



# The Somali Muslim Community in England

## **Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities**





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# 1 Executive Summary

## 1.1 Introduction and context

This report is one of thirteen reports on England's Muslim ethnic communities commissioned by the Cohesion Directorate of Communities and Local Government in order to understand the diversity of England's Muslim population and to help enhance its engagement and partnership with Muslim civil society.

The primary goal of the research was to detail the main population and community locations, identify denominations and religious practices, and identify the strengths of links with the country of origin. An overarching objective for the project was to identify how government could best engage and work in partnership with specific communities.

For many of these communities, there was little pre-existing research specific to the community. Hence the research was expanded to include other areas such as identity, language use, socio-economic situations, and intra-community dynamics. Since the country and migration contexts are important, these have also been briefly detailed.

The relatively limited scope of this study in relation to individual communities means that there is still a great deal more research needed in order to establish comprehensive knowledge and understanding about the different communities. This study provides first insights into the communities rather than offering firm conclusions, and hence should be understood as a starting rather than an end point in getting to know the different communities covered by the research.

This report focuses on the Somali community in England and as such those interviewed and involved in focus groups were based in England. However, some of the existing research and data on the community refers to England; England and Wales; Great Britain; and the United Kingdom. Thus the report refers to whichever of these is the most relevant in the context.

## 1.2 Migration and England's Somali Muslim population

The Somali community of the UK is one of the largest and longest established in Europe with an estimated population of over 100,000. An official 2006 estimate of the Somali-born population in the UK, which doesn't include Somalis born in the UK or outside Somalia, was 82,300, up from 42,548 in the 2001 Census, including 37,999 Muslims.

Somalis first arrived in the UK in significant numbers from the late 19th Century, as seamen in the British Merchant Navy and settled in most port cities. A second wave of Somali immigrants started arriving during the Second World War with the British Navy and many stayed, in search of employment. Due to the demand for labour in the steel

industry, Sheffield and South Yorkshire were among the first places the Somali community originally settled on arrival in the 1940s. The most recent Somali migrants started to arrive mainly as refugees in the late 1980s. Many families have been torn apart by the Somali civil war and many have relatives still living in the refugee camps of Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya and Yemen. Since 2000 the established community has attracted other Somalis from Europe who have started to move to the UK and settle in areas where there is an established Somali presence.

### 1.3 Identity, religion and language

The Somali community is a complex heterogeneous group made up of long-settled local communities, civil war refugee families and recent arrivals from Europe. These communities tend to loosely divide along a number of lines including Somali origin (ie Somaliland, Southern Somalis), Somali clan, gender and generation, and UK place of settlement. Clans play a central role in Somali society, politics and identity formation. Clans not only form the basis of the traditional Somali political structure, but also provide both a system of rights and social support. The system continues to have an impact on the community in the UK, often acting as a pre-existing support network, with clan members feeling obliged to assist a newly arrived refugee from their own clan. For many people, successful settlement in the UK has resulted in a weakening of links with Somalia and a lessening of the emphasis on clan affiliation in favour of identities based on local connections in the UK.

According to the 2001 Census, 89.3 per cent of migrants born in Somalia are Muslim and Somalis identify themselves primarily as Muslims. Most are Sunni Muslims and predominantly followers of the Shafi school of Islam. Religious identity is strong and influences many aspects of life. However, while an important part of Somali culture, it does not necessarily dominate everyday life and strict adherence to orthopraxy varies in the community. Traditionally Somalis have tended to attend mosques established by the more settled Muslim communities, particularly Pakistani and Bangladeshi mosques. However, there are now a small number of mosques around the country that are specifically built and run by Somalis.

The majority of the community speak Somali, though a small Chiwmini speaking minority has also been identified in the UK. Approximately 15 per cent of Somalis are also reported to speak fluent Arabic. Somalis who have arrived from other European countries do not speak their mother tongue or English very well, and consequently face significant challenges integrating into both the Somali and British communities in the UK. Many UK Somalis also have problems with English language ability, especially women, and there is also a lack of literacy in Somali among many adult members of the community, who missed out on their schooling due to either war or migration during the post-independence years in Somalia.

## 1.4 Socio economic status

Somali born migrants have the lowest employment rate of all immigrants in the UK and levels of education within the community are also low, with 50 per cent having no qualifications and only 3 per cent having higher education qualifications. Unemployment affects the community across the board, including men and women, young people and adults, highly skilled professionals and trades people, as well as unskilled individuals. Unemployment is thought to be a key factor contributing to Somalis becoming caught in a cycle of depression, isolation and poverty, and ultimately turning to Khat<sup>1</sup> use.

There are now an equal number of men and women in the community but significant differences exist between the education, employment and social opportunities available to men and women. Amongst Somali women in Britain there is generally a lower level of education and language proficiency than men, though there are some women who are highly qualified within the community. Most Somali women are found in lower paid jobs. Women cite the main barriers to employment as being non-recognition of their work qualifications and a lack of work experience. In the UK at the moment many women feel they are being held back, not simply due to internal community dynamics but also due to external factors such as discrimination.

## 1.5 Intergenerational dynamics, young people and the role of women in the community

Somalis are traditionally tight knit with very strong kinship and family structures, both immediate and extended, but within a broader community framework where the social bonds are looser, with varying degrees of closeness with other members of the community. These structures are, however, beginning to break down and there is consequently a considerable level of intergenerational conflict based on issues relating to family relationships and obligations.

The process of negotiating conflicting cultural identities is also believed to have led to high levels of intergenerational conflict. Young Somalis are seen by the older generations as increasingly moving away from Somali culture as they adopt what is perceived as a British way of life. Somali youth however are creating new British identities developed from a fusion of an attachment to Somalia, clan group identities and Britishness.

<sup>1</sup> Khat (also known or spelt as 'qat', 'jaad', 'qaat' or 'chat') is a plant most commonly grown in Eastern African or Middle Eastern countries that when chewed creates a stimulant effect. Khat itself is legal in the UK, but the two main active ingredients (cathine and cathinone) are Class C controlled substances, under the Misuse of Drugs Act (1971). A recent survey found that 76 per cent of respondents use more khat in the UK than in Somalia; in Sheffield, 59 per cent of young Somalis chew khat. Source: Shipla L. Patel, Sam Wright, Alex Gammampila (2005), *Khat use among Somalis in four English cities*, Home Office. [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/rdsolr4705.pdf](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/rdsolr4705.pdf)

This is not an easy process and can often result in confusion, tensions and conflicts both inside and outside the family. A growing detachment from the traditions and older mentors in the community, along with the lack of appropriate social spaces, are seen by older people as the main reasons why many young people get involved in crime and drug abuse or become 'over religious.' Family separation and marital breakdown is also believed to have had a very negative impact on young people.

Youth crime and vulnerability to negative influences was a concern that consistently came up during the research. Regional background in Somalia continues to affect boys' behaviour in London, with many boys forming groups around different ethnic identities and becoming involved in gang crime based on inter-ethnic Somali youth gangs. Traditional gender differences were identified as a strong factor affecting male behaviour, with suggestions that discipline in relation to boys is less strict than for girls. This lack of discipline and respect for authority is thought to lead to major problems at home and with institutions, manifesting in tensions between young Somalis and authority figures such as the police, education professionals and Somali elders.

Since migrating to the UK, the role of women has been changing in many ways. Increasing numbers of women are taking on single parent roles as a result of family and marital breakdown, as well as responsibility for the care of dependants in Somalia. Whilst the majority continue to face high levels of unemployment or are relegated to low paid jobs, women are increasingly finding ways to create other pathways into work. For example, more educated women are getting involved in charity work and setting up successful businesses. Also, girls are performing better than boys in the education system and becoming more highly qualified than their male counterparts. Somali women in London have started to develop strong networks which are enabling many to move forward against a backdrop of difficult circumstances. However, despite such changes, many women are still housebound because of the lack of social spaces to go to. For many, this can lead to physical and mental health problems.

## 1.6 Other issues affecting the community

Respondents report high levels of stress and mental health related illness in the community, the likely causes of which are lack of access to employment, racial harassment and isolation. The community has also been strongly affected by the traumas resulting from many years of war and life in refugee camps, forced migration and family breakdowns. All these factors are said to be leading to a range of hidden 'health and well-being' issues that are not being recognised or addressed by health and social welfare providers. The problems are thought to be especially acute for Somali children who have arrived as asylum seekers or refugees. The education system is unable to offer appropriate support, it is believed that this leads to many children dropping out of school, being excluded and generally underachieving in education.

## 1.7 Cohesion and integration

English proficiency has been identified as a key barrier that prevents many Somalis from fully integrating into UK life. Lack of English language skills has a significant impact on positive social participation, and the lack of access to information is seen as a major barrier for many Somalis. This is particularly the case for Somali women, and many have suffered high levels of social and economic exclusion as a consequence. Isolation of women is a common theme, particularly for Somali mothers.

However, racial tensions between Somalis and other groups, and discrimination in housing and employment are also perceived to be important factors in hindering integration. The community is also said to encounter considerable prejudice from other ethnic minority communities, including from West African Christians, black Caribbeans, and in some areas of the country respondents reported not being made fully welcome in South Asian mosques. There is a very low level of reporting of discriminatory incidents because of unfamiliarity with UK human rights legislation and a lack of confidence in redress for victims.

There is a great deal of internal debate concerning community identity and how to retain that identity, while at the same time allowing enough room for change to enable the community to fully integrate into mainstream society. Attitudes regarding this issue vary considerably, with some believing that Somali society, particularly its young, has already assimilated too much into the mainstream. Others believe that the community has been too rigid about retaining its distinctive identity and suggest that Somalis need to take a more active lead in integrating themselves into British society.

## 1.8 Media and links with country of origin

The British media is blamed by many as playing a major role in inciting hate crime and hence making integration and cohesion difficult. It is perceived as constantly portraying and attacking a stereotypical and negative picture of Muslims and Somalis. The little reporting that is done on the community is perceived to be linked to crime, war in Somalia and terrorism.

Somalis based in Britain have a keen interest in, and broad range of, print, broadcast and web based media catering for the community in the UK. African-born Somalis retain the 'myth of return' and a particular interest in the political situation in Somalia itself, therefore many watch news and seek out websites and radio broadcasts from outside the UK intended for people in Somalia and the wider Diaspora.

Most Somalis in the UK have been parted from family due to the war and there is an ongoing concern in the community about the political situation and how the lack of peace and stability in Somalia impacts on the welfare of family, friends and others left behind. The link is maintained mainly through sending money to relatives in Somalia; Somalis abroad are the main providers for their relatives and a lifeline for vast numbers of people in Somalia. Rates of travel however are low due to the continuing instability in the country.

Many Somalis in the UK have strong political ties with Somalia, or a desire and ambition to become involved in politics back home once the situation there improves. They therefore retain strong ties and belonging to specific tribes and their allegiance to different political parties in Somalia and Somaliland.

## 1.9 Civil society and civic engagement

While Somali communities have been settled in the UK for over 100 years and there are numerous civil society organisations in every major area of settlement, Somali community organisations are perceived to be at an early stage of establishment compared to the older migrant community structures, with whom they have to compete for funding and support. Somali civil society organisations are also very localised and not networked into wider partnerships. Hence there is no strong collective voice for the Somali communities across the country and the impact and influence of organisations does not often extend beyond their local area.

Mosques are central to religious life within the Somali community and some do offer a range of community welfare services. However, this function is primarily fulfilled by the many local community organisations catering for the needs of the Somali community. Influence in the community rests primarily with leaders of community organisations, mosques and Imams. Local mosques are considered influential as people go to them for both spiritual healing as well as broader guidance. Volunteers and activists running small community organisations are accorded a high level of respect. However, it is the community organisations themselves that are seen as more influential in the community than the individuals running them.

Some of the larger and better funded organisations often have good relationships with their local authority, and a few local authorities across the country are seen as more successful and proactive in engaging with their community than others. In general however, most community respondents felt that there is a lack of acknowledgement, response or follow up by public authorities in relation to any issues which the community raises, and that this leads to further disengagement with public authorities. These problems of participation and engagement are thought to be worsened by the perceived tendency of authorities to only involve the older and better established black minority ethnic communities in community consultation and involvement processes.

Civil society structures are not strong and most Somali community organisations face many problems in getting established and surviving on a long term basis. Some fare better than others as they receive some funding through charitable organisations and local authorities, while others are struggling to sustain their community initiatives through voluntary efforts.

Somali organisations are seen by and large as lacking the capacity to deliver high quality services, and most organisations require capacity building support. Not surprisingly, the lack of funding for activities and services designed and tailored to Somali community needs and organisations was highlighted as the most pressing problem for Somali civil society organisations. Specific areas identified where support is needed include: premises and facilities, fundraising and financial management, management committee and leadership training, staff training and development, policy development and partnership development support.

**Specific recommendations arising from community respondents include:**

- Targeted funding and capacity building support which organisations can access without having to compete with the larger South Asian and black Caribbean organisations
- Improving engagement by identifying and working with those community organisations that have the capability and understanding needed to communicate and can engage equally with both local authorities and Somali communities
- Support for the development of a collective representative forum for the Somali community in the UK and for the development of stronger partnerships and networking between authorities and communities
- Direct recognition of Somalis in local consultations and decision making forums without being ignored in the broader black and minority ethnic label
- Educational opportunities, facilities and premises for young people
- Funding and support for the establishment of Somali women's organisations
- Employment training and support for all adult members of the community.

**Other recommendations:**

- Research into mental health problems and trauma arising from war and refugee status
- Development work with education and health professionals to enable them to more effectively support school children and adults at risk from trauma and related health problems
- Targeted youth provision to address educational underachievement and other youth problems identified.

## 1.10 Report structure

The report is structured to address the key research questions (as set out above). Sections 6 and 7 are primarily based on quantitative secondary data. Sections 8 to 12 draw primarily on the qualitative research corroborated by secondary sources where these are available. Finally, section 13 draws together specific recommendations arising from the research.

## 2 Introduction

Communities and Local Government recognises that there is a need to enhance its understanding and knowledge of the diverse Muslim ethnic populations in England, particularly relating to some of the specific smaller communities of African, Middle Eastern and other Asian countries of origin. As such, Communities and Local Government commissioned The Change Institute (CI) to deliver the research project 'Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities' (UMEC). The 13 ethnic Muslim communities that the Cohesion Directorate was seeking more information about were those originating from:

- Afghanistan
- Algeria
- Bangladesh
- Egypt
- India
- Iran
- Iraq
- Morocco
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- Saudi Arabia
- Somalia
- Turkey.

Reports have been provided under separate covers for each diaspora community, along with separate synthesis and technical reports.

### 2.1 Objectives of the research

There were four objectives for the research:

- *Mapping*: Develop population maps for each ethnic community outlining the spread of the population and identification of high density clusters
- *Identification of denominations and pathways*: Collect information on the grassroots institutions/key individuals working with ethnic communities and the breakdown of these ethnic communities by denomination/sect/clan

- *Identifying strength of links and capacity of ethnic communities:* Collect information on the strength of links between each ethnic community and country of origin (including influential institutions/individuals/media channels/religious influences). Also to collect information on the relative strengths and weaknesses of civil society infrastructure for each ethnic community, highlighting where capacities need to be developed
- *Identifying how government can best engage with ethnic communities:* Develop recommendations on the ways in which Communities and Local Government can best engage with and understand Muslim ethnic communities in England, including recommendations on avenues of communications and delivery to these communities.

These objectives translated into six key questions that the study needed to address:

1. Where are the key ethnic groups of the Muslim population located?
2. What are the latest estimated sizes and demographic make-up of the key ethnic communities?
3. Which denominations and/or other internal groupings do these ethnic groups belong to?
4. How can Communities and Local Government best engage with them?
5. What are the strength of links between the ethnic communities and country of origin?
6. How developed is the level of social infrastructure for each group?

During the course of the desktop research and fieldwork, we obtained data on other facets of the community such as socio-economic position and intra-community dynamics. In order to provide additional context to users of the report we have included this information where it was felt this would be valuable to the reader. However, it should be noted a comprehensive socio-economic description or analysis of the community was outside the scope of this study. We also took the view that the migration and history of each community's country of origin was important and often offered potential explanations for the location; intra-community dynamics, including political, social and cultural characteristics; and development of the diaspora communities in the UK.

## 3 Methodology

The research questions represented a broad area of inquiry and analysis. While quantitative data about the size, location and other demographic features of the priority communities was a key research need, the study primarily focused on enabling Communities and Local Government to 'know' these communities in depth.

To fulfil these research requirements, the methodology developed needed to combine documentary research with processes of consultation and dialogue. Data collection consisted of two phases which were consistent across each community.

PHASE	ACTIVITY	METHOD
1	Population mapping	Review of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing literature</li> <li>National data sources</li> <li>Local data sources and consultations with Local Authority, other public bodies and community representatives. These were conducted to cover all 13 communities in this study.</li> </ul>
2	Qualitative data collection	Community interviews (205 total, 21 with Somali community). Focus groups (30 total, two with Somali community and four with Muslim youth from all ethnic backgrounds).

In addition, we conducted 15 interviews with local government and voluntary services stakeholders across England to discuss their existing experiences of working in partnership with and supporting Muslim civil society organisations across all the Muslim ethnic communities that we researched.

### 3.1 Project phases

#### Phase 1: Population mapping

The first phase consisted of collecting mainly secondary quantitative data but also some primary qualitative data about locations of Muslim ethnic populations and known civil society organisations. The main method for data collection on population characteristics was through a comprehensive review of a broad range of secondary data sources, including the Census, Annual Population Survey and the output of migration and population think tanks and academic research centres. This initial literature review assisted in developing a detailed picture of data currently available in the public domain and in identifying key gaps in the existing knowledge base. It also helped in identifying key locations for each diaspora, to be targeted in the community research which followed, as well as identifying key stakeholders and community respondents.

Robust and up-to-date population data is difficult to obtain outside of the 2001 Census but we were able to obtain some anecdotal information from Local Authorities and community groups about migration since 2001. However, the 2001 Census data still informs the baseline of the population figures quoted in this study. This data has been supplemented where possible by a limited amount of additional Local Authority information or other sources where reliable estimates have been made.

Specifically in relation to Somalis, there are a number of good pieces of existing research on the community which should be useful for readers who wish to understand the community in even greater depth. These include:

- Hermione Harris (2004) *The Somali community in the UK: What we know and how we know*
- ICAR (2007) *Briefing: The Somali Refugee Community in the UK*
- The Foreign Policy Centre (2006) *Improving FCO engagement with the UK-Somali community*
- Rima Berns McGown (1999) *Muslims in the Diaspora: The Somali Communities of London and Toronto*.

## **Phase 2: Qualitative data collection**

Qualitative data collection has been undertaken primarily through 21 one-to-one interviews with key respondents ('those who might be expected to know') and two focus groups with individuals from the Somali community. This phase of the research was carried out between April and July 2008.

### **3.1.1 In-depth interviews**

The interviews assisted in developing an overview of national and local contexts: the make-up of diaspora communities, key issues concerning violent extremism including perceptions, experiences and activities, current initiatives in place to counter this and existing civil society structures and development needs. The interviews also assisted in identification of further key contacts for the one-to-one and focus group research and covered a range of topics including:

- Key data sources
- Denominations and pathways
- Key influencers and institutions
- Key issues and needs for the specific Diaspora
- Links with countries of origin
- Civil society structures and capacity needs
- Current levels of contact and key barriers to engagement with public authorities

- Media consumption
- Appropriate communication channels for engagement and involvement.

The majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face with some by telephone where necessary.

Respondents were chosen on the basis that they offered a range of different types of knowledge and perspectives on community issues and dynamics.

Selection of respondents involved drawing up a 'long list' of key contacts in each community in consultation with community interviewers, expert advisers and contacts made during the first phase of research. Shortlists were produced to ensure that there was adequate female and youth representation and a regional spread that reflected the distribution of the community in England. Additional names were added on the basis of subsequent recommendations made.

Interviews for the Somali community research were conducted by a researcher from the Somali community. The researcher was already familiar with many of the civil society organisations in the Somali community in London and Leicester. This added legitimacy to the process of enquiry that was critical in opening up discussion and enabled us to gather rich and sometimes controversial data.

The profile of the twenty-one respondents was as follows:

- Nine females and 12 males.
- Three were in the 18-24 age range; seven were 25-34; eight were 35-44 and three were 45-55.
- Five were involved in community health, two from women's centres, one education worker, two from community forums and 11 from Somali community organisations.
- Thirteen were from London, one from Bolton, one from Leicester, one from Manchester, one from Liverpool, one from the East of England, one from South Yorkshire, two from Birmingham.

A quality control process was used by the Change Institute (CI) to ensure consistency and quality across each community. This involved:

- *Piloting*: Each community researcher was required to carry out two/three pilot interviews in each community to refine approaches and questions where necessary. This included a detailed discussion with each researcher following the pilot interviews, with expert adviser involvement where necessary, as well as a review of the interview field notes to ensure that relevant data was being picked up by researchers

- Each community researcher was assigned to a member of the core research team who reviewed field notes on an ongoing basis. Regular internal team meetings were held to share findings and ensure consistency across the project.

### 3.1.2 Discussion groups

In addition to the individual interviews, we conducted two focus groups that allowed for collective insights to be generated on community needs and issues, including challenges and practical ways forward. These explored partnership issues, civil society infrastructure and capacity development needs, media and communications. While these focus groups were limited in number, they provided a rich and often diverse set of views that complemented the data gathered in the one-to-one interviews.

Focus groups were designed to include a mix of participants from different community networks and different occupational backgrounds who might be expected to hold a wide range of views. Participants were recruited by the core research team through local community organisations and CI networks.

One male and one female focus group were conducted, attended by individuals over 35 years of age. The focus groups were conducted in London in July 2008.

		Location	Born in the UK	Born outside of the UK	Age range
Group (Female)	1	London	2	6	35+
Group (Male)	2	London	1	7	All 35+ except for one 18-25.

Language translation was required for some members of the female focus group. Groups were facilitated by CI directors and analysts, with additional support from community researchers.

In addition to the two focus groups for each community, four youth focus groups were conducted in London, Birmingham and Bradford, with youth from a range of ethnic backgrounds. The findings of these focus groups are discussed in the summary report.

This report uses selective quotes from the interviews and focus groups to illustrate key recurring themes and issues arising during the qualitative data collection. Where necessary they have been carefully edited for ease of reading, or understanding what was meant.

## 3.2 Analysis of data

Data analysis involved generating understandable patterns by comparing what different respondents/focus groups said about specific themes or questions. The central question was whether the data and information and the range of views expressed led to the same conclusions. Findings were validated, so far as possible, by triangulation of all data and information collected in both project phases and by critical internal reflection and review within the CI team.

The analytical process involved reviewing field notes to develop emerging themes in line with the analytical framework, which was done in collaboration with the field researchers; regular internal meetings to discuss findings from all communities; dedicated internal workshops on the communities to finalise analysis; reviews from expert advisers; feedback from 'community reviewers' and a formal peer review process.

Intercultural understanding of responses and non-responses was also essential in considerations of the data generated. A set of commonly held assumptions and understandings in any cultural group may mean that some things are simply left unsaid – because they are commonly understood in the group and do not require articulation. In addition literal translation or interpretation may simply misrepresent or miss the significance of what is being articulated. In this context in particular there will often be a distinction between what is said and might be noted or recorded and what is meant. In looking for meaning, silences and body language were often as important as what was said. A good example of potential misinterpretation that came up many times was body language indicating discomfort and unwillingness to pursue a particular line of enquiry.

Finally and most importantly, we were *reflexive* in our approach, critically reflecting on the role and influence that our own research intervention may be having on key respondents and focus groups, using critical judgment and being conscious of the need to interpret with integrity in relation to what we were seeing and hearing.

### 3.3 Limitations of the research

Data analysis represents both general and particular challenges in the current social and political context, as well as specific challenges in relation to some of these communities. These include:

- The sample sizes for each community were relatively small and respondents were not intended to be a representative sample of the relevant communities
- Because the interviews were not based on a random sample, the study does not claim to provide an analysis of the Somali population as a whole, nor was this the intention of the study. We have analysed views and comments in the context of existing data, knowledge of the current political and social context for these communities and the comments of other respondents
- Many aspects of the topic guide were designed to identify the key needs and challenges facing the community.<sup>2</sup> Hence the research tended to generate data on problem areas and challenges, particularly in focus group discussions when respondents felt they had limited time to ensure that their voices got heard. This may not reflect many of the positive and optimistic views of respondents. However, respondents were often aware that the discussions may come across as negative in tone and were quick to try and balance this by highlighting perceived positive aspects of both their communities and their lives in the UK. We have endeavoured to set out the 'best' story (in terms of explanatory power) in the context of what is already known about why some of our respondents might express negative feelings
- In the current context, the politicisation of the research field meant that all respondents were conscious of being part of a community under public and government scrutiny. Respondents were made aware of the purposes of the research through a 'showcard' that explained the research as well as possible uses of the research.<sup>3</sup> They were informed that this research would potentially be used to inform a publication that would enter the public domain and would cover aspects such as religion, intra-community dynamics and links with country of origin. A climate of some scepticism within Muslim communities, discrimination, both real and perceived, and awareness of government interest in 'what is happening' on the ground, meant that respondents were often sceptical about the use of the information that they were providing. Many will have had agendas (for positive as well as negative reasons) when asked about issues for their communities, which may have influenced their responses (eg representing their community as having few or no problems, or conversely, as having many or major needs and/or issues with public authorities)

<sup>2</sup> The topic guide is included in the Technical Report, available from Communities and Local Government.

<sup>3</sup> The showcard is included in the Technical Report, available from Communities and Local Government.

- This also created a number of practical difficulties in research terms, including difficulties in getting interviews with particular types of respondents, hesitancy and caution in some responses and a closing off of some lines of questioning in relation to religion, identity and differences
- The researchers' analytical response to these difficulties was to be critically attuned to who was speaking, their location in the community and the interests that they may have, and to judge their comments in the light of this context. Researchers were aware that there are dynamic and charged debates and movement taking place within these communities on a whole range of issues ranging from religion, its expression and orientation in the context of being Muslim minorities living in a non-Muslim society, to negotiations about roles, responsibilities, duties, gender relations, and relationships with country of origin. This awareness underpinned the analysis of the data and the conclusions drawn from responses received.

For all these reasons, the research should be viewed as a 'snapshot' in time rather than reflective of the full complexity or range of issues, challenges and changes taking place in these communities (eg intergenerational relationships, gender roles, perceptions of ethnic and religious identity, changing attitudes among the young (both in liberal and more radical directions) and the levels of integration or tensions within and across communities). We are conscious of the dynamism and the rapid changes taking place in some communities, both positive and negative.

## 4 Country Profile and History

Somalia, officially the Somali Republic and formerly known as the Somali Democratic Republic, is located in the Horn of Africa, bordered by Djibouti to the northwest, Kenya to the southwest, the Gulf of Aden and Yemen to the north, the Indian Ocean to the east and Ethiopia to the west. With its capital in Mogadishu, it has a population of 8.7 million<sup>4</sup> inhabitants and the major religion practiced is Islam.



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<sup>4</sup> Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision*.

A former British protectorate (British Somaliland) and Italian colony (Italian Somaliland), Somalia was created in 1960 when the two territories merged. Since then its development has been hindered by internal warfare and territorial claims on Somali-inhabited areas of Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti. Somalia has been without an effective central government since the military government of President Siad Barre was overthrown in 1991. After the collapse of the Siad Barre regime, the north-west part of Somalia unilaterally declared itself the independent Republic of Somaliland. The territory has enjoyed relative stability, though its independence is not recognised by international bodies.

A transitional government was set up in 2000 with the aim of reconciling warring militias, but the administration made little progress in uniting the country by the end of its mandate. In 2004, after talks in Kenya, the main political representatives signed a deal to set up a new parliament, which later appointed a president, Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, to lead the Transitional Federal Government. A former army officer and faction leader, Mr Yusuf had led a guerrilla movement in the 1970s aimed at ousting Siad Barre.

The new administration, the fourteenth attempt to establish a government since 1991, has faced a formidable task in bringing reconciliation to a country divided into clan based fiefdoms.<sup>5</sup> The authority of the interim government was further compromised in 2006 by the rise of a rival administration - the Union of the Islamic Courts. The Union movement emerged out of a judicial system funded by the powerful business community in an attempt to instill more law and order. It seized Mogadishu and much of the South from US-backed warlords in June 2006. The US, alongside other Western Countries, alleges that the movement and its military wing - al-Shabab - are linked to al-Qaeda, and that it has links to the group's leadership hiding out in Pakistan's tribal areas.<sup>6</sup> At the end of 2006, with the assistance of Ethiopian troops, military forces aligned to the interim administration seized control from the Islamists and a surge in violence ensued.

The current Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein, also known as Nur Adde, has stated that he is willing to speak with armed opponents of the interim government, including Islamists.<sup>7</sup>

Somalis represent one of the largest Muslim ethnicities in the UK. The community is extremely mixed, coming from different clans and social backgrounds that reflect the socio-economic and clan demarcations of Somalia itself. The experience of Somalis in the UK is extremely complex and differs significantly from that of comparable communities that have fled war zones. The Somali tradition of nomadic and collective identity remains important, highlighted by comments from respondents such as *what you are part of, informs who you are*. The politics, loyalties and power struggles in Somalia have had an impact on the coherence of the community within the UK diaspora, and the breakdown of former clan and social networks informs a sense among many of being unanchored in UK society.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Country profile: Somalia, BBC: [news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/world/africa/country\\_profiles/1072592.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/world/africa/country_profiles/1072592.stm) (20.6.2008)

<sup>6</sup> Stephanie McCrummen and Karen DeYoung, 'U.S. Airstrike Kills Somali Accused of Links to Al-Qaeda', *The Washington Post*, 2.5.2008.

<sup>7</sup> BBC, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Dominic Casciani, 'Somalis' Struggle in the UK', *The Somaliland Times*, 30.5.2006.

## 5 Migration History and Trends

The presence and settlement of Somalis in significant numbers in the UK dates from the late 19th century, when many Somalis arrived as seamen in the British Merchant Navy. These Somalis settled in most port cities, with the majority putting down roots in Cardiff, Liverpool and the East London docks.

A trickle of Somali immigrants started arriving during the Second World War with the British navy and some stayed in search of employment.<sup>9</sup> Due to the demand for labour in the steel industry, Sheffield and South Yorkshire were among the first places the Somali community originally settled, on arrival in the 1940s. Since the closure of the steel plants and mines, many Somalis from the region have moved to other parts of the country, though a significant number still remain.

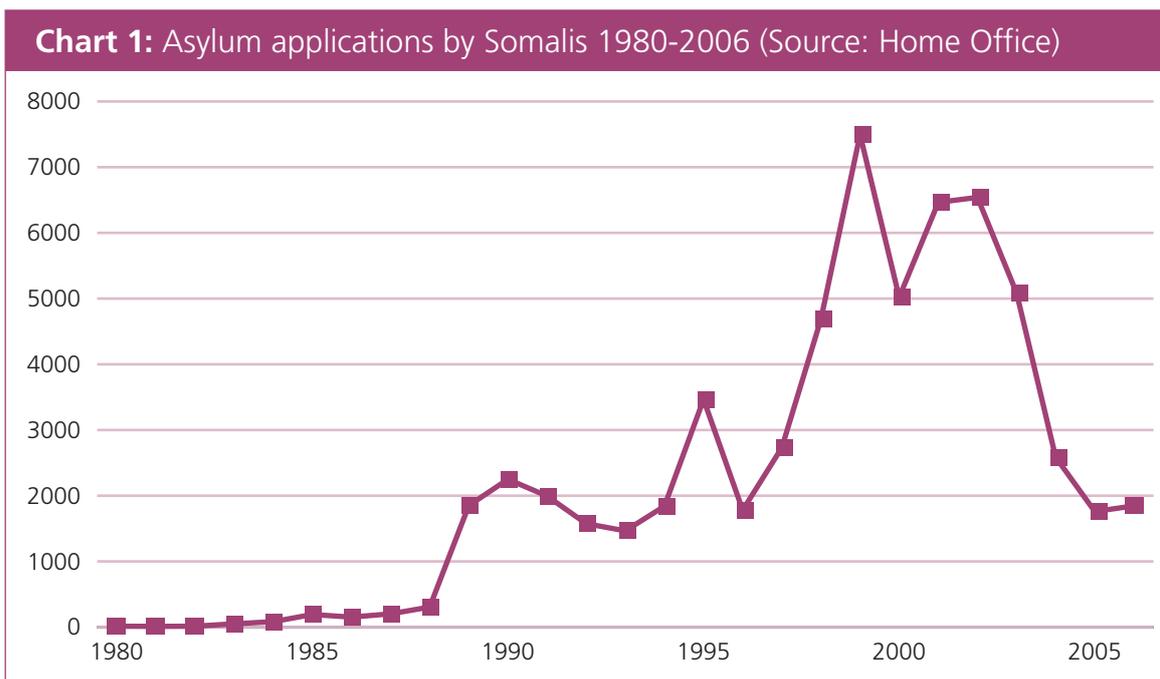
Since the Republic of Somalia became independent in 1960, the country has been overwhelmed by a continuous series of problems including internal political upheaval, war with Ethiopia, droughts and famine, secession of various regions of the country, and clan based civil war. Migration from war torn and drought-ridden Somalia to other parts of the world has been a feature of the country for much of the late 20th and early 21st century.

The first wave of refugees arrived in the UK via refugee camps in Ethiopia and Djibouti in the late 1980s. Most tended to settle alongside clan members, such as the former Somali seamen of the East End. Since 2000, the established community has attracted other Somalis from Europe who have started to move to the UK and settle in areas where there is an established Somali presence. A major draw is the desire to join both kin and fellow countrymen and women, and the diaspora now extends to a wide range of countries including the USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Holland, Italy, France, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Luxembourg, and Austria, along with Zambia and Tanzania.

Between 1985 and the end of 2006, Somalia was consistently one of the top ten asylum applicant producing countries in the UK.<sup>10</sup> Chart 1 shows the growth in asylum applications by Somalis to the UK rising from 305 in 1988 to a peak of 7,495 in 1999 and then dropping to 1,845 in 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Fred Halliday (1992), *Arabs in Exile*, IB Taurus.

<sup>10</sup> Home Office, Research Development Statistics (2007).  
[www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html)



The main issues arising within Somali asylum applications in the UK relate to questions of state protection and internal relocation in the country of origin if the application is refused. The fracturing of the State and associated institutions in Somalia means that 'protection' that would otherwise be provided by the state can only be secured through clan membership or patronage. Somalis who are not members of one of the majority clans, or related sub-clans, may frequently be subjected to persecution and unable to access any adequate form of protection.<sup>11</sup>

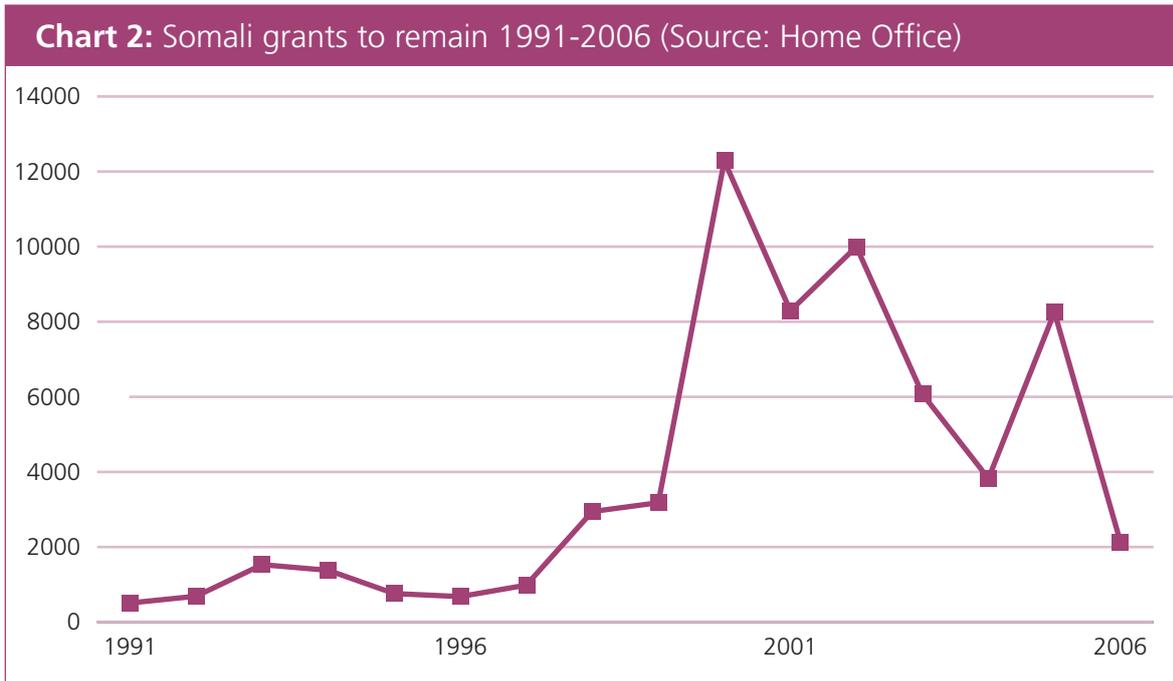
Many families have been torn apart by the war and many have relatives still living in the refugee camps of Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya and Yemen.<sup>12</sup> Most respondents in the study expressed a deep worry and concern about such relatives, as well as their desire to bring them to the UK. Those with rights of residence are able to apply for family reunion through which they are entitled to bring spouses and children under eighteen years of age into the UK. Older children and elderly parents are only allowed into the UK on a discretionary basis. The current inflow is mainly composed of women and children, and is largely drawn from the wider diaspora, including many from other European countries, particularly the Netherlands and Scandinavia, rather than from those fleeing Somalia itself.<sup>13</sup>

Chart 1 shows the grants of settlement given by the Home Office to Somalis since 1991. Since 2001 these have numbered 38,575 grants of settlement.

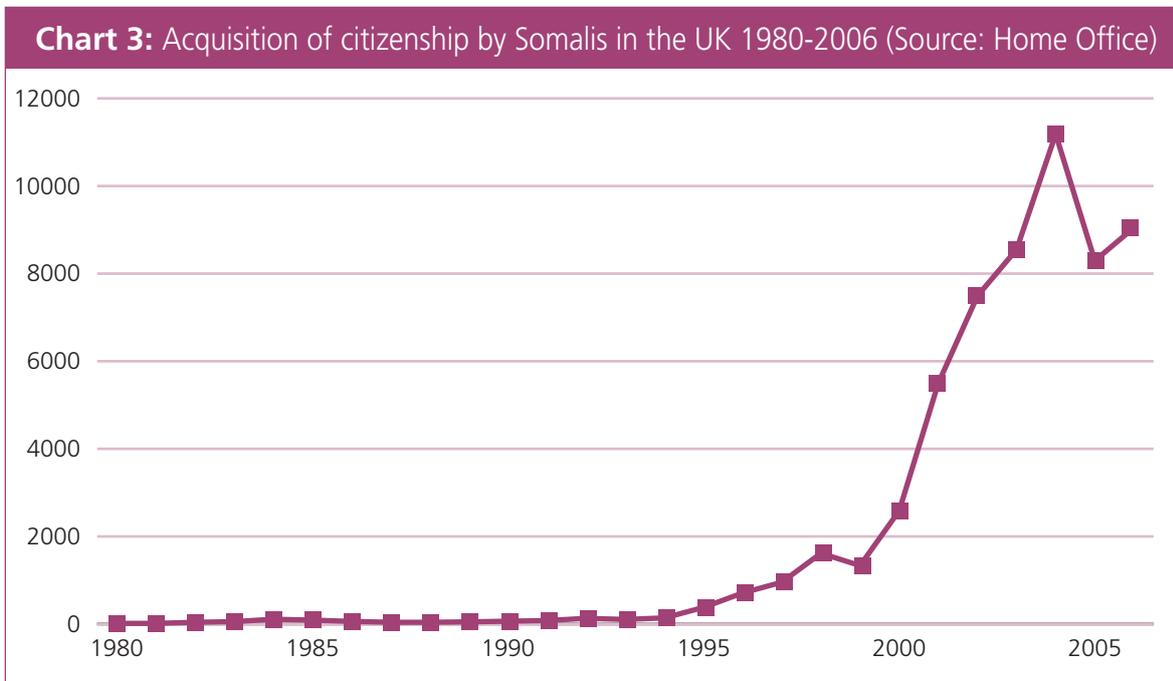
<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees (ICAR) (2007), *Briefing: The Somali Refugee Community in the UK*. [www.icar.org.uk/download.php?id=354](http://www.icar.org.uk/download.php?id=354)

<sup>13</sup> ICAR, 2007.



Statistics suggest that an increasing number of Somalis are taking up British citizenship. According to Home Office figures, since 2001, 50,000 Somalis have gained UK citizenship. Chart 3 shows the rapid growth in citizenship acquisition in recent years.



Though not a representative sample, most respondents in this study expressed the view that UK immigration policy is discriminatory towards Somalis and that the process is highly stressful. There was a common perception among respondents that Somalis are more disadvantaged than people from other countries, and that they are prevented from competing fairly with other newcomers. A number of respondents

claimed that Somali refugees are obliged to remain without legal status for five or more years unless they produce 'proper identification documents'. Some claimed that even if they do have genuine identification documents, in many cases immigration officers have refused to accept them. One community worker cited a number of cases of people he knew who have been living and working in the UK for ten years or more without being granted the right to live permanently in the country. Adults and young people both reported high stress levels related to their employment, their education and their future immigration status. Despite having been here for many years, some respondents felt that they are still treated as recently arrived refugees, and a large number of Somali youth are believed to be prevented from accessing higher education because of their lack of landed status.

## 6 Community Demography and Key Locations

2001 Census: Somalia born Muslim population in England: 37,999

2006 Annual Population Survey: Somalia-born estimate: 82,300

England is host to one of the largest and longest established Somali communities in Europe.<sup>14</sup> However, many respondents highlighted problems with ethnic data collection under the Census categories, which means that Somalis are subsumed under the black African or Other black categories, and hence the need to rely on country of birth statistics. However, these statistics do not include Somalis born in England or other parts of Europe, and so are likely to be significantly lower than the actual Somali population in England. In addition to the exclusion of children and young people born in England, the census figures do not provide useful estimates of the current Somali population because of significant Somali immigration since 2001. For example in 2001 the Somali born population in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets was 1,353, but recent estimates by community representatives and reports consider this to have probably increased ten-fold to around 10,000 - 15,000 – see Table 1.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Holman, C. and Holman, H. (2003) *First steps in a new country: baseline indicators for the Somali community in LB Hackney Sahil Housing Association*.

<sup>15</sup> Ian Cole and David Robinson (2003), *Somali Housing Experiences in England*, Sheffield Hallam University.

**Table 1: Census population figures for Somali born population compared to recent estimates for total ethnic Somali population (Source: Census 2001 and footnoted where applicable)**

Local authority	Somali born population 2001	Recent estimates (2003-2007)
Ealing	3,045	11,000 – 15,000 <sup>16</sup>
Tower Hamlets	1,353	10 - 15,000 <sup>17</sup>
Sheffield	1,306	3,000 – 5,000
Islington	1,226	2,500 - 4,000 <sup>18</sup>
Manchester	1,225	5,000 – 6,000
Leicester	872	10-15,000 <sup>19</sup>
Birmingham	819	3,000 – 4,000 <sup>20</sup>
Liverpool	678	3,000 – 5,000 <sup>21</sup>

The most recent official estimate by country of birth is 82,300 from the 2006 Annual Population Survey (APS), up from 42,548 in the 2001 census.<sup>22</sup> Within the community itself, perceptions of the size of the community are very different to those estimated from official sources. These estimates vary enormously, ranging from between 70,000 to 110,000 for London, and between 200,000 to 500,000 UK wide.<sup>23</sup> These are probably based on perceptions of high Somali population density in the areas where respondents questioned live and are likely to be too high.

In 2001, 80 per cent (30,461) of Somali born Muslims lived in London – see Table 3 for a list of the top ten boroughs by Somali-born Muslim population. Outside London there are significant Somali communities in Leicester, Sheffield, Liverpool, Cardiff, Birmingham, Bolton and Manchester. Recently, other cities such as Newcastle, Bristol, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Hull have seen a rise in numbers. Leicester is a particularly interesting case. In 2001 the census recorded only 872 residents born in Somalia, while in 2008 it has the largest population concentration outside London, estimated at around 10,000-15,000.<sup>24</sup> Most Somali refugees and asylum seekers have settled in the St. Matthews and St. Marks areas of Leicester and represent the largest Muslim community in this area.

<sup>16</sup> Ian Cole and David Robinson (2003), *Somali Housing Experiences in England*, Sheffield Hallam University.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Lianne Straus, Andy McEwan and Helen Croker (2006), *Tobacco use among the Somali population in Islington*, Islington Primary Care Trust.

<sup>19</sup> The Foreign Policy Centre (FPC) (2006), *Improving FCO Engagement with the UK-Somali Community*.

<sup>20</sup> Malcolm Dick (2002), *Celebrating Sanctuary: Birmingham and the Refugee Experience 1750-2002*, Birmingham City Council.

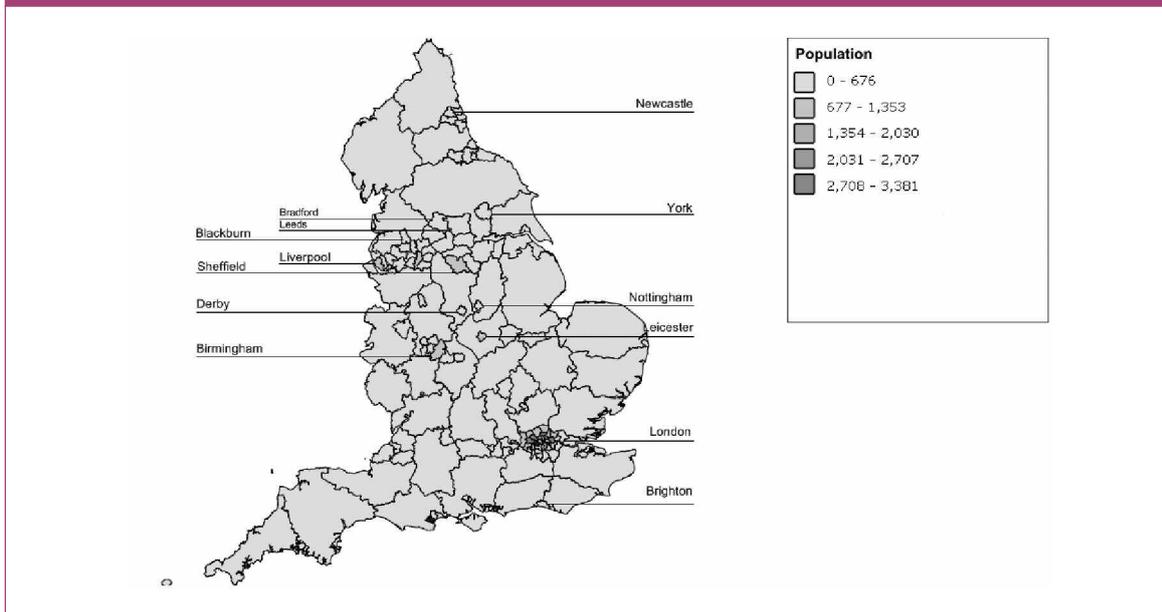
<sup>21</sup> Local Government stakeholder, April 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Irrespective of religion. Kyambi, S. (2007), *Beyond Black and White*, IPPR.

<sup>23</sup> These figures are included to highlight community perceptions of the size of the community rather than reflect the actual size of the population.

<sup>24</sup> FPC, 2006.

**Figure 1: Distribution of Somali born population in England, 2001 (Source: Census 2001, ST104)**



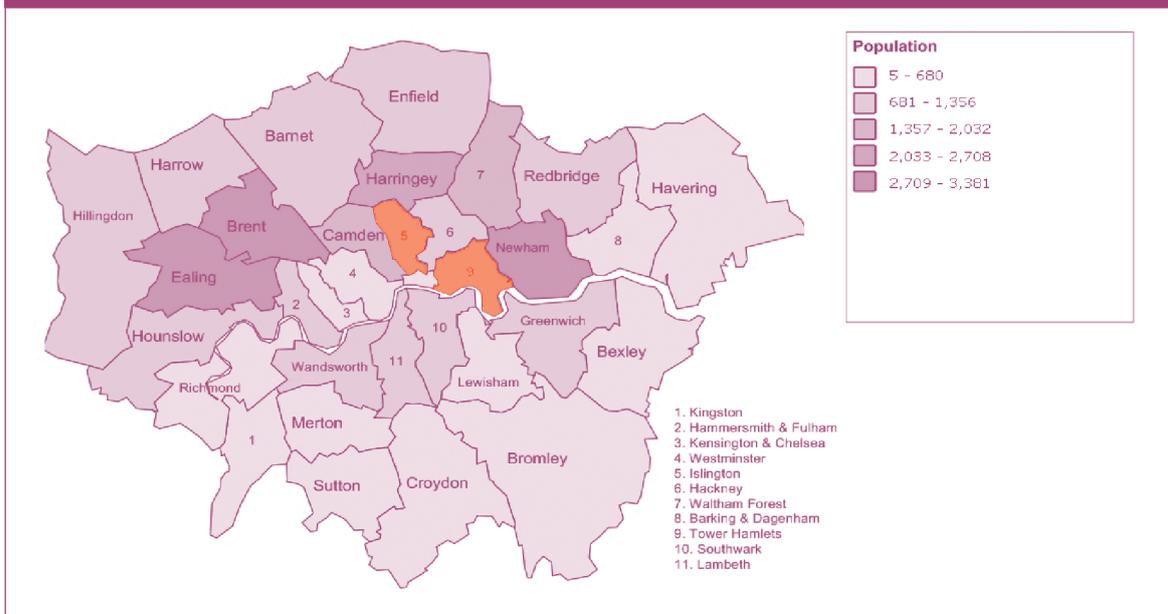
According to the 2001 Census, 89.3% of migrants born in Somalia are Muslim and there is a small amount of variation across England’s regions – see Table 2.

**Table 2: Distribution of Somali born Muslim population in Government Office Regions in England (Source: 2001 Census, commissioned table C0644)**

GO Region	% of Somali born population who are Muslim	Number of Somali born Muslims	% of total Somali-born Muslim population	Somali-born Muslims as % of GOR Muslim population
London	90	30,461	80.2	5.0
North West	87	1,828	4.8	0.9
Yorkshire and the Humber	88	1,298	3.4	0.7
East Midlands	88	1,295	3.4	1.8
South East	87	1,181	3.1	1.1
West Midlands	81	836	2.2	0.4
South West	90	652	1.7	2.8
East of England	83	376	1.0	0.5
North East	78	72	0.2	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>89.3%</b>	<b>37,999</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2.5%</b>

The majority of the Somali population in the UK is concentrated in London with large populations in Tower Hamlets, Newham, Brent, Hackney, Islington and Ealing. The population is significantly younger than the national profile; school roll data recorded 21,000 ethnic Somali pupils in 27 London Local Authorities in 2006.<sup>25</sup> There are smaller Somali groups dispersed across London, with main settlements in Acton, Camden, Crystal Palace, Wembley, Wembley Central, Tottenham, Southall, Hounslow, Harlesden, East Ham, Wapping, Kentish Town and Cricklewood. There is even a distinct Somali Bravanese community in Hackney with some speakers of Chimini.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, there is a small Somali community to the south of the Thames, spread across Thamesmead, Plumstead, Woolwich and Erith.<sup>27</sup> Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of the Somali population across London according to the 2001 census. The boroughs highlighted in red, ie Islington and Tower Hamlets, are the recipients of the majority of Somali immigrants since 2001.

**Figure 2: Distribution of Somali-born population in London**  
(Source: 2001 Census)



<sup>25</sup> Department for Skills and Education (2007), *Ethnicity and Education: The Evidence of Minority Ethnic Pupils aged 5-16*.

<sup>26</sup> *The Somaliland Times*, Issue 286: [www.somalilandtimes.net/sl/2007/286/72.shtml](http://www.somalilandtimes.net/sl/2007/286/72.shtml)

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<b>Table 3: Somali born Muslim population in London Local Authority areas (Source: 2001 Census, commissioned table C0644)</b>			
<b>Borough</b>	<b>% of Somali born population who are Muslim</b>	<b>Number of Somali born Muslims</b>	<b>Somali-born Muslims as % of LA Muslim population</b>
Brent	90	3,030	9.4
Ealing	91	3,017	9.7
Newham	86	2,798	4.7
Haringey	89	1,944	8.0
Camden	91	1,729	7.5
Waltham Forest	94	1,327	4.0
Tower Hamlets	92	1,246	1.7
Harrow	94	1,161	7.8
Redbridge	92	1,139	4.0
Hounslow	88	1,110	5.7

## 7 Socio economic situation

Somali born migrants have the lowest employment rate of all immigrants in the UK and levels of education within the community are also low, with 50 per cent having no qualifications and only 3 per cent having higher education qualifications.<sup>28</sup> Unemployment affects the community across the board, including men and women, young people and adults, highly skilled professionals and trades people, as well as unskilled individuals.

The reasons cited for this lack of economic mobility include the lack of work experience in the UK, lack of information about available support services, and barriers to accessing educational upgrading and retraining. Respondents also highlighted some specific issues related to public sector jobs and the perceived absence of people of Somali background in either senior or community facing positions in local and other public Authorities. According to many respondents, these organisations are seen as going through 'tick box' exercises when it comes to ethnic minority recruitment, which they feel severely disadvantages the Somali community. The following comment is illustrative of a widely held view: *The Local Council thinks as long as you have 'BME/Asians' in these positions it is ok. As long as they are 'BME' they don't care.*<sup>29</sup>

Islamophobia was also perceived as having an impact on the community in relation to employment opportunities. According to respondents, people are easily identified as Muslims due to their physical appearance, and since 9/11 men are finding it more difficult to find work. Religious requirements are also said to prevent some men from applying for some jobs, such as driving and security, because of the need to pray during work hours. Some respondents suggested that as there are no real support mechanisms for entrepreneurial men, there is a tendency for many to opt for owning internet cafes and other small businesses, particularly if they are unable to get jobs within institutions in which they feel there is a bias against the wearing of a beard.

Unemployment was felt by many respondents to be one key factor contributing to Somalis becoming caught in a cycle of depression, isolation and poverty, and ultimately turning to Khat use. Respondents suggested that many Somalis are also affected by stress, anxiety and loss of self-esteem due to being relegated from a position before the civil war where many had properties, jobs and were financially well off, to the lowest strata of society in the UK. They also highlighted the difficulties faced by highly educated people coming to the UK and being unable to practice the professions they had been trained for. The high hopes such people had for their own and their families' futures, and the reality of their life in the UK, is thought to leave many in a condition of hopelessness and despair.

<sup>28</sup> Sarah Kyambi (2005), *Beyond Black and White*, IPPR.

<sup>29</sup> Focus group participant, male.

Lack of access to housing and poor housing quality were highlighted by focus group respondents in Leicester as well as some one-to-one respondents. These experiences align with much of the existing data and research. In 2003 Sheffield Hallam undertook an extensive study into the housing experiences of Somalis in England.<sup>30</sup>

The study concluded that:

*The nature and extent of Somali housing aspirations and needs, however, remain hidden, largely as a result of the inadequacies of ethnic monitoring procedures and the limits of traditional approaches to determining and profiling need. It is therefore difficult to see how the provision of new housing opportunities can cater for the particular needs of Somali households (in areas such as location or design), how sensitive and relevant housing allocations can be made to Somali applicants and how services can be provided in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner.<sup>31</sup>*

The study made a number of recommendations specific to housing including:

- Ethnic categories employed by local authorities and housing associations should be appropriate and sensitive to the specifics of the local population
- Analysis of minority ethnic housing needs by local authorities should acknowledge and explore the particular requirements of distinct minority ethnic populations
- The Housing Corporation should maintain its commitment to a strong and vibrant black and minority ethnic housing movement in England, able to inform and educate white-led, mainstream agencies about the particular needs of different minority ethnic populations.

<sup>30</sup> Cole and Robinson, 2003.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

## 8 Key characteristics

### 8.1 Identity

Identity within the Somali community has been informed by the experiences of pastoralism, clan values and Islam as practiced in Somalia.<sup>32</sup> The community in England is best understood as a complex heterogeneous group made up of long-settled local communities (particularly from Somaliland), civil war refugee families (from both the North and the South), and recent arrivals from Europe, especially Scandinavia. Many of the latter group are European Union passport holders who have come to the UK for the more established Somali community infrastructure that exists in England, as well as to escape what they perceive as increasing discrimination in mainland Europe. These communities tend to loosely divide along a number of lines including Somali origin (ie Somaliland, Southern Somalia), Somali clan, gender and generation, and UK place of settlement.

Clans play a central role in Somali society, politics and identity formation. Clan groups share a common ancestry through male descent, with lineage often going back generations. The clan system in Somali society forms not only the basis of the traditional Somali political structure, but also provides both a system of rights and social support. The system continues to have an impact on the community in the UK, often acting as a pre-existing support network with clan members feeling obliged to assist a newly arrived refugee from their own clan. A Foreign Policy report on the community in the UK notes that although clan loyalty is an important issue for Somalis in the UK, there is a reluctance to discuss its significance with outsiders.<sup>33</sup>

There are five main clans; four of these, Darod, Isaq, Hawiye and Dir, are commonly referred to as 'Noble' clans, whose members are believed to share a common Somali ancestry.<sup>34</sup> The fifth main clan, the Digil and Mirifle, are described as occupying the middle ground between the 'Noble' clans and Somali minority groups.<sup>35</sup> Members of 'lower' clans or minority groups are frequently the targets of persecution and are relatively more disadvantaged than other clans.<sup>36</sup> The UK Home Office identifies the Bajuni, Benadiri and Bravanese minority groups as being part of the 'underclass' in Somali society, and at particular risk in light of their lack of affiliation with any established Somali clans.<sup>37</sup> There are also a number of other minority groups, known as 'occupational castes', with few or no clan affiliations, and who have historically

<sup>32</sup> For an overview of pastoralism, as developed in Somalia, read Alex de Waal's *'Class and Power in a Stateless Somalia'* (2007); Social Science Research Council. [hornofafrica.ssrc.org/dewaal/index1.html](http://hornofafrica.ssrc.org/dewaal/index1.html)

<sup>33</sup> FPC, 2006.

<sup>34</sup> Danish Immigration Group (2000) *Report on Minority Groups in Somalia*. [www.unhcr.org/home/RSDCOI/3ae6a5fa0.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/home/RSDCOI/3ae6a5fa0.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Home Office (January 2007) *Country of Origin Information Report- Somalia*. [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs07/somalia-150107.doc](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs07/somalia-150107.doc)

<sup>36</sup> US Dept of State (2006) *Country Report on Human Rights Practices*. [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61592.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61592.htm)

<sup>37</sup> Home Office (2006) *Operational Guidance Notes – Somalia*

[www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/countryspecificasylumpolicyogns/somaliaogn?view=Binary](http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/countryspecificasylumpolicyogns/somaliaogn?view=Binary)

faced societal discrimination, including exclusion from employment and the denial of ownership of property or livestock.<sup>38</sup>

Religious, tribal and political problems back home continue to inform debates among the community, and some respondents noted that there are individuals who exploit tribal affiliations to create unnecessary divisions amongst Somalis in the UK. They suggested that older people, with the direct experience of inter-clan hostilities and factionalism, may be more reluctant to co-operate with members of other clans. Paradoxically, it is also more common for the clan elders to take a peacemaking role in such disputes.

Often successful settlement in the UK results in a weakening of links with Somalia and a lessening of the emphasis on clan affiliation in favour of identities based on local connections in the UK.<sup>39</sup> The Foreign Policy report referred to above also notes that although there is high clan awareness in the community, the significance of clanship may be lessening in the UK. In Britain, territorial and occupational identities of the Somali diaspora, such as 'pastoralists and farmers', are beginning to fade and identities are increasingly being asserted through a sense of 'Britishness' and 'religion'.<sup>40</sup>

Somalis identify themselves primarily as Muslims, and some respondents noted that they are also redefining what it is to be a good Muslim in the context of their new environments. This is especially the case for many teenagers who are attempting to combine the cultural and religious practices of their inherited culture with their experiences of the host culture.

Conflicts can arise when parents and children redefine their Muslim identity in different ways. While some struggle to find an accommodation between their life in England and a commitment to Islam, as well as reconciling a Somali identity with being British born and bred, many young people are positive about their multiple identities. However, many respondents felt that the second generation as a whole has yet to fully come to terms with its hybrid identity. Some respondents suggested that there needs to be a 'psychological leap' in the collective mind of the younger generations if they are to assert a renewed, confident Somali identity that is at ease with its dual British-Somali nature.

<sup>38</sup> Home Office, 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Rima Berns McGown (1999) *Muslims in the Diaspora: The Somali Communities of London and Toronto*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

## 8.2 Ethnicity

Clan identity and belonging represents a complex and historically deep set of relationships, but these should not be overstated or generalised in the context of the UK. Some reports have suggested that Somalis refer to themselves as 'Afro-Arabs' although this term was not mentioned by any community respondents. Most respondents stressed the overall homogeneity of the Somali community. Most are Sunni Muslims following the Shafi' judicial school with a common language, and claim that there are no class or ethnic divisions beyond the tribe or clan.<sup>41</sup> However, tribal affiliations can sometimes override religious commonalities.

## 8.3 Religion

Most Somalis are Sunni Muslims and predominantly followers of the Shafi' school of Islam. Religious identity is strong and influences many aspects of life. According to the 2001 census 89.3 per cent of the Somali-born population in England is Muslim.

While religion is acknowledged to be an important part of Somali culture, a number of respondents in the study stressed that it does not necessarily dominate everyday life. Strict adherence to orthopraxy varies in the community, particularly as in Britain being visible as a Muslim is seen by some Somalis as being 'out of step' with British culture.

Mosques are the primary centre for religious and social gatherings where relatives, new arrivals, friends and members of the community come for prayers and to socialise. Mosques are also seen as playing an important role as information-sharing networks and receiving news about 'home'. Traditionally Somalis have tended to attend mosques established by the more settled Muslim communities, particularly Pakistani and Bangladeshi mosques. Most Somalis in Islington and other parts of north London attend the Finsbury Park Mosque. However, there are now a small number of mosques around the country that are specifically built and run by Somalis. One of these is the Al-Huda Mosque in Tower Hamlets. There is also a Somali mosque/Islamic Centre in St Marks in Leicester and the Al Furqaan Mosque in Manchester, which is also known as the Manchester Somali Culture and Development Centre.

In other areas of the country Somalis will often attend local mosques which are run by other ethnic groups. For example, in London many Somalis attend mosques in Old Kent Road, Regents Park and Whitechapel Road.

Many Somali women also attend mosques regularly, although not for Friday prayers, whilst others recite prayers at home in small groups or alone. One respondent noted that it is less common for women in Somalia to attend mosques because they will usually get their religious teaching through the education system whereas in England they need to attend mosques for Quranic studies.

<sup>41</sup> The Shafi' school is a major Sunnī Islamic law school associated with Muhammad ibn Idris alī Shafīī (d. 820), predominant in East Africa and Southeast Asia.

Groupings that do exist include some youth groups or religious followers congregating in particular mosques to read the Qur'an or Hadiths. There are some Somali young people who have formed ties with other young non-Somali Muslims, and some respondents feared that this might make them less engaged with the Somali community itself.

## 8.4 Language

The majority of the community speak Somali, though a small Chiwmini speaking minority has also been identified in the UK.<sup>42</sup> Approximately 15 per cent of Somalis are also reported to speak fluent Arabic.<sup>43</sup> Respondents also noted that there are some Somalis who have arrived from Holland, or other European countries, who do not speak their mother tongue or English very well, and consequently face significant challenges integrating into both the Somali and British communities in the UK.

Many UK Somalis also have problems with English language ability. A key determinant of English language skills is gender. Somali men tend on the whole to have both better English language and Somali literacy skills than women. According to a Foreign Policy Centre report in 2002, 7 per cent of Somali men who had been living in the UK for five years or more spoke little or no English, compared with 27 per cent of Somali women.<sup>44</sup>

The lack of English language skills amongst Somali women has contributed to their low levels of interaction and integration into wider UK society. Many have suffered high levels of social and economic exclusion as a consequence. Female focus group respondents noted that it has also hampered them in other ways, for example in their ability to support their children through the UK education system.

An additional problem identified by respondents is a lack of literacy in Somali among many adult members of the community, who may have missed out on their schooling due to either war or migration during the post-independence years in Somalia when schooling was available. In the context of the UK, where the conditions necessary for effective oral transmission of tradition and culture do not exist, this is a loss that is felt particularly keenly.

<sup>42</sup> Chimwini or Chimbazizi is a Bantu language spoken by people from the city of Brava. Bravanese also speak Standard Somali which is the official language of Somalia and has been retained as the national language of the various regional governments.

<sup>43</sup> FPC, 2006.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

## 9 Intra-community Dynamics

### 9.1 Intergenerational issues

Somalis are traditionally a tight knit people, with very strong kinship and family structures, both immediate and extended. However, within a broader community framework, the social bonds are looser, with varying degrees of closeness with other members of the community. These structures, however, are beginning to break down, and consequently there is a considerable level of intergenerational tension around issues relating to family relationships and obligations.

The process of negotiating conflicting cultural identities is also believed to have led to high levels of intergenerational conflict, an issue that was repeatedly highlighted by respondents of all ages during the study. Somali youth are seen to be creating new British identities developed from a fusion of an attachment to Somalia, clan group identities and Britishness. This is not an easy process and can often result in confusion, tensions and conflicts both inside and outside the family. Such conflict centres primarily around notions of belonging and identity. Most of the older respondents expressed their concern about generational differences, relating this to the formation of new identities. A young respondent illustrated the tensions between the generations in these words:

*Many in the elder generation are still talking about Somaliland – young people are confused whether they are here to stay or will go back to some mythical Somaliland that doesn't exist.<sup>45</sup>*

Young Somalis are seen by the older generations as increasingly moving away from the Somali culture as they adopt what is perceived as a British way of life. While this is seen as positive in some ways as it helps them to integrate better within mainstream society, many also see this detachment from the traditions and older mentors in the community as the reason why many go astray and get involved in crime and drug abuse or become 'over religious.' One respondent summed up a common sentiment among older respondents:

*There are huge generation gaps among the Somalis here in the UK. For example, the Somalis born here, or those who grew up here, do not understand their culture or mother tongue, and often do not understand the reason why they should adopt Somali culture as it does not have any bearing on their day to day life here in the UK. Again it comes back to the issue of role models in regards to cultural and identity issues. Some also tend to become very religious which is the other side of the coin.<sup>46</sup>*

<sup>45</sup> Somali community respondent: Male, 20s, London.

<sup>46</sup> Somali community respondent: Female, 30s, London.

Youth crime and vulnerability to negative influences was a concern that consistently came up during the research. Most respondents linked this to the breakup of the traditional extended family support network in which individual problems were normally solved collectively. In the UK family separation and marital breakdown is seen as the cause of growing anxiety, both for individuals and the community as a whole, and is believed to have had a very negative impact on young people. Whilst some respondents felt that this is most evident in youth crime and a growing young Somali prison population, others felt that without anyone to guide them along the right path many vulnerable young people are turning to Islam for inspirational guidance and ending up being brainwashed by what they describe as the 'wrong sort of people'.

Some respondents also identified traditional gender differences as a key factor affecting male behaviour. They suggested that boys are revered as 'demi-gods' by most Somali families, and that discipline in relation to boys is lacking as a result within the community. According to them, many young men and boys are allowed to do whatever they want, and that as a consequence many regard themselves as untouchable. This lack of discipline and respect for authority is thought to lead to major problems at home and with institutions, manifesting in tensions between young Somalis and authority figures such as the police, education professionals and Somali elders.<sup>47</sup>

However, while acknowledging that there are many areas of internal conflict within the community, some respondents also spoke with pride about their intra-community mediation processes. One interviewee described the process in detail as follows:

*When individuals have a dispute, this dispute can be taken to the community elders instead of going to the police. The elders will pass judgment and the individuals will promise to accept the decision of the elders. The person who has done wrong will have to apologise to the elders for not coming to them first and may have to pay a fine to the other person. The other party will also have to apologise to the community and may have to pay money to a community fund. This is a cultural practice that has been imported from Somalia. We are very proud of this since we don't use up police time and public money to mediate smaller disputes. Not many people know about this or see this as a contribution to society.<sup>48</sup>*

<sup>47</sup> Hermione Harris (2004) *The Somali community in the UK - What we know and how we know it*, Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK (ICAR).

<sup>48</sup> Focus group participant, male.

## 9.2 Young people

Somali youth in Britain are a diverse group due to differences in country of birth, reasons for migration, family cohesion, economic position, clan identity, religion, gender, education and social norms. As such, there is no one single definable Somali youth identity. Unfortunately, the stereotype most frequently encountered is that of the young male offender.<sup>49</sup> This is not the whole picture and there are many young people who are striving against enormous odds to create the future they want.<sup>50</sup>

There are several barriers to Somali youth achieving the same level of success as other UK peer groups. Many Somali young people born in Britain are said to be trying to come to terms with being consistently seen and treated as 'the outsider'. The two most significant barriers cited by respondents were family culture and religion. Religious identity for many Somali youth is a given, but generally remains in the background as a private relationship as they cope with external pressures. It is the sense of not belonging to the British, Somali culture or 'Muslim' culture in Britain which is potentially creating the greatest tensions within families, and contributing to the exclusion of Somali youth from mainstream society.

A number of respondents noted that clan affiliations and regional background in Somalia continues to affect young Somali male behaviour in London. They suggested that many boys form groups around different clan and regional identities, and become involved in gang crime based around these identities. Respondents identified the lack of social spaces for the community, in particular for young people, and a lack of role models, especially male role models, as one of the key causes of crime amongst young Somali males. Young boys are described by many in the community as a 'lost generation'. Women respondents expressed particular concern about the growing numbers of young Somalis in prison, suggesting that there are an unacceptably large number in the Feltham young offenders' institution.<sup>51</sup>

In response to these problems and concerns, some youth and community organisations and Local Authority councils such as Camden have begun working with young people to assist in relationships between young people and families, and between young people and local institutions. Whilst these initiatives were seen as hard work, many community organisations felt them to be necessary and have developed a range of approaches including distributing leaflets and word of mouth outreach activities in community centres, mosques and parks mainly frequented by boys.

<sup>49</sup> Harris, 2004.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Female focus group participant, May 2008.

## 9.3 Women

*Women in Somalia were very dynamic. They worked in fields and in the professions. They were strong and central in the family and community structures, but now they are trying to balance various problems, including the legacy of war and the need to support families in Somalia, which is affecting their lifestyle here.*<sup>52</sup>

During the 1960s, the Somali population was concentrated in Tower Hamlets and largely made up of single men. During the 1980s and 1990s the majority of asylum seekers were women, some of whom came to join families, but a vast majority of whom were single women with children escaping war. This influx has meant that there are now an equal number of men and women in the community but significant differences exist between the education, employment and social opportunities available to men and women.

Amongst Somali women in Britain there is generally a low level of education, and respondents noted that most Somali women are to be found in lower paid jobs. For those women who do work, many occupy cleaning positions and stress that they are willing to do anything to support their children and families. As a female focus group participant put it: *you need to start somewhere*. Women cite the main barriers to employment as being non-recognition of their work qualifications, and the lack of work experience in Britain. Female focus group respondents noted that at the moment many women feel they are being held back, not simply due to internal community dynamics, but because of external factors such as discrimination.

It was reported that even highly qualified women in the community find themselves receiving benefits, and that for many this constitutes a problem since indigenous Somali culture expects a high degree of self-reliance from both men and women. The inability of such women to continue on their chosen career paths is believed to be extremely demoralising. However, women are increasingly finding ways to create pathways into work. For example, more educated women are getting involved in charity work and setting up businesses. Subsequently, as well as supporting their families back home, they are playing a more active role in the public arena in the UK.

Since migrating to the UK, community respondents noted that the role of women has been changing in many ways. It was explained that while traditionally men were leaders of the family, women in the UK are becoming more successful than men in business and other areas of life. Also, as in most other migrant and indigenous communities, respondents noted that girls are performing better than boys in the education system and becoming more highly qualified than their male counterparts.

<sup>52</sup> Female focus group participant, May 2008.

Increasing numbers of women are thought to be forced into taking on single parent roles as a result of family and marital breakdown. It was noted by some respondents that there is a high divorce rate among Somalis in the UK, although depending upon the region women come from there is also said to be a high rate of re-marriage. Many women are said to be raising children on their own, and some respondents bemoaned the absence of support from men who are *missing in action*, or because *they are here [in the UK] but not here [with their families]*. The transition for Somali children who have arrived as asylum seekers or refugees is extremely difficult and respondents claimed that many have suffered some form of trauma which has had a detrimental impact on their mental health.

Previous studies have noted that the role of Somali women is also shifting in relation to religious identity. According to one academic study:

*The role of Somali women in the diaspora is undergoing significant change as a result of the influence of Islamists and the migratory experience. Many women wore the hijab for the first time in the diaspora as a way of asserting their Muslim identity, rather than because they were instructed by a father or husband. In many cases the decision to wear the hijab is accompanied by an increased understanding of the Qur'an and a concomitant feeling of increased power to make decisions about their lives and identity.*<sup>53</sup>

Many women are housebound because of the lack of social spaces to go to. For many this can lead to physical and mental health problems. Health issues are of particular concern amongst the older generation of women, and a cause of frustration among young people who recognise the need for a stronger and louder advocacy role in relation to health. There are real and acknowledged difficulties in bringing about health behaviour change among women in a community that is under such extreme pressures. However, some younger respondents in the female focus group acknowledged the need for more responsibility on the part of the community itself and commented on the lack of interest many Somali women appear to show about their own health.

Female respondents stressed that Somali women have traditionally played a strong role in communities and that this role needs to be renewed. Most clearly recognise the challenges that their community faces on a whole number of fronts and want to be more engaged and enabled to take on the responsibility for doing something about community problems. However, in the absence of appropriate community spaces and forums this is difficult for many women. Respondents suggested that women would come to life if they had the appropriate facilities to express their skills, capabilities and strength. Some female focus group participants noted that things are beginning to change for the better, and that Somali women in London have now developed strong networks which are enabling many to move forward against a backdrop of difficult circumstances.

<sup>53</sup> Berns McGown, 1999.

## 9.4 Integration and cohesion

As highlighted earlier, English proficiency has been identified as a key barrier that prevents many Somalis from fully integrating into UK life. Lack of English language skills has a significant impact on positive social participation, and the lack of access to information is seen as a major barrier for many Somalis. Racial tensions between Somalis and other groups, and discrimination in housing and employment are also perceived to be important factors in hindering integration.

The main problems articulated by respondents include: poor housing, lack of access to public health services due to language barriers and culturally unresponsive provision (eg lack of translators during health appointments), alongside prejudice and discriminatory attitudes that they encounter from public sector staff. These stories circulate widely among community members and reinforce the sense of being a marginalised community that is not respected. There is a very low level of reporting of discriminatory incidents because of unfamiliarity with the UK human rights legislation and a lack of confidence in redress for victims. Isolation is also a common theme stressed by many, particularly Somali mothers. As one female respondent noted:

*Because of their unfamiliarity with the cultural and social norms of Brits, Somalis appear to get less involved with members of the wider society. People generally feel less warmth and more formality in their social relationships in the UK. The culture is so much different from what they experienced at home. This makes the community inward looking and closed in on itself.<sup>54</sup>*

Many respondents also felt that the community encounters considerable prejudice from other ethnic minority communities, and that it feels particularly discriminated against by West African Christians. Respondents suggested that this is partly fuelled by an anti-Muslim sentiment in these communities relating to the Muslim-Christian dynamic in some African countries. There are also reported to be high levels of ethnic tensions amongst West Indian and Somali communities in some parts of London. The black Caribbean community were seen by respondents as aligning with white working class populations to express anti-Muslim sentiments and to treat Somalis with disdain in interactions.

<sup>54</sup> Somali community respondent: Female, 30s, London.

There is a great deal of internal debate concerning community identity and how to retain that identity, while at the same time allowing enough room for change to enable the community to fully integrate into mainstream society. Attitudes regarding this issue vary considerably, with some believing that Somali society, particularly its young, has already assimilated too much into the mainstream. Many also see their efforts as being unreciprocated by mainstream society: *We come from a culture where the host shows the visitor around, whereas in England there is a cold host; so what do we do?*<sup>55</sup> Many respondents were also critical about the current public debates about integration and cohesion:

*Politicians need to be mindful about the language that they use: stupid terms like integration, community cohesion and Britishness - what do they really mean? My values are similar to those of my non-Somali or white British friends.*<sup>56</sup>

The UK hosts the largest Somali community outside Somalia, and the UK based community was described by some respondents as being seen as a 'meeting point'. Among Somalis outside Britain, the UK is also thought to have a reputation for religious tolerance and as being a 'more intercultural society' than many of the European states Somalis have left behind.<sup>57</sup> However, according to some respondents, the reality sometimes doesn't live up to this view. In the words of a male focus group participant:

*75 per cent of Somalis in Leicester are from other countries apart from Somalia, mostly from Scandinavian countries. They came here believing that they would get a better life but when they come here they are very disappointed. They were much better off where they were. We thought that with the language and with the British people we would have better lives – this isn't the case.*<sup>58</sup>

While most respondents saw the lack of integration as a result of external barriers, some believed that the community has also been too rigid about retaining its distinctive identity. They suggested that Somalis need to take a more active lead in integrating themselves into British society. This need for a more proactive approach is highlighted by one interviewee as follows:

*Often the Somali community is not active enough and is waiting for the host country to come forward and assist them in their community needs, whereas it should be the other way around. Somalis need to come forward and ask for support.*<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Focus group participant, male.

<sup>56</sup> Focus group participant, female.

<sup>57</sup> ICAR, 2007.

<sup>58</sup> Focus group participant, male.

<sup>59</sup> Somali community respondent: Male, 30s, Leicester.

## 9.5 Other issues

There are significant differences between the UK and Somalia in relation to social and health service availability. In Somalia people are used to relying more on the support of family and friends for emergency or non-emergency help. Some respondents working in community organisations noted that significant numbers of Somalis underutilise some services which did not exist back home. Even when people do know of the existence of specific services, many do not know how and where to access them, and consequently do not seek help. Language barriers and the formalities connected with service delivery also discourage some people from using welfare and emergency services. These respondents described a tendency among many people to drop in without appointments with the expectation of obtaining a service immediately.

However, most respondents suggested that the main barrier to accessing appropriate service provision is the inability of mainstream services to understand and cater for the very specific needs the Somali community has. There are said to be high levels of stress and mental health related illness in the community, the likely causes of which are lack of access to employment, racial harassment and isolation. The community also has to cope with the traumas resulting from many years of war and life in refugee camps, forced migration and family breakdowns. All these are believed to lead to a range of hidden 'health and well-being' issues, which are not being recognised or addressed by health and social welfare providers.

In the education system, teachers are also thought to struggle to understand the psychology of Somali children who suffer from trauma related to these issues, and they are therefore unable to offer appropriate support. This in turn is believed to lead to many children dropping out of school, being excluded and generally underachieving in education. While there is some youth service provision available, it is not far reaching enough and hence has a low overall impact on the community.

## 10 Media

### 10.1 Perceptions of the UK media

The British media is blamed by many as playing a major role in inciting hate crime and hence making integration and cohesion difficult. It is perceived as constantly attacking Muslims and of making gross errors in linking Islam and terrorism. Many Somalis interviewed remarked that the UK media often portrays a stereotypical and negative picture of Muslims and Somalis. The little reporting that is done is linked to crime, war in Somalia and terrorism. On the stereotyping of Somalis, the general view of most respondents is captured by this comment from one of the respondents:

*I think that the media in the UK has been very unhelpful. It constantly labels the community and propagates negative aspects such as Somalis being refugees, asylum seekers and illegal immigrants.<sup>60</sup>*

As an example of the extremes this can go to, another quoted a tabloid report from a few years ago which claimed that Somalis were 'eating donkeys' in London, a complete fabrication as far as respondents were concerned. Such negative stereotyping is said to add to the alienation already experienced by the community.

### 10.2 Media consumption

Somalis based in Britain have a keen interest in the media. African-born Somalis take a particular interest in the political situation in Somalia itself, while anecdotal evidence suggests that British-born Somalis have less interest in following political developments in the Horn of Africa. Some respondents suggested that many Somalis still do not see themselves as people who are in the UK on a permanent basis, and like other migrant communities before them, still retain the 'myth of return'. Many therefore watch news and seek out websites and radio broadcasts from outside the UK intended for people in Somalia and the wider diaspora.

According to a mapping report by the International Organisation for Migration London (IOM), word of mouth is the most common source of information (36%), followed by the radio (31%), the Internet (22%) and then newspapers 5 per cent.<sup>61</sup> In terms of locations for receiving information IOM's survey found that money transfer outlets (40%), shops and markets (34%) and libraries (9%) were the most recommended locations for publicity material.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Somali community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

<sup>61</sup> IOM London (2006), *Somali Mapping Exercise*.

[www.iomlondon.org/doc/mapping/Somali%20Mapping%20Exercise%20Final%20Report.pdf](http://www.iomlondon.org/doc/mapping/Somali%20Mapping%20Exercise%20Final%20Report.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

The majority of respondents confirmed that BBC Somali radio occupies a central position in Somali homes in Britain since they rely solely on it to get unbiased news about Somalia. A BBC Somali poll also indicated that 99 per cent of Somalis in the UK listen to the service.<sup>63</sup> The revolution in communications and technologies means that many Somalis now have access to BBC Somali via satellite or internet. However, many still prefer to congregate in khat houses, Somali shops, restaurants, coffee shops and mosques as they view radio listening as a collective activity. This habit of congregating reflects the cultural norms that govern the Somali way of life.<sup>64</sup>

There is a diversity of media sources that are popular in the Somali community. While the majority of respondents cited that they mainly watch mainstream British TV channels, trans-national television channels remain a prominent part of Somali life. Al-Jazeera in particular has become the main source of news for Somalis living in the UK. Many stated that the channel reinforces a sense of wider belonging among the Somalis/Muslim communities in the Diasporas.

There are at least three UK-based small radio stations with limited Somali transmissions. Two of them (Somali Voice and SOA) are based in London, while a third, Sahan Radio, is based in Manchester. SOA, which broadcasts on London's Spectrum Radio, transmits a two-hour long programme every day. No other radio outlet transmits more than four hours each week. However, Radio Sahan claims it 'will become a broad service aimed at the UK Somali community, playing music and providing information and discussions on issues such as health, immigration and education. It will be transmitted 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The service will be broadcast in the Somali language. It will be free to air and carried on the Hotbird 6 satellite network.'

In May 2005, a group of London-based Somali businessmen launched a satellite television called 'UNIV-TV' (Universal Television) which was available in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. However, UNIV-TV broadcasts have been sporadic and the station has not been on-air since April 2006. An initiative based at the Rockingham Community Centre in London, in association with the 'Community TV Trust', is reportedly investigating the feasibility of establishing a UK-wide Somali-language television station. A Mogadishu-based TV station called 'Somali Television Network' or STN, with a bureau in London, reportedly broadcast from East Africa for several years (including covering the election of the President of Somalia at the end of two-year long peace talks in Kenya in October 2004).

At least five weekly or monthly Somali-relevant print publications are circulated in the UK, including three tabloid-sized newspapers: *Kasmo* (c. 5,000), *Jamhuuriya* (c. 3,000) and *The Somali Voice* (Bristol based). There are three magazines: *Hiraal*, *Somali Eye* (quarterly, c. 20,000) and *Sheeko*. There are also two newspapers dedicated to sport, 'Goal' and 'The Player', and others dedicated to topics such as women's issues. There is no daily UK-oriented Somali newspaper.

<sup>63</sup> Anthony Olden (1999), 'Oral Culture in a Western Communication', *Libri*, Vol. 49, pp. 212-224.

<sup>64</sup> IOM, 2006.

The Internet is a key source of information both for UK-Somalis and the global Somali diaspora. A significant number of the many Somali-relevant websites are based in the UK. The most popular Somali online publications are:

- [www.Hiiraan.com](http://www.Hiiraan.com) (Canada-based; c. 35,000 visitors/day)
- [www.Dayniile.com](http://www.Dayniile.com) (Sweden-based; c. 32,000 visitors/day)
- [www.Midnimo.com](http://www.Midnimo.com) (UK-based; c. 20,000 visitors/day)
- [www.Awdalnews.com](http://www.Awdalnews.com) (US-based; c. 20,000 visitors/day)
- [www.hornafrik.com](http://www.hornafrik.com)

Other important websites include:

- [www.BBCsomaliland.com](http://www.BBCsomaliland.com) (UK)
- [www.Allpuntland.com](http://www.Allpuntland.com) (Netherlands)
- [www.Qarannews.com](http://www.Qarannews.com) (UK)
- [www.Jamhuuriya.info](http://www.Jamhuuriya.info) (UK)
- [www.Goobjoog.net](http://www.Goobjoog.net) (UK)
- [www.Somaliweyn.com](http://www.Somaliweyn.com) (Sweden)
- [www.4somalwomen.com](http://www.4somalwomen.com) (popular with women)
- [www.somalinet.com](http://www.somalinet.com)
- [www.somalilife.com](http://www.somalilife.com)
- [www.Aflax.net](http://www.Aflax.net) (religiously orientated)
- [www.boqolsoon.com](http://www.boqolsoon.com) (religiously orientated)
- [www.hobyonet.com](http://www.hobyonet.com) (covers Somali music issues).

Many Somali websites contain material in both Somali and English. These websites are popular among UK-Somalis, many of whom rely on them for information about the UK, as well as news from Somalia itself. Some websites also offer web streaming of video clips.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>65</sup> The Foreign Policy Centre's paper on improving FCO engagement with the UK-Somali community (2006) – has a comprehensive list of Somali-relevant media based in the UK and in Africa.

Non-Somali media outlets popular among Somalis include Pan-Arab and International television stations such as Al-Jazeera, Iqraa, CNN and BBC World. Many UK-Somalis prefer Pan-Arab stations to UK terrestrial stations for cultural reasons. Sky News reportedly has some following among UK-Somalis. This may be because the channel occasionally reports from Somalia and broadcast a series of such reports in 2005. Among those UK-Somalis who can read English, the Guardian and Mirror are reportedly preferred for international news and sports respectively.

Although most Somali media outlets tend to target a broad audience, specialist outlets do exist. In Mogadishu, for example, there are two radio stations focusing on religious issues and the teachings of Islam: 'The Holy Qur'aan' Radio and 'Iqra' Radio.

# 11 Links with country of origin

## 11.1 Travel

Most Somalis in the UK have been parted from family due to the civil war in Somalia and concerns for those left behind remain strong. One respondent estimated that 60 per cent of families in the UK have been split up due to the war, and that most maintain strong links with their families left behind. However, the continuing war and civil strife makes it difficult for most people to physically travel back to visit their families. The link is maintained mainly through sending money to relatives in Somalia, and through observing current political events taking place in the country.

Statistics from the Home Office support the information provided by respondents about the low rates of travel (see Table 4). Out of all 13 communities, flights by Somalis to and from Somalia are by far the least frequent. The next lowest is Iraq at 14,100. Given the large number of Somalis in the UK, there are a very small number of passengers returning after a temporary leave of absence ie visiting the country. There are only 97 foreign fee paying Somali students in the UK which means these trips are infrequent.<sup>66</sup>

**Table 4: Passengers given leave to enter the UK by nationality, 2006  
(Home Office, Control of Immigration Statistics, 2006)**

	Total Admitted	Ordinary	Business	Students	Passengers returning after temporary leave of absence	Leave to enter	Refused entry on Arrival
Somalia	3,540	445	55	5	820	1,020	690

## 11.2 Remittances

There is an ongoing concern in the community about the political situation and attendant lack of peace and stability in Somalia and about how this impacts on the welfare of family, friends and others left behind. People back home rely heavily on the remittances sent by the Somalis abroad, who are the main providers for their relatives and a lifeline for vast numbers of people in Somalia. As one male focus group respondent described: *Sending money to relatives is a necessity not a luxury, I have three children and six grandchildren. If I don't send back £300 a month, they will die.* Most families support their siblings or blood relations back home through financial support via remittances using Dahabshil, Amal and Qaran Express companies. Unfortunately there is no official data on the actual level of remittances from the UK to Somalia.

<sup>66</sup> UNESCO (2007), *Global Education Handbook*.

## 11.3 Political links

Another reason for close links with Somalia is political motivation. Political problems in Somalia are still evident in the UK context in many different ways. The trauma that the community has collectively and individually experienced as a consequence of Somalia's history still plays out today in the UK context. Related to this is the issue of uncertainty about the community's long term future in the UK.

Many Somalis in the UK were reported by respondents as having strong ties with politicians, or of having a desire and ambition to become involved in politics, back home. They therefore retain strong ties and belonging to specific tribes, and political parties in Somalia and Somaliland. People who aspire to future leadership are said to travel a great deal for political conferences and other related activities.

## 12 Civil Society

### 12.1 Brief overview

In 2006 there were more than 200 Somali community organisations registered with the English Charity Commission. However, while Somali communities have been settled in the UK for over 100 years and there are numerous civil society organisations in every major area of settlement, most people perceive Somali community organisations to be at an early stage of establishment compared to the older migrant community associations catering for the Pakistani, Indian and black Caribbean communities. This is partly due to the fact that the majority of the community arrived as refugees, as well as much later than these established communities, from the late 1980s onwards.

Competition with the older communities for scarce resources is also seen to have held back Somali civil society development. As one community worker described the situation: *We compete for funding with (other ethnic minority) groups that have been around for 20 years, and who have 20 years' experience filling out forms, doing proposals and getting funding. We can't compete with them.*<sup>67</sup>

Somali civil society organisations are also very localised and not networked into wider partnerships; therefore their impact and influence does not often extend beyond their local area. One of the reasons for this is that Somali community associations are scattered all over the UK and there is no one strong voice for the Somali communities across the country. There have been two unsuccessful efforts to establish a nationwide forum, the 'Somali Conference' in 1997, and the 'Somali Community Meeting' in 2003 (co-ordinated by Jeremy Corbyn MP). This is thought to be a result of the fragmented nature of Somali communities and networks in the UK, and perhaps exacerbated by Somalis' lack of experience of a unified society, political structures and organisations in Somalia itself.<sup>68</sup>

### 12.2 Types of organisations and services

Mosques are central to life within the Somali community and are often the first social space people become involved in when they arrive in the UK. They offer a place for social interaction where people can meet with other Somalis and exchange information and news. Some mosques also organise community events and cultural ceremonies and were described by respondents as having similarities with advice centres, as many also provide education and other services. However, it was also stressed that Somalis do not necessarily go to mosques for involvement in political or social welfare issues. This function is fulfilled by the many local community organisations catering for the needs of the Somali community.

<sup>67</sup> Somali community respondent: Male, Birmingham, 30s.

<sup>68</sup> FPC, 2006.

There are a large number of Somali voluntary and community organisations across the country created in response to the varied needs of the Somali diaspora. Community needs are complex and multi faceted and different sections of the community have very specific needs. Problems facing the community collectively include high unemployment, overcrowding and housing problems, under achievement in education and exclusions from school. Many women are currently not accessing breast screening, cervical screening, dental, dietary or other health services. Many young people are leaving home and in addition to the problem of homelessness, can end up as drug abusers or being recruited as drug dealers. Somalis above the age of 30 have greater difficulties than younger people in accessing information and advice due to language difficulties and often turn to other Somalis (who may also be ill-informed) for information and guidance.

Voluntary organisations in the community try and respond to these issues and problems by catering for a wide range of educational, welfare, health, leisure and cultural needs. Examples of activities and services provided include:

- English classes
- Mother tongue teaching
- After school and social clubs for young people
- Employment related training and support
- Arts and cultural activities and workshops
- Sports activities
- Advice and guidance: health, welfare, immigration
- Conflict intervention and mediation
- Family support services.

### 12.3 Key organisations

There is a wide range of Somali focused organisations in England, particularly in London, Leicester and Sheffield. Key organisations identified by respondents include:

- **Haringey Somali Community Association (HSCA):** offers information and advice for the Somali community on a wide range of subjects including welfare benefits, housing, immigration, education, employment and health.

- **Islington Somali Community:** offers advice, support and counselling for the Somali community, including refugees and asylum seekers as well as advice on benefits, housing, education, employment, health, immigration and racial harassment. It holds a range of cultural and community events and has a befriending project to support older people. There is a domestic violence and youth support project. In relation to language there is translation and interpreting, mother tongue and supplementary classes.
- **Lambeth Somali Community Association:** Opened in 1990, the LSCA provides advice and information for the Somali community. Subjects dealt with include housing, welfare rights, health, immigration, employment and training and help with accessing health and social services. The Association offers translation and interpreting, a bilingual advocacy project for parents with young children as well as programmes to integrate Somali youth into UK society. Other services include a Youth Club, homework club and ESOL classes.<sup>69</sup> While based in Lambeth they provide London wide service provision.
- **Ocean Somali Community Association (OSCA)<sup>70</sup>:** Ocean Somali Community Association is a voluntary organisation that was established in 2001 by professionals and Somalis, with the goal of strengthening communication and linkages between service providers and the Somali community. Its formation was as a direct response to the lack of services to the Somali community residing in the East End, particularly Tower Hamlets.
- **Somali Banadir Community Council:** Offers advice, information and support for members of the Somali Banadir<sup>71</sup> community, including refugees and asylum seekers. There are translation and interpreting service for members of the association, help with networking and putting members of the Banadir community in touch with others, as well as support for isolated and vulnerable people. The Council also offers services for elderly members of the community.
- **Somali Refugee Action Group (SORAG):** is a not-for-profit making charity organisation founded in 1990 to respond to the large influx of refugees arriving in the United Kingdom during the civil war in Somalia. The project was set up primarily to assist the refugees find homes, schools and access health services etc.
- **South London Somali Community Association:** offers a range of services for the Somali community and other East African communities including advice and information on benefits, education and training, homelessness and housing rights, money and debt, drugs advice and support, senior citizens' coffee mornings, and activities for children and young people. It has basic IT and ESOL classes, basic life skills courses, discussion forums and home visiting.

<sup>69</sup> [www.lamsom.org.uk](http://www.lamsom.org.uk)

<sup>70</sup> [www.oceansomali.org.uk](http://www.oceansomali.org.uk)

<sup>71</sup> Region in Southern Somalia with Mogadishu as regional capital.

- **TH Somali Organisation Network (THSON):** THSON was set up to act as an umbrella organisation for Somali organisations in Tower Hamlets and London. THSON's coordinator has been active in bridging divides between different community organisations.

There are also a number of regional organisations that were mentioned during consultations including:

- **Somali Development Services (SDS) (Leicester):** is a non-profit making co-operative that co-ordinates and assists in addressing the development needs of the Somali community in Leicester.
- **Somali East African Community Advice and Support Bureau (Birmingham):** serves the Somali community and provides advice and support on issues such as support to victims of crime and education.
- **Somali Youth Development Organisation (Sparkbrook, Birmingham):** provides community support services and socio-cultural activities for Somali school children, young people and their families.
- **ISRAAC (Sheffield):** ISRAAC is an umbrella organisation for Somali organisations in Sheffield. It was formed in 2000 to respond to the need to equip more Somalis with skills to secure stable employment and the need to have an umbrella organisation that aligned the work of smaller Somali support groups.

## 12.4 Key influencers

The majority of respondents and stakeholders in the study indicated that there are no influential figures or key persons that could be considered leaders at the national level. In the words of a community activist:

*There are no particular persons or people who are influential across the UK, because the Somali community is not organised and does not have a representative body that can speak and advocate on behalf of the community.<sup>72</sup>*

Other respondents also spoke about a leadership crisis within the community which has resulted in a lack of direction for the community and a failure to develop strong partnership working amongst Somali groups, a problem which is compounded by the lack of trust between different tribes and clans.

<sup>72</sup> Somali community respondent: London, male, 30s.

At the local level, influence rests primarily with Imams and leaders of community organisations and mosques. Just over half of the respondents thought that community organisations and their leaders are the most influential, followed by Imams and scholars. Local mosques are considered influential as people go to them for both spiritual healing and broader guidance. The prominence of religious authorities and influencers may in part be due to the existing socio-economic conditions within the community, whereby high levels of unemployment and educational underachievement have hindered the establishment of a professional and entrepreneurial middle class to date. Additionally, the community is a relatively recent arrival, and many Somalis still believe that they are in the UK on a temporary basis. Therefore, unlike the older established Muslim communities, there is a tendency within the Somali community to remain more involved in politics in Somalia rather than engage in mainstream political structures within the UK or to look to local elected representatives as key influencers.

Volunteers and activists running small community organisations are accorded a high level of respect. However, it is the community organisations themselves that are seen as more influential in the community than the individuals running them. There is a real appreciation of the services, facilities and advice that these organisations offer to the community in relation to life in the UK. Community organisations are at the forefront of handling community complaints and advocating for specific issues and interests to policy/decision makers and funders, and often represent the only channel or platform for Somalis to have their voices and opinions heard at the public level.

## 12.5 Civic engagement and participation

Some of the larger and better funded organisations often have good relationships with their local authority, and a few local authorities across the country are seen as more successful and proactive in engaging with their community than others. In general however, most community respondents felt that there is a lack of acknowledgement, response or follow up by public authorities in relation to any issues which the community raises, and that this leads to further disengagement with public authorities.

A common complaint by respondents was that, despite the size of the Somali population in different parts of the country, the community remains largely invisible in public policy and community engagement processes. Key barriers for the Somali community in terms of engagement are a lack of information, advice and guidance on policy issues, and a lack of representation on decision-making forums both locally and nationally. An additional problem identified as a barrier to engagement was that due to disillusionment with politics and a lack of information about registration, many Somali young people are probably not registering to vote, and hence are becoming even more estranged from political and civic processes.

These problems of participation and engagement are thought to be worsened by the perceived tendency of authorities to only involve the older and better established black and minority ethnic communities in community consultation and involvement processes. This comment from a focus groups respondent illustrates a strongly felt concern within the community across the country:

*There are 10-15,000 Somalis living in Leicester and no one cares about us. We are a forgotten, voiceless community which is dissolved into a bigger (BME) community. We are a minority within a minority who are the most disadvantaged.*<sup>73</sup>

It was noted by most respondents that whilst relations with local authorities leave a lot to be desired, there is little or no engagement with central government. There was also a strong perception that the government has no knowledge about what community organisations do, and that it does not value or recognise the services they are providing to the community.

Perceived problems of engagement at local and central government level are felt to be compounded by the absence of strong community advocacy organisations or related forums for participation. This may partly be the result of a lack of community cohesiveness, but also because the community does not have the tools to navigate the system. This can lead to widespread cynicism: ‘What is the point of talking as no one really cares?’ was a sentiment expressed by an older female focus group participant and widely shared amongst the rest of the group. Despite this, the majority of respondents were extremely pleased that this study was taking place and felt it could be really valuable. As one focus group respondent said:

*Things like this are very helpful – this is the first time that we have been able to give ideas and information to the government. We are good listeners but other people don’t want to speak to us. We also have a lot to say but there is no one listening.*<sup>74</sup>

## 12.6 Community issues and capacity building needs

Civil society structures are not strong and most Somali community organisations face many problems in getting established and surviving on a long term basis. Some fare better than others as they receive some funding through charitable organisations and local authorities, while others are struggling to sustain their community initiatives through voluntary efforts. Not surprisingly, the lack of funding for activities and services designed and tailored to Somali community needs was highlighted as the most pressing problem for Somali civil society organisations. Even organisations such as those in South Yorkshire which have been around for many years are seen as continually struggling due to the lack of finance.

<sup>73</sup> Focus group respondent, male.

<sup>74</sup> Focus group respondent, male.

The Somalis in Tower Hamlets are seen as a better resourced and organised community by Somalis from other parts of London and the UK. As a result of the limited social spaces in the areas that they come from, many respondents said that they tend to gravitate to Tower Hamlets for social proximity with the larger Somali community in the area. However, in general, the view is that the levels of funding that are available to Somali community organisations are too small to make any significant impact, for example:

*There are a few Somali organisations such as sports clubs, homework clubs and supplementary schools such as this one. However, there are not enough – there are thousands of young children who need support.<sup>75</sup>*

Some community stakeholders who do receive a bit of funding can often be seen by others as using it to promote their own personal agendas. Some respondents accused public authorities of playing groups off against each other rather than responding to real community needs. Respondents also highlighted a lack of support for communities to build and sustain community enterprises.

Somali organisations were seen by and large as lacking the capacity to deliver high quality services, and most organisations were felt to require capacity building support. Specific areas identified where support is needed included:

- Finance;
- Management committee and leadership training
- Staff training and development
- Policies and documentation
- Premises and facilities
- Partnership development support.

<sup>75</sup> Somali community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

## 13 Conclusions and recommendations

Somalis represent one of the largest Muslim ethnicities in the UK. Whilst the majority of Somali born residents live in London, there are significant Somali communities in all the major UK cities. The community is extremely mixed, coming from different clans and social backgrounds that reflect the socio-economic and clan demarcations of Somalia itself.

The experience of Somalis in the UK is extremely complex and differs significantly from that of comparable communities that have fled war zones. The Somali tradition of nomadic and collective identity remains important. The politics, loyalties and power struggles in Somalia have had an impact on the coherence of the communities within the UK diaspora and continue to have a deep influence on inter-community relations and future outlooks of the community.

Somali born migrants have the lowest employment rate and lowest levels of education of all immigrants in the UK. Unemployment affects the community across the board, including men and women, young people and adults, highly skilled professionals and trades people, as well as unskilled individuals. This is probably at the root of many of the problems identified during the research, including family breakdown, health problems, drug use and the growing crime rate amongst young people. Youth crime and vulnerability to negative influences is a pressing problem that has yet to be addressed by public authorities in any strategic way.

The majority of families have been separated by war and have relatives living in refugee camps outside Somalia. The welfare of these relatives left behind is of utmost importance and most families in the UK are financially supporting them through regular remittances. This, together with high levels of unemployment and low pay, is probably a significant factor in maintaining the poor socio economic position of the community in the UK.

The role and status of women in the community is beginning to improve but there is still a long way to go for women to achieve an equal status with men or to become more engaged in community and public life. Support for the establishment of women's organisations is key to the further empowerment and development of Somali women.

There is also a need for the development and training of public service providers, especially in the areas of education, health, policing, youth and social services, in order to enhance their understanding and ability to respond effectively to the particular issues and problems faced by children and adults from the Somali community.

The community and its civil society organisations are particularly disadvantaged in areas where there are older and well established ethnic minority communities, for example Tower Hamlets and Leicester. This is felt in the competition for funding and resources for community organisations, the invisibility of Somalis in public consultation and decision making bodies, and in the lack of access to high profile public sector jobs that are filled by other 'black and minority' groups particularly by South Asians.

One of the key factors inhibiting further engagement by the community is the lack of formal political representation and representative community forums that can advocate on behalf of the community to central government and local public bodies. Factionalism, lack of trust and a lack of community leadership contributes a great deal towards the failure in establishing such bodies.

## 13.1 Recommendations

This research has provided many insights into the Somali community in England. Subsequently, many areas were highlighted as community concerns but require further enquiry to draw firm conclusions. The UMEC reports should be seen as a starting point in the process of understanding England's diverse Muslim and ethnic minority communities in greater detail.

The UMEC Overview report provides detailed recommendations for engagement with and development of Muslim civil society organisations. The following specific recommendations for public authorities are in relation to responding to the Somali community.

### **Specific recommendations arising from community respondents include:**

- Targeted funding and capacity building support which organisations can access without having to compete with the larger South Asian and black Caribbean organisations
- Improving engagement by identifying and working with those community organisations that have the capability and understanding needed to communicate and can engage equally with both local authorities and Somali communities
- Support for the development of a collective representative forum for the Somali community in the UK and for the development of stronger partnerships and networking between authorities and communities
- Direct recognition of Somalis in local consultations and decision making forums without being ignored in the broader black and minority ethnic label
- Educational opportunities, facilities and premises for young people
- Funding and support for the establishment of Somali women's organisations
- Employment training and support for all adult members of the community.

**Other recommendations:**

- Research into mental health problems and trauma arising from war and refugee status
- Development work with education and health professionals to enable them to more effectively support school children and adults at risk from trauma and related health problems
- Targeted youth provision to address educational underachievement and other youth problems identified.

## 14 Glossary

**APS:** The Annual Population Survey (APS) combines results from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the English, Welsh and Scottish Labour Force Survey boosts (During 2004 and 2005 the APS also comprised of an additional boost for England (APS (B)) which are funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Education and Skills, the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Executive.

**CI:** The Change Institute.

**Hadith:** Reports of Prophet Muhammad's deeds and sayings, an authoritative source of guidance for Muslims.

**ICAR:** Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees.

**Khat:** Khat (also known or spelt as 'qat', 'jaad', 'qaat' or 'chat') is a plant most commonly grown in Eastern African or Middle Eastern countries that when chewed creates a stimulant effect.

**Shariah:** 'Shariah' literally means the path that leads to the well of water. Shariah is the path to Islam – including Islamic theology, ethics, law and spirituality. It is often considered to be God's will for humanity, especially as presented in the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet, providing the basis for Islamic law as defined by Muslim scholars over the centuries.

**Sunnī:** Muslims who emphasise the importance of the actions and customs of Muhammad and the first generations of Muslims, viewing as legitimate the establishment of the caliphate, in contrast to Shī'ī beliefs. About 85 per cent of all Muslims are Sunnīs, (Esposito, 2008).

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This report presents a picture of the Somali Muslim community in England. It is one of a series of thirteen reports on different Muslim communities in England.

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