

FAITH IN BUSINESS: THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ASPIRATIONS OF MIGRANTS IN THE UK



Foreign-born entrepreneurs in the UK own approximately 14 per cent of companies, with 1 in 7 new start-ups opened by migrants (CEF/Duedil 2014). While migrant entrepreneurs contribute massively to the economy of the society, comprehensive business support services addressing the needs of new aspiring entrepreneurs are lacking in the UK. This brief draws on the study 'Religion, migration and entrepreneurship: The impact of transnational Pentecostalism on migrant entrepreneurship in the UK' conducted by Dr. Maria Villares-Varela and Dr. Olivia Sheringham, and funded by the British Academy/Leverhulme Trust (SG160477), according to which, religious spaces seem to fill some of the lacuna of services left by central and local governments by providing a wide range of services for their congregants and the communities where they settle.

Drawing on qualitative interviews with Pentecostal migrants in the UK and pastors, this project examined the role of Pentecostal churches in supporting entrepreneurial activities among migrant communities and the ways in which Pentecostal beliefs and values influence the aspirations and practices of these entrepreneurs. The focus on Pentecostalism emerges from its importance amongst new Christian migrant communities in the UK, emphasis on the promise of prosperity, its success among the economically disadvantaged, and its role in career aspirations.

The research showed that affiliation to churches/ religious values have an important role for congregants in the following ways -

- Accessing resources (e.g. knowledge exchange networks, capital, mentoring)
- Providing fellowship, relationships and counselling for migrants in a new country
- Enhancing resilience when confronted with business and life setbacks
- Fostering empowerment and motivation to work on individual career trajectories
- Fostering of entrepreneurial journeys, mentoring and encouragement of business aspirations
- Formal training on professional, financial and business development skills
- Building strong social networks
- Maximising business activities, particularly in relation to mentoring, searching for suppliers and customers, and showcasing products and services.
- Fostering the role of community and family by building a sense of community and togetherness.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

We delineate here a set of policy recommendations for (i) churches and other Faith Based Organisations which support migrant communities , and for (ii) business support organisations servicing migrant communities.

Recommendations for churches and FBOs

- **Understanding the career aspirations of congregants.** The lack of recognition of skills, and experiences of racialised discrimination tend to situate migrants in a position of vulnerability in the labour market, thus making opening a firm a suitable and appealing option. A more thorough understanding of the biographies of congregants, their skills and professional aspirations may uncover the potential to a successful career in paid employment and not necessarily as an entrepreneur.

- **Fostering community values and social networks within and beyond church.** For those congregants with strong entrepreneurial aspirations, churches emerge as the central hub for socialisation, networking and mentoring. Churches hold the potential to enable the consolidation of networks that cushion the risks of opening a business and to help business growth. Reaching out to other churches and networks beyond the congregation would facilitate further connections with other social actors and institutions that can help business owners to scale up their projects and facilitate access to a diverse range of resources and finance.

- **Connecting with existing support provision and embedding this in the church offer.** Specific business support for migrant entrepreneurs is provided by a range of social enterprises, charities, banking sector, and other key actors that churches could tap on. These institutions have years of experience in the provision of business support that could aid and train aspiring entrepreneurs and business consultants.

- **Establishing formal mentoring networks within church.** Informal mentoring takes place in churches amongst congregants and between congregants and pastors. Data shows that this is of great importance to the formation of aspirations, and to get informal advice and encouragement. These mentoring services can be formalised in church structures by upskilling mentors with specific training and situating this offer within the wide range of services churches offer.

Recommendations for business support providers

- **Reaching out to churches in your communities to recruit beneficiaries.** Our data shows that migrant entrepreneurs are generally disconnected from mainstream business support agencies. If business support providers are willing to increase the diversity of their beneficiaries, churches in urban spaces include a generally diverse population of new and more established migrants that could highly benefit from support services.

- **Broadening extant support.** Although some churches offer in-house training, there is scope to improve services by working alongside them and facilitating development of specific skills related to business plans, legal requirements, access to finance and mentoring. The professional experience of business support providers will aid migrant entrepreneurs to combine church specific support with mainstream support.

- **Extending networks for consolidation and growth.** Congregants who have set up businesses rely on immediate church networks for advice, access to customers and suppliers, which are of vital importance in the early stages of development of small firms. Entrepreneurs who wish to consolidate their endeavours and grow would benefit from access to larger networks beyond church, sector specific mentoring schemes and access to finance. Business support agencies can facilitate these bridges between churches and mainstream services.