Mahamed, CEO, Ashley*

**Dr. Maria Villares** from the [University of Southampton](#) and CREME Associate, talked about the collaborative project conducted by

ACHA. The research looks at aspirations and capabilities of new migrant entrepreneurs. She highlighted that there is a large gap between the jobs available for migrants on the labour market and their actual capabilities and aspirations, which is often one of the reasons behind their ambition to start-up businesses. Some of the other reasons were: escaping from perceived discrimination, acquiring/ improve their self-esteem or giving back to the community. She stated that the research found that some of the most common challenges that aspiring entrepreneurs struggle with are related to language, lack of knowledge in relation to legal requirements, setting up business mentoring schemes and access to finance.

**Fuad Mahamed**, CEO of [Ashley Community Housing Association](#). He mentioned that their mission is to change the way in which refugees are seen and find a holistic way in which to address the needs of this social group, for which they have developed the *#Rethinkingrefugee* campaign. Accordingly, *‘We need to be thinking about moving refugees into work and into entrepreneurship and not about warehousing them and only then can we say that we have effectively integrated refugees into society’* This is all the more important in the line of the economic potential refugees represent for the country, thus it is important to approach refugees as assets. Research shows that 1 in 7 businesses in the UK are started by migrants. Access to finance is one of the biggest challenges faced by aspiring entrepreneurs.

Following the discussion, **Charlie Fraser**, Director of the [Entrepreneurial Refugee Network \(TERN\)](#) mentioned that one of the programmes ran by TERN is currently working with companies and business networks in order



to find employment for refugees. Alternative sources of finance include ‘Hagbet’, (Islamic finance model, also mentioned by **Fuad Mahamed**) there is the equity crowdfunding which is some of the fastest growing finance methods in the market.



#### 4. Valuing Enterprise in Diverse Communities

The final discussion of the day focused on bridging the gap between ethnic enterprise networks and the opportunities available to these businesses. Networks are essential for the success of every business and they’re absolutely critical when you are looking to collaborate with others and one of the many barriers that ethnic entrepreneurs face is access to networks. New networks representing different communities and groups are emerging but they are not part of the mainstream business networks.

One of the speakers from this session was Jawaahir Daahir, a social entrepreneur who migrated from Somalia 27 years ago to the Netherlands before moving to Leicester and setting up [The Somali Development Services](#). The organisation is a social enterprise that provides a range of services to support the growth of new communities. One of the main services offered by the agency is supporting businesses through helping them in accessing a wide range of services available as well as understanding how the UK finance system works.

Chester Morrison ([The British Black List](#)) started 18 months ago as an online business, providing a platform for African and Caribbean small businesses and offering a range of services and networks aimed to facilitate their participation. The organisation provides a business hub consisting of incubating units and training facilities, designed to encourage small entrepreneurs and to provide them with a safe space in order to develop and assess their capabilities to survive and grow. Additionally they look at how small businesses can be positioned for growth and how they can participate in the wider network (mainstream). Their network comprises for over 100 businesses. Access to finance was once again named as one of the main challenges faced by ethnic minority owned SMEs. Another one of the missions that the organisation engages with is assessing how businesses can make use of their cultural links and expand on the international market. This is particularly important given the current context generated by the Brexit vote. The organisation offers free registration on their website and each business is allowed to upload three pictures and a 500 words description to market their services/products.

*“As an ethnic minority, the Polish community is completely invisible”*  
Elizabeth Kardynal, *Race and Equality Sandwell*

Elizabeth Kardynal from [Race and Equality Sandwell](#) spoke about the ‘Better Than That’, an anti-hate campaign started by a Polish digital marketing company conducted a series of research projects to identify the social trends following the Brexit referendum. Although the Polish community living in the UK currently accounts for over 1 million members, making it the largest ethnic community in Britain: *‘As an ethnic minority, the Polish community is*



*completely invisible and this is mainly due to the colour of their skin* (Elizabeth Kardynal, Race and Equality Sandwell, representative of the Polish community in the Midlands). Despite their huge appetite and potential as well as their high degree of professionalism, migrant owned businesses are still seen as vulnerable social groups and this is partly because the media portrays them as unemployed people who came to this country for the social benefit and constitute liabilities for the British economy.

Arron Reid, Procurement Manager and Head of [Sustainable Procurement for Balfour Beatty](#) talked about the 'Supply Diversity' programme that is currently spending £1.4 billion per year on supporting SMEs. Balfour Beatty is looking for a strategy to increase the spending and investment in EMBs as a response to the strong agenda to encourage inclusive growth and achieving social balance. Mr Reid signals the lack of visibility of EMBs and the absence of business networks that would facilitate this connection between big companies who are looking to invest and support these types of firms. There are huge opportunities available but promoting and helping EMBs compete for contracts is made difficult by their limited visibility and access to business support networks, therefore Mr Reid stressed the need for increasing the collaboration between EMBs and mainstream communities through creating a common platform to bring together all EMBs regardless of their specific ethnic background. This would facilitate learning, communication and increase their chances for survival and growth.

### Concluding remarks

The remarkably stimulating conversation was concluded by Prof Monder Ram who thanked everyone for their contribution and stressed that regardless where they come from, ethnic entrepreneurs have a disadvantage compared to

domestic ones. *'If we are as good as we think we are we need immediate effective action and this is our challenge. It's up to all of us to support and make this vision a reality, we need to walk the talk'*.