

AT HOME IN
EUROPE

SOMALIS

IN **LONDON**

Somalis in European Cities

Somalis in London

At Home in Europe



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Open Society Foundations Mission Statement

The Open Society Foundations work to build vibrant and tolerant societies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. Working with local communities in more than 100 countries, the Open Society Foundations support justice and human rights, freedom of expression, and access to public health and education.

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This city report was prepared as part of a series of reports titled Somalis in European Cities. The series focuses on seven cities in Europe with a Somali origin population. The cities chosen, and within them specific neighbourhoods, are Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Leicester, London, Malmö, and Oslo.

The reports have been prepared by At Home in Europe, part of the Open Society Initiative for Europe, Open Society Foundations, and in cooperation with local/national based experts.

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PREFACE

A central belief of the Open Society Foundations is that all people in an open society count equally and should enjoy equal opportunities. The Open Society Foundations work day-to-day with civil society organizations across Europe to respond to discrimination, prejudice and injustice; to understand the emergence of new and sometimes worrying political phenomena; to inform better practices in policing and security; to connect those seeking justice and equality with policymakers and institutions; to promote inclusion for Europe's minorities; to support a critical and informed discourse among nongovernmental actors; and to empower grassroots organizations to seek change for themselves, unique to their own local context.

At Home in Europe, part of the Open Society Initiative for Europe, Open Society Foundations, is a research and advocacy initiative which works to advance equality and social justice for groups excluded from the mainstream of civil, political, economic, and cultural life in Western Europe. It places a high priority on local community and city level practices that mitigate discrimination and seek to ensure access to equal opportunities for all. At Home in Europe engages with policymakers, civil society organisations, and communities at the local, national and international level to improve the social inclusion of Europe's diverse minority and marginalised communities in different ways.

Minority communities – whether Muslim, migrant or Roma – continue to come under intense scrutiny in Europe today. This complex situation presents Europe with one of its greatest challenges: how to ensure equal rights in an environment of rapidly expanding diversity. The Somali community is one such emerging minority group on whom a lack of precise data hampers the possibility of achieving meaningful integration.

People of Somali origin have lived in parts of Europe for many generations but in the past 15 years their numbers have increased. There are no accurate figures for the number of Somalis in Europe but on the whole, whilst small in absolute numbers, they are among one of the continent's largest refugee groups and a growing minority population. Europe's Somalis can be divided into three broad categories: people of Somali origin born in Europe, Somali refugees and asylum seekers (who came directly from Somalia or neighbouring countries largely as a result of conflict) and Somalis who migrated to a country in Europe from elsewhere in Europe, such as from Sweden to the UK for example. They are a diverse and vibrant community who suffer from negative and biased media representation and stereotyping. There is a limited understanding on the specific needs of this community and they are in the category of groups that experience significant inequalities in accessing education, employment, health, and housing with resulting poor outcomes. Somali community groups are very present in certain countries in Europe but their engagement with policymakers and in local and national bodies can be relatively limited.

The comparative research series ‘Somalis in European Cities’ examines city and municipal policies that have actively sought to understand Somali origin communities and their specific needs. The research aims to capture the everyday, lived experiences as well as the type and degree of engagement policymakers have initiated with their Somali and minority constituents. An underlying theme is how Somali communities have themselves actively participated in tackling discrimination and whether the needs of specific groups warrant individual policy approaches in overcoming barriers to equal opportunities.

The ‘Somalis in European Cities’ series contains seven individual city reports and an overview. The cities selected take into account the population size, diversity, and the local political context. They are: Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Leicester, London, Malmö, and Oslo. All seven city reports were prepared by teams of local experts on the basis of the same methodology to allow for comparative analysis. Each report includes detailed recommendations for improving the opportunities for full participation and inclusion of Somalis in wider society in the selected city. These recommendations will form the basis for *At Home in Europe of the Open Society Initiative for Europe’s* advocacy activities.

Somalis in London

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Alternative education provision
APPG	All Party Parliamentary Group
BME	Black and minority ethnic
BSC	British-Somali Community
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
BWHAFS	Black Women's Health and Family Support
CBL	Choice-Based Lettings
CCG	Clinical Commissioning Group
CLG	Communities and Local Government
CCTV	Closed Circuit Television
CSEW	Crime Survey for England and Wales
CSU	Commissioning support unit
CTSET	Communities Together Strategic Engagement Team
DL	Discretionary Leave
EiC	Excellence in Cities
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FGM	Female genital mutilation
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GP	General Practitioner
HP	Humanitarian Protection
ICAR	Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the U.K.
ICT	Information and communication technology
IPCC	Independent Police Complaints Commission
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LBC	London Borough Council
LINKs	Local Involvement Networks
MPD	Metropolitan Police District
MPS	Metropolitan Police Service
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NHS	National Health Service

NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OBV	Operation Black Vote
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OSCA	Ocean Somali Community Association
PACE	Police and Criminal Evidence
PCT	Primary Care Trust
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
SCC	Somali Cultural Centre
SEN	Special educational needs
SIT	Somali Integration Team
SYDRC	Somali Youth Development Resource Centre
TEAM	Together Everyone Achieves More
THH	Tower Hamlets Homes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is part of a set of comparative policy-oriented studies exploring the views and experiences of Somali communities and policy responses and initiatives that support their integration. The research was undertaken concurrently in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Oslo, Stockholm, Leicester and London. The reports are qualitative studies with data collected through focus group discussions with 91 Somalis living in the London boroughs of Camden and Tower Hamlets in 2013, as well as interviews with stakeholders working in government and civil society. The report focuses on the experiences and concerns of Somalis in relation to identity, belonging and interactions, education, employment, housing, health and social protection, safety and security, civil and political life and the role of the media.

Identity and belonging: In the main, focus group participants were positive about living in their neighbourhoods, in London and in the United Kingdom, citing the opportunities available in terms of education and employment as factors influencing this. There was recognition that the issue of identity was complex and at times confusing, and that identity formation is shaped both by an individual and a collective “sense of belonging” as well as an awareness of how “other” ethnicities and the indigenous population perceive and define minority groups. For the participants in the study, being Somali, British, black and Muslim overlapped. On one level, such intersectionality was not problematic as it encapsulates the complexities surrounding identity formation and belonging. However, on another level, having multiple identities also compounded potential discrimination, as there were several ways in which people experienced this. Adopting a “Somali identity” was seen by some participants as a “safe” identity, since this was not challenged by mainstream society.

Education: The importance of education was emphasised by all of the people who participated in the research. Research participants expressed concerns about underachievement at school, particularly in terms of the way that British-Somali boys were treated in mainstream education, giving examples of boys being stigmatised as “bad”, or referred to special education units if teachers were unable to cope with “boisterous behaviour”. Further difficulties regarding education included parents’ lack of understanding of the education system and being unable to properly support their children, since often parents had not been educated themselves. A child interpreting on behalf of parents was also highlighted as a problem. It should be noted that high numbers of British-Somali children now engage with supplementary education, which has improved achievement levels; however, underachievement remains a problem.

Employment: The importance of employment and the role of education and training in enhancing employment opportunities were recognised by British-Somali communities in this research. There were numerous examples of British-Somalis being

successful in securing employment in high status occupations; however, there were also many examples of barriers to securing employment and experiences of discrimination. A significant structural barrier to British-Somalis gaining employment is the current economic downturn and recession, which means that jobs and opportunities are scarce. This has meant that there is greater competition for fewer jobs. It is evident that older women need support in accessing employment, as they face disadvantages in terms of language barriers, educational attainment, qualifications and work experience. However, young men also face disadvantages in the labour market; difficulties in accessing established networks is an important barrier.

Housing: There are a number of issues facing British-Somali households in terms of housing in Camden and Tower Hamlets. Significantly, London is characterised by very high housing costs, a chronic housing shortage and the concentration of lower income groups in the rental sector. Low income also affects housing choices. The shortage of appropriate affordable housing in the social and private rented sector, compounded by the impacts of welfare reform, poor housing conditions and difficulties navigating and negotiating complicated systems present a range of problems for British-Somali communities in the study areas and across London as a whole. There is evidence of hidden homelessness, with more than one household sharing the same accommodation. There is also evidence of families being eligible for rehousing, but being unable to move due to the shortage of available properties within London. This means that often the only option is to move to the suburbs of the capital. There is, however, evidence of good practice and initiatives to improve the housing circumstances of British-Somali communities.

Health: For British-Somali communities in London, there are clearly difficulties in accessing appropriate healthcare. The pressure placed on the NHS, the length of appointment times allocated to patients, compounded by a lack of English language skills and difficulties navigating sometimes complicated systems, pose problems for older British-Somali women in particular. Further difficulties are caused by a lack of cultural sensitivity and awareness on the part of medical staff, a lack of interpreters and British-Somali staff in GP surgeries and instances of miscommunication and misdiagnosis. Some participants felt that they had been unfairly discriminated against by the health system and this can lead to chronic conditions being left untreated and this is potentially further detrimental to health. Stakeholders reported a reluctance to engage with social services by British-Somali communities and none of the research participants in any of the focus groups indicated that they had any social services involvement.

Policing and security: Although there was recognition that the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) played an important role and that there was a need for law enforcement, it was felt that British-Somali young men experienced discrimination by the police. Stakeholders also commented on the lack of trust between young British-Somali men in particular and the MPS, and identified exclusion from school, lack of employment and the area they lived in as factors which made young people vulnerable to crime. The

excessive use of stop and search was highlighted as a significant problem, and that this also perpetuated a lack of trust and poor relations between British-Somali communities and the MPS.

Concern about lack of knowledge of one's rights was expressed by focus group participants, and stakeholders also cited families being unable to support young men who had been arrested or charged with offences as being problematic. Some positive examples of initiatives intended to improve relations between the police and the British-Somali community were identified, and there was some willingness among the men interviewed to work for the MPS. However, it was felt that the culture of the MPS would need to change to be attractive to young British-Somali people. It also seems evident that there is some discrepancy between the MPS' priorities and the priorities of the British-Somali community, particularly around forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM).

Participation and citizenship: For some research participants, citizenship in the United Kingdom was straightforward, comprising rights and opportunities in terms of education and employment. Integration was seen as a key component of citizenship, however, and there were recognised barriers to integration. Among participants, perceptions of being accepted—or not—by mainstream society shaped experiences and expectations of citizenship in the United Kingdom. Many felt that although they were “officially” British citizens, they were not actually accepted as being British by the majority population. It seems evident too, that although British-Somalis are politically aware, both in terms of events in their country of origin and in the United Kingdom, they are not fully engaging with participatory democratic mechanisms and their involvement in civil society is limited. There were no examples of affirmative action aimed at British-Somali communities and an historical lack of ethnic monitoring information.

The role of the media: British-Somalis in the United Kingdom have a keen interest in the media, both in terms of events in Somalia and issues facing Somalis in the United Kingdom. However, the British media are considered to play a major role in inciting hate crime and creating obstacles to integration and cohesion (Communities and Local Government, 2009). Stakeholders and focus group participants felt that international and national reporting about Somalia as a country tends to focus on negative stereotypes of a famine-ravaged, failed state, characterised by civil war and piracy. British-Somali communities in the United Kingdom are also often portrayed as refugees fleeing violent circumstances. Reporting on British-Somalis living in the United Kingdom is also considered to be rather negative as the focus is on asylum seeking, large family size, benefit dependency and reliance on welfare services, religious extremism, terrorism and FGM.

Based on the research, the key areas of concern and barriers to integration for British-Somali communities in Camden and Tower Hamlets include a range of obstacles in accessing services and a lack of understanding from providers and organisations. Poor relationships with “official” bodies, most notably between the police and young male

British-Somalis, are a major area of concern. Young men are at risk of being criminalised and are also at risk of crime. A lack of positive role models and negative stereotyping by the media compound these difficulties. British-Somalis are a distinct ethnic group and are often stereotyped. They are perceived as a tightly knit and secretive community by official bodies and there is evidence of a reciprocal lack of understanding and trust.

There is evidence of a lack of knowledge about how “the system” works among British-Somali communities, and there is also concern among stakeholders that cuts in resources could further marginalise these communities. British-Somali communities in Tower Hamlets and Camden experience underachievement in school, high levels of unemployment, and poor health and housing outcomes. There is an increase in lone-parent families and absent fathers, with British-Somali women often facing a “triple burden” in terms of motherhood, employment and managing the home/bringing up the children.

There is, however, a good deal of evidence of successful initiatives in both boroughs. Despite dialogue previously happening with the “wrong” people, there are a number of voluntary organisations that fill the gap left by the mainstream. Early years education, supplementary education, youth clubs and women’s organisations play a vital role in Tower Hamlets and Camden, but these organisations operate in extremely challenging times and their future is in the balance due to cuts in funding and competition for increasingly scarce resources.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report explores the everyday views and experiences of British-Somali communities living in London, as well as the policy responses and initiatives that support their integration. Throughout this report the term “British-Somali” is used, as this captures the lived experiences of being “from” one country (Somalia) and “of” another (the United Kingdom). This term also reflects the majority of respondents’ depictions of their ethnic and national identity. The research was undertaken concurrently in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Oslo, Stockholm, Leicester and London. The focus of this research is on the experiences and concerns of British-Somalis in London in relation to identity, belonging and interactions, education, employment, housing, health and social protection, safety and security, civil and political life and the role of the media.

1.1 Methodology and Methods

This study, “Somalis in London”, is part of a wider research project, “Somalis in European Cities”. The London boroughs of Camden and Tower Hamlets have been chosen as the research focus based on the nature and size of the British-Somali population in each borough. Tower Hamlets is home to the longest established British-Somali community in London, while in Camden there are concerns about the perceptions of young British-Somali men’s vulnerability to crime, identified by community members during a scoping exercise by the study team. The study is underpinned by a qualitative methodology with the aim of exploring and capturing the lived experiences of this under-researched group.

The overarching aim of the project is to make policy recommendations to address issues around integration and to illuminate the structural context of service provision and the agency of British-Somali communities. A common research strategy has been adopted across the seven cities, comprising 12 focus groups with Somali communities, with representation across gender and a range of age groups as well as focusing on discrete areas as follows: identity and belonging; citizenship; housing; health; education; policing; and the role of the media. A total of 91 participants attended 12 focus groups held in London. Six took place in Camden and six in Tower Hamlets. Participants were recruited by the London research focus group lead and with the help of local stakeholders. Contact was made with local community and youth centres, mosques, educational and women’s organisations. A roundtable discussion was held with stakeholders across London and the findings and recommendations were addressed.

In Tower Hamlets focus groups took place in Bethnal Green (South) and Stepney wards. Both centres are highly visible and known to community members for activities including hosting supplementary schools, Islamic lessons and a variety of community interest activities such as welfare advice. The Al Huda Mosque and Cultural Centre, run and managed by the Somali community, is close by, as are a number of cafés and restaurants. Similarly, in Camden focus groups took place in Kilburn ward and Kentish

Town ward, where sessions took place in local community centres. This supported efforts to gain the trust and cooperation of the community.

While hubs were selected as focal points for each borough, participants were recruited from further afield in neighbouring wards such as Fortune Green, Swiss Cottage and Camden Town in the London borough of Camden. In Tower Hamlets Limehouse, Bromley by Bow and Mile End were represented. Care was taken to capture a variety of thoughts and experiences from a cross-section of the community. These included those of employed, unemployed as well as British-Somalis in higher education, long-term residents and the newly arrived. Local government employees including civil servants, teachers as well as legal and medical professionals participated in focus group discussions.

Semi-structured interviews were also undertaken with 20 stakeholders from a range of backgrounds including representatives from local government, the voluntary sector—including young people's and women's organisations—the police, housing, health, education and community groups.¹

1.2 Report Structure

The report is structured in the following way. In the next chapter population demographics of the British-Somali community in the United Kingdom, London and the boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Camden are presented. Consideration is given to the ethnic and national backgrounds of the British-Somali population in the United Kingdom alongside a discussion of religious traditions and affiliations, migration histories and settlement patterns. Chapter 2 concludes with an outline of citizenship issues and access to citizenship for British-Somalis in the United Kingdom.

In Chapter 3, the policy context of London is presented. In this chapter, the administrative structure, roles and responsibilities of bodies regulating and providing education, employment, housing, health and social care and policing in the United Kingdom and London are presented. The findings of the research are presented in Chapters 4 to 11.

Chapter 4 focuses on identity and belonging, exploring how Somalis feel about their neighbourhood and city and how they experience belonging to it; the spaces and the people British-Somalis interact in and with; how British-Somalis define themselves and how religion, ethnicity and culture intersect; generational differences and divides within British-Somali communities; and finally, how global and national events impact on identity and belonging.

Chapter 5 discusses education, providing demographic information on British-Somali children in school in Camden and Tower Hamlets and an overview of educational attainment and achievement levels. A summary of initiatives aimed at improving

¹ See Appendix 2 for a full list of stakeholder respondents.

achievement is also outlined alongside the qualitative experiences of Somalis in education.

Chapter 6 focuses on employment, discussing the barriers facing British-Somalis regarding employment; discrimination in employment and the labour market; the influences on the employment choices made by British-Somalis; U.K. government initiatives to improve access to employment and community responses; and where Somalis turn for advice, information and support in relation to employment issues.

Chapter 7 discusses housing, focusing on the housing position of British-Somalis in London; barriers communities face in accessing housing; the influences on housing choices that Somalis make; initiatives to improve access to housing; and finally, where British-Somalis go for advice and support in relation to housing issues.

Chapter 8 focuses on health and social protection, first considering the health status of British-Somalis; experiences of British-Somalis using health and social service provisions; initiatives to improve access to social services and healthcare; and finally, where British-Somalis go for information and support in relation to healthcare issues.

Chapter 9 discusses policing and security, considering the experiences of British-Somalis in relation to criminal justice and policing; policies and processes addressing anti-Muslim violence and hostility; initiatives to recruit British-Somalis into the police and other security forces; the impact of national anti-terror legislation and policies on British-Somali communities in the city; and finally, where British-Somalis turn for advice, information and support in relation to policing and security issues.

Chapter 10 focuses on participation and citizenship, first considering who is a citizen of the United Kingdom and what citizenship entails; the extent to which British-Somalis feel that they are able to influence decisions at the local and national levels; participation of British-Somalis in civil society, politics and policymaking; experiences of British-Somalis trying to influence policy and decisions at local and national levels; membership of political parties; British-Somali organisations at the local level and their members; and finally, a consideration of the mechanisms and measures taken to ensure that initiatives aimed at the involvement of local residents are inclusive of British-Somalis.

In the final findings chapter, Chapter 11, a discussion of the role of the media is put forward. First, a consideration of the experiences and impact of media reporting on British-Somali communities is presented, followed by a discussion of the level of engagement of British-Somalis with the media and journalists. The media sources British-Somalis rely on for news and information about local, national and international issues is discussed and the chapter concludes by assessing any initiatives aimed at improving media engagement of British-Somalis in London.

Chapter 12 discusses the conclusions drawn from the research and in Chapter 13 a set of recommendations is put forward.

2. POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the population demographics of the British-Somali community in the United Kingdom, London and the boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Camden are presented. Consideration is given to the ethnic and national backgrounds of the British-Somali population in the United Kingdom alongside a discussion of religious traditions and affiliations, migration histories and settlement patterns. The chapter concludes with an outline of citizenship issues and access to citizenship for British-Somalis in the United Kingdom.

2.2 The British-Somali “Community” in the U.K. and London

The British-Somali community in the United Kingdom is one of the largest and most long established in Europe. It is estimated that there are 99,484 people of Somali origin currently residing in the United Kingdom,² which is an increase on the 43,519 people recorded in the 2001 Census. Although country of birth data provides some insight into the size of the British-Somali community in the United Kingdom, providing exact figures is problematic due to the fact that there was no specific categorisation of “British-Somali” as an ethnic group in the 2011 Census. Most attempts to classify Somalis are unable to capture their position in relation to nationality/ethnicity and religion/culture. If they are subsumed within the category “Black African”, the differences between Somalis and neighbouring African countries in terms of culture, language, diet, dress and religious practices are not highlighted. However, as Muslims, Somalis worship at mosques alongside Muslims from South Asian and Arab countries, but they do not share other aspects of culture, for example language, diet or dress, with these groups. This lack of inclusiveness in monitoring categories has often resulted in the British-Somali community’s experiences being overlooked.³

British-Somalis in the United Kingdom include British citizens and residents born in, or with ancestors from, Somalia. This is a complex and heterogeneous community, comprising descendants of merchant seamen arriving in the late 19th century, economic migrants arriving after the Second World War, refugees escaping the civil war in Somalia from the late 1980s, and also more recent arrivals from other European countries. However, there is still a lack of understanding of minority ethnic communities in the United Kingdom, and British-Somalis are also “misunderstood” as

² Census 2011.

³ S. Khan and A. Jones, *Somalis in Camden: Challenges Faced by an Emerging Community*. London: Camden Borough Council, 2002.

many people are unable to recognise Somali people.⁴ Britain has a long relationship with Somalia; the northern part of the country was previously a British colony known as “British Somaliland”, gaining independence in 1960 along with the south, which was colonised by Italy. The global migration patterns of Somalis are also complex and fluid, with 15 percent of Somalis—amounting to approximately one million people—living outside Somalia.⁵ Due to the war, many families are separated and are living in different countries.

However, despite the long history of British-Somalis residing in the United Kingdom and being one of the largest black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, British-Somalis are relatively “silent” and very little is known about them. Media representations of British-Somalis are overwhelmingly negative, stereotyping young men as gang members, violent extremists and they also focus on piracy and FGM.⁶ Furthermore, British-Somalis are a “group” which experiences significant inequalities in service provision and poorer outcomes in relation to education, employment, housing and health. Although there are large numbers of locally produced reports on British-Somali communities, these are not widely circulated, joined up or accessible.⁷

Lack of engagement and limited knowledge about the specific needs of British-Somali communities are often cited as barriers to accessing services by many providers, and such difficulties have been compounded by the invisibility of British-Somali communities in ethnic monitoring processes.⁸ British-Somali communities are often described as “hard to reach” and there is evidence that British-Somalis fare worse than other BME groups in the United Kingdom.⁹ There are large numbers of community groups, but very little representation in mainstream local and national bodies.¹⁰ The use of *khat* among men and the growing incidence of lone-parent families are also highlighted as further challenges facing this community.¹¹

⁴ H. Harris, “The Somali community in the UK: What we know and how we know it”, The Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK (ICAR)/International Policy Institute, King’s College London, 2004 (hereafter, Harris, “The Somali community in the UK”).

⁵ United Nations Development Report (UNDR), “Human Development Report—United Nations Development Programme, Kenya”, 2001.

⁶ Communities and Local Government (CLG). “The Somali community in England: Understanding Muslim ethnic communities”. London: Change Institute/Communities and Local Government, 2009 (hereafter, CLG, “The Somali community in England”).

⁷ Harris, “The Somali community in the UK”.

⁸ P.J. Aspinall and man Chinouya, “Determining the Identity of ‘black Africans’ in UK population and health policy contexts: Ethical issues and challenges”, *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* 17(2) (2011), pp. 255–270.

⁹ A.M. Bloch, “Refugees’ opportunities and barriers in employment and training”, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 179, Leeds Corporate Document Service, 2003 (hereafter, Bloch, “Refugees’ opportunities and barriers”).

¹⁰ Harris, “The Somali community in the UK”.

¹¹ CLG, “The Somali community in England”.

British-Somalis are a distinctive ethnic minority group,¹² sharing a language (Somali) and faith (Islam). Religion is central to British-Somali identity and strong ties with Somalia characterise the experiences of many Somalis living away from “the homeland”. The vast majority of British-Somalis are Sunni Muslim, and British-Somali women in particular are easily identifiable through the wearing of traditional dress. Many older British-Somali women wear long flowing dresses and a *hijab* (headscarf), or more often a head to foot covering known as the *jilbab*. Younger British-Somali women tend to wear smaller headscarves and Western clothes. However, despite shared characteristics such as language, religion and cultural practices, there are also significant divisions. For example, being from the north, “Somaliland”, or the south, “Somalia”, shapes identity and identification.¹³ Clan identity and affiliation is also important, and this also impacts on belonging, identity and the availability of social support, particularly for newly arrived migrants. There is also differentiation in terms of gender, generation and place of settlement in the United Kingdom. Issues facing British-Somali communities in the United Kingdom as a whole include discrimination from the mainstream and prejudice from other BME groups; young boys being vulnerable to crime; poor education outcomes; high levels of unemployment;¹⁴ poor housing, including disrepair and overcrowding;¹⁵ and poor health compared to the wider population, with a high incidence of infectious diseases like tuberculosis and hepatitis, and also the prevalence of chronic conditions such as cancer, hypertension and diabetes.¹⁶ There is also evidence of high levels of mental illness.¹⁷

There are records of British-Somalis in London dating back to 1914, when they were recruited to fight in the First World War and then subsequently settled in the capital. This first group was followed by a continuous trickle, many of whom came over as merchant seamen.¹⁸ Whilst numerous British-Somalis came to London as asylum seekers, fleeing civil unrest in their country, many are second, third and even fourth generation British-Somalis.^{19,20}

¹² Harris, “The Somali community in the UK”.

¹³ Harris, “The Somali community in the UK”.

¹⁴ CLG, “The Somali community in England”.

¹⁵ Cole and Robinson (2003).

¹⁶ Block, (2003) “Refugees’ opportunities and barriers”.

¹⁷ Block, (2003) “Refugees’ opportunities and barriers”.

¹⁸ Harris, “The Somali community in the UK”.

¹⁹ See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/5029390.stm (accessed 4 August 2014).

²⁰ See <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census-analysis/immigration-patterns-and-characteristics-of-non-uk-born-population-groups-in-england-and-wales/story-on-immigration-patterns-of-non-uk-born-populations-in-england-and-wales-in-2011.html#tab=Migrations-to-England-and-Wales-between-1991-and-2011> (accessed 4 August 2014).

It is currently estimated that there are 65,333 Somali-born British-Somalis living in London,²¹ with the largest group—approximately 7,000—being located in Brent. In Tower Hamlets and Camden, there are close to 3,000 Somali-born British-Somalis in each borough. However, this figure does not capture the total number of Somali-heritage residents and it is estimated that there are 10,000 people of Somali origin living in Tower Hamlets.²²

Table 1. Top 10 London boroughs with British-Somali populations

Location	Number
Brent	6,855
Ealing	6,468
Haringey	3,325
Enfield	3,297
Hillingdon	3,130
Tower Hamlets	2,925
Camden	2,879
Hounslow	2,707
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,701
Islington	2,518

Source: 2011 Census, “Population by country of birth—Somalia”.

The census categories for ethnicity do not allow respondents to identify as Somali. Although “place of birth” can be used as a proxy to estimate the size of the Somali community, it should be noted that a significant proportion of the community were born in the United Kingdom and will not be recorded within this figure.

In Camden, using “place of birth” as a guide in the 2011 Census, 1.31 percent of residents replied that they had been born in Somalia. This is up from 0.96 percent in the 2001 Census.

In 2007, 6,000–8,000 was regarded as a plausible estimate for the total number of Camden’s Somali population. Again using “place of birth”, the distribution of Somali residents across the wards showed that St Pancras and Somers Town had the highest percentage—3.16 percent—followed by Kilburn with 2.32 percent. Hampstead Town

²¹ 2011 Census, “Population by country of birth—Somalia”.

²² J. Caspell, S. Hassan and A. Abdi, “Meeting the needs of Somali residents: Somali tenants engagement project final report, April 2012”. London: Tower Hamlets Homes, London, 2012.

had the lowest percentage (0.12 percent). All wards, except Frogna and Fitzjohns, showed an increase in the proportion of residents saying they were born in Somalia in the 2011 Census compared with that of 2001.²³

The number of Somali-born residents in Tower Hamlets increased from 1,353 in 2001 to 2,925 in 2011, up by 11.6 percent from 2001. Somali-born residents made up 1.2 percent of the borough's population in 2011.²⁴ However, in 2010 Mayhew and Harper estimated the Somali community in Tower Hamlets at approximately 4,645 people.²⁵ There is a paucity of accessible, up-to-date and collated data on the size of the Somali community in Tower Hamlets and London as a whole. Published figures will not capture second generation and U.K.-born Somalis. If we consider that the "Black African" population is 9,495 and the "Black other" population is 3,793, Somalis would be subsumed in the "Black African" category and some could identify themselves as "Black other", complicating things further. Analysis of the Census "other write in" responses shows that a total of 2,349 residents specifically identified themselves as either *Somali* (1,802) or *Somalilander* (547) when responding to the ethnicity question.²⁶ This clearly highlights the distinct challenges in measuring the size of the Somali population.

2.3 Citizenship in the U.K.

Since 1985, Somalia has been among the top 10 countries from which asylum seekers come to the United Kingdom.²⁷ For an individual to be accepted as a refugee in the United Kingdom, they must apply for asylum through the Home Office. Claims for asylum are assessed by representatives from the Home Office and there are three potential outcomes: the first is that the applicant is recognised as a refugee under the 1951 United Nations Convention; the second is where an applicant is not granted asylum but they are recognised as being in need of protection and granted either Humanitarian Protection

²³ Provided by the Stronger Communities Manager, Camden London Borough Council, 1 April 2014.

²⁴ 2011 Census, "Second release headline analysis", Research Briefing, Tower Hamlets Council, December 2012.

²⁵ L. Mayhew and G. Harper, "Counting the population of Tower Hamlets—A London borough in transition", May 2010, at <http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&trct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCwQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.towerhamlets.gov.uk%2Ffidoc.ashx%3Fdocid%3D78225e8f-f045-4fca-b6df-2337dcbea485%26version%3D-1&ei=QodaU4DIL6ag7Abp64GADw&usg=AFQjCNHjqzHMSQjzxtRGocQcZFExyMsHBQ> (accessed 4 August 2014).

²⁶ "Ethnicity in Tower Hamlets", analysis of 2011 Census data, Tower Hamlets Council Research Briefing, 2013, at http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&trct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=4&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CEYQFjAD&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.towerhamlets.gov.uk%2Ffidoc.ashx%3Fdocid%3D9844a055-178d-420d-94f7-6a2e96a9a8a4%26version%3D1&ei=-nN7U9PqFY-iqhAeBv4HYDA&usg=AFQjCNEIa2__dYcYb_Yp2WROYb_FSOZgbg (4 August 2014).

²⁷ Harris, "The Somali community in the UK".

(HP) or discretionary leave to remain in the United Kingdom; the third potential outcome is that asylum is refused and the applicant has the right to appeal.

In 2011, the leading sources of asylum applicants in the United Kingdom were Iran, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Eritrea. The number has decreased since 1999 for Somalia (7,495, 11 percent of the total), meaning that in 2011 Somalia dropped out of the top 10.²⁸ It is difficult to collate statistics on rejected claims for asylum in the United Kingdom, so we are unable to present these here.²⁹

Over the last decade, the Home Office has increasingly been using Discretionary Leave (DL) to remain rather than granting refugee status.^{30,31} Many British-Somalis who have applied for asylum have been granted HP or DL,³² and this temporary status affects the citizenship status of British-Somalis in the United Kingdom.

Table 2. Asylum applications, 2001–2011³³

Year	Total number of asylum applications (from Somalis)	Number accepted (by U.K.)
2001	6,419	2,911
2002	6,540	2,517
2003	5,088	1,664
2004	2,585	456
2005	1,760	659
2006	1,844	656
2007	1,613	803
2008	1,344	489
2009	932	412
2010	587	352
2011	581	354

Source: Home Office, Immigration Statistics January–March 2014

²⁸ S. Blinder, “Migration to the UK: Asylum”, Migration Observatory Briefing, COMPAS, University of Oxford, February 2013 (hereafter, Blinder, “Migration to the UK”).

²⁹ Blinder, “Migration to the UK”.

³⁰ Harris, “The Somali community in the UK”.

³¹ L. Morris, *Managing Migration: Civic Stratification and Migrants’ Rights*. London: Routledge, 2002.

³² Harris, “The Somali community in the UK”.

³³ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-january-to-march-2014/immigration-statistics-january-to-march-2014> (accessed 16 September 2014)

It is worth noting that while in 2003 a higher proportion of decisions on Somali asylum applications were DL, this trend quickly disappeared and the proportion of decisions resulting in DL is now very low for Somalis (and is lower for all nationalities than it was in 2003 and 2004). DL is primarily awarded to unaccompanied asylum seeker children, so a larger proportion of decisions resulting in DL is probably more indicative of the numbers of children applying. Issues facing Somalis are what happens to those who are refused asylum and what happens to unaccompanied children when they reach 18 and their status is reviewed. There are no data on how many Somalis with refused applications are still in the United Kingdom, but there are implications for community members and organisations to provide support to individuals who may not be entitled to all public services and support, or to legal employment.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the policy context of Greater London is presented. This will include a discussion of the administrative structure, the roles and responsibilities of bodies regulating and providing education, employment, housing, health and social care and policing in the United Kingdom and London.

The Greater London Authority, comprised of the Mayor (currently Boris Johnson) and the London Assembly, is the administrative body for the Greater London area. The Assembly is made up of 25 elected members who act as the scrutiny committee supervising priorities and decision-making for the city. The Greater London Authority oversees many of London's core public services including public transport, housing and policing.³⁴ London Borough Councils are local governing bodies with responsibilities for local services, schools and other social services.

The London borough of Camden is located in the northern part of the city, reaching from Holborn and Bloomsbury in the south to Hampstead Heath in the north. It is 21.81 km², has a population of 198,020 and is the seventh most populated borough in London. In terms of ethnicity, 73.1 percent of the population is white, while 14.9 percent are from a BME background. There are 22 electoral wards for the municipal council in Camden³⁵ (Census 2001). Like many London boroughs, Camden operates via a cabinet system, and a number of committees and sub-committees ensure accountability.³⁶ In Camden there are 54 councillors, the majority of whom are Labour, including one Somali-born councillor, Awale Olad. The Liberal Democrats have the second largest representation with 13 councillors. The Conservatives have 10 councillors and the Green Party one councillor.³⁷

The London borough of Tower Hamlets is located to the east of the City of London and north of the River Thames. It is in the eastern part of London and covers much of the traditional East End and much of the redeveloped Docklands region of London. In the 2010 general election, the borough was split into two parliamentary constituencies: Bethnal Green and Bow, and Poplar and Limehouse. There are 17 wards in Tower

³⁴ See the website of the Greater London Authority at <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-assembly> (accessed 4 August 2014).

³⁵ Census 2001. These wards are Belsize, Bloomsbury, Camden Town with Primrose Hill, Cantelowes, Fortune Green, Frognal and Fitzjohns, Gospel Oak, Hampstead Town, Haverstock, Highgate, Holborn and Covent Garden, Kentish Town, Kilburn, King's Cross, Regent's Park, St Pancras and Somers Town, Swiss Cottage and West Hampstead. Camden has been Labour controlled since 2010.

³⁶ See the Camden Council website at <http://camden.gov.uk/ccm/content/council-and-democracy/about-the-council/how-the-council-is-organised/guide-to-democracy-and-representation.en> (accessed 4 August 2014).

³⁷ See <http://democracy.camden.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1> (accessed 4 August 2014).

Hamlets and it has a directly elected Independent Executive Mayor. Lutfur Rahman is the borough's first directly elected Mayor. The Mayor and his cabinet hold decision-making authority and the relevant scrutiny and regulatory committees oversee these decisions.³⁸ Of the 42 councillors in Tower Hamlets Council, there are 20 Labour councillors. Labour councillor Amina Ali is the only councillor of Somali heritage. 18 councillors represent Mayor Lutfur Rahman's Tower Hamlets First Party and four are Conservative. There are three vacant posts for Blackwall and Cubbitt Town ward.³⁹

3.2 Cohesion and Integration

The U.K. government defines integration as "creating the conditions for everyone to play a full part in national and local life".⁴⁰ The premise behind integration is to reduce intolerance between different ethnic groups and to mitigate potential extremism. The integration agenda was introduced by the coalition government following a series of disturbances in urban areas across the United Kingdom, which were seen in part to be characterised by race and conflict. Responsibility for promoting integration is devolved to local authorities and local communities who are encouraged to hold events, for example "The Big Lunch", where different ethnic groups can engage in social contact. In the United Kingdom, the current policy debates on integration tend to focus on the agency of migrants and what they are expected to do/not do in order to integrate in their country of settlement.⁴¹ The idea of integration is very much influenced by New Labour's "Community Cohesion" strategy,⁴² which aimed to foster contact between different ethnic groups with the purpose of improving understanding of other cultures.

Camden Council has defined community cohesion as "a place where everyone who lives, visits, works or studies in the borough feels that they belong and can safely participate in local life. It is a place where people support one another and share their common values amongst and between the borough's diverse communities."⁴³ Camden Council have made available the Equality and Cohesion Fund designed to support "organisations and projects that work towards removing some of the barriers that many excluded Camden communities or residents face in terms of opportunity, access to

³⁸ See the Tower Hamlets website at <http://modern.gov.towerhamlets.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1> (accessed 4 August 2014).

³⁹ <http://modern.gov.towerhamlets.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?FN=PARTY&VW=LIST&PIC=0> (accessed 4 August 2014).

⁴⁰ DCLG (2012), p. 2.

⁴¹ L. Hammond, "Somali transnationalism activism and integration in the UK: Mutually supporting strategies", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39(6) (2013), pp. 1001–1017.

⁴² Beider (2012).

⁴³ See <http://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/content/community-and-living/your-local-community/equality/equality-in-camden.en?page=4> (accessed 4 August 2014).

services and participation”.⁴⁴ The aims of the Equality and Cohesion Fund are to improve access to services, improving life chances and building a more inclusive and cohesive borough for Camden’s residents. An example is the Somali Youth Development Resource Centre, which is working to reduce truancy and exclusion from school amongst Somali young people. The project is already demonstrating a positive impact on some of the 45 young people they have reached in year one and is working closely with the LBC Community Safety team and Camden schools.

Tower Hamlets Community Plan underpins the vision and aspirations of the borough with regard to cohesion. The relevant strands of this plan relate to healthy and supportive communities, safe and cohesive communities and prosperous communities.⁴⁵ Additionally, the overarching aim of “One Tower Hamlets” works to tackle inequality, strengthen cohesion and build community leadership and personal responsibility.

3.3 Education

Responsibility for education in England lies with central government. Most children in England attend state-funded schools. There are a variety of different types of schools,⁴⁶ and Camden and Tower Hamlets Councils have responsibility for overseeing state-funded education in their boroughs. All state-funded schools are accountable to the Department of Education (central government) through regular inspections by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). Ofsted gathers information on the quality of education delivered in state-funded schools and publishes performance statistics. If a school is judged to be performing inadequately, it can be placed under “Special Measures”, which means that senior staff and governors can be replaced.

In England, it is compulsory for all children from the ages of five to 16 to attend full-time education that is appropriate for their age, ability, aptitude and special educational needs (SEN). State-funded schools must teach the National Curriculum, which determines the subjects taught in schools and also the standards that pupils are

⁴⁴ See <https://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/content/community-and-living/voluntary-organisations-and-funding/voluntary-and-community-sector-review-2010/voluntary-and-community-sector-vcs-investment-and-support-programme-2012-2015.en?page=2> (accessed 4 August 2014).

⁴⁵ See http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgs/800001-800100/800022_community_plan.aspx (accessed 4 August 2014).

⁴⁶ Community schools, controlled by the local council and not influenced by business or religious groups; foundation schools, with more freedom to change the way they do things than community schools; academies, run by a governing body, independent from the local council—they can follow a different curriculum; grammar schools, run by the council, a foundation body or a trust—they select all or most of their pupils based on academic ability and there is often an exam to get in.

expected to achieve. Under the National Curriculum there are four Key Stages in education.⁴⁷

The National Curriculum consists of a set of core and foundation subjects. The core subjects are English, Maths and Science, and the foundation subjects are Design and Technology, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), History, Geography, Art and Design, Music, Physical Education, Modern Foreign Languages (Key Stage 3 only) and Citizenship (Key Stages 3 and 4 only). Religious Education is taught according to an agreed local syllabus. All pupils in England, except those at independent (i.e. fee paying or private) schools and the new academies are required to adhere to the National Curriculum. Having completed GCSEs, pupils have a choice of whether to continue with further education at school or college through AS-Level, A-Level or vocational qualifications or to undertake employment.⁴⁸

In addition to traditional state-funded schools, there are “Free Schools”, which were introduced by the coalition government following the 2010 election. Free Schools are state funded and still accountable to the Department of Education, but they are not run by local councils. Like state schools, they are free to attend. They also have more flexibility and control in terms of how they deliver education, and they do not have to teach the National Curriculum. Unlike grammar schools, they do not select on the basis of “ability”. Free Schools can be set up by charities, universities, independent schools, community and faith groups, teachers, parents and businesses.⁴⁹ There are also a number of Faith Schools in England. These are run like state schools and follow the National Curriculum apart from religious studies, where they are free to teach about a specific religion. Finally, Private Schools (or Independent Schools) charge fees for attendance. Private Schools do not have to teach the National Curriculum.⁵⁰

3.4 Employment

In the United Kingdom, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has overall responsibility for welfare, employment and pensions. Part of its remit is encouraging people into work⁵¹ and managing the benefit system. The DWP’s employment-related services are provided through “Jobcentre Plus”. The DWP is responsible for the management of job centres, and there are 37,000 staff employed in 750 job centres

⁴⁷ Key Stage 1: Years 1 and 2 (up to age 7); Key Stage 2: Years 3, 4, 5 and 6 (ages 7–11); Key Stage 3: Years 7, 8 and 9 (ages 11–14); Key Stage 4: Years 10 and 11 (ages 14–16).

⁴⁸ See http://www.schoolswork.co.uk/media/files/Understanding_the_UK_education_system.pdf (accessed 4 August 2014).

⁴⁹ See <https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school/overview> (accessed 4 August 2014).

⁵⁰ See <https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school/overview>.

⁵¹ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions> (accessed 4 August 2014).

across England.⁵² Jobcentre Plus was previously an executive agency, but services offered by Jobcentre Plus are now provided directly by the DWP. Although the Jobcentre Plus corporate brand remains in place at the present time, it functions just as a public brand of the DWP rather than as a separate entity. Jobcentre Plus handles benefits for people who are unemployed or unable to work, and it also directs people who are receiving unemployment benefit towards employment, and sources potential employees for employers. People of working age without disabilities who are not in employment receive Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), which is paid at the rate of £56.80 per week.⁵³ To qualify for JSA, a claimant must be 18 years or over and able and available for work. Claimants need to attend their job centre fortnightly to demonstrate that they have been actively searching for work to continue being eligible for this benefit.⁵⁴

3.5 Health and Social Care

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 makes provisions for a number of changes to the NHS in England Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), and the Strategic Health Authorities, which were previously responsible for the organisation and delivery of local health services, have been abolished and a new body called the NHS Commissioning Board has been created to allocate resources, provide commissioning guidance, oversee the performance of Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and deliver some specialised commissioning. Local family doctors—General Practitioners—now form CCGs with powers to commission services on behalf of their patients. Local government has responsibility for Public Health, and each local authority area has Health and Well-being Boards, which bring agencies together to create Joint Health and Well-being Strategies based upon the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, summarising the health and well-being needs of local populations. Local Involvement Networks (LINKs, themselves only three years old and just getting established) have been replaced by local HealthWatch, with unclear lines of accountability and no specification to ensure that the bodies are representative of the local population. It is unclear if they can investigate services.⁵⁵

In London there are 12 CCGs supported by a separate organisation—commissioning support unit, or CSU—which are effectively ex-employees of the PCT, attached to the NHS commissioning board and managed by a separate agency. This will be kept within the NHS for three years and then it will become a separate organisation. Part of

⁵² "Responding to change in jobcentres 2013", Public Accounts Committee Fifth Report, Department for Work and Pensions, at <http://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Job-Centres-Full-report.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2014).

⁵³ See <http://www.jobsite.co.uk> (accessed 4 August 2014).

⁵⁴ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions>.

⁵⁵ See <http://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/our-work/nhs-reform> (accessed 4 August 2014).

the role of the CSU is to oversee strategy, policy and engagement with the community. In every CCG there is a head of engagement responsible for:

- the workforce;
- local practices (GPs);
- local communities.

3.6 Policing

In Greater London, the Metropolitan Police Service (abbreviated to MPS and widely known as “the Met”) is responsible for law enforcement. There is a separate police force, the City of London Police, for the financial district of the City of London. The leader of the MPS is the Commissioner of Police, and the Commissioner is accountable to the Mayor of London’s Office for Policing and Crime.

The area of jurisdiction of the MPS is the Metropolitan Police District (MPD), and the MPS is divided into a number of Borough Operational Command Units, which directly align with the 32 boroughs in Greater London.

4. IDENTITY AND BELONGING

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and analysis on identity and belonging from stakeholders and three focus groups, one with women aged between 18 and 35 in Tower Hamlets, and two with men aged 18 to 35 in both Camden and Tower Hamlets. The analysis considers the following: citizenship in the United Kingdom; what citizenship entails; how British-Somalis feel about their neighbourhood and city and how they experience belonging to it; the spaces and people British-Somalis interact in and with; how British-Somalis define themselves and how religion, ethnicity and culture intersect; generational differences and divides within British-Somali communities; and finally, how global and national events impact on identity and belonging.

Examples of community events in Tower Hamlets include “Somali week”, which involves a celebration of Somali music, culture, poetry and food in October. The annual event hosts artists and authors from the United Kingdom, the Horn of Africa and beyond, highlighting the significance of literature, culture and the arts for the diaspora community in the United Kingdom. The unique series of events held as part of Somali week acts as a focal point for lectures and discussions to reflect on historical achievements in the arts, and also to engage both younger and older generations to look to and share grassroots initiatives for the future.

4.2 Citizenship in the U.K.

In the United Kingdom, if a person is over 18 years of age and has been living in the United Kingdom for five years (three if married to or has a civil partner who is a British citizen) they can apply for British citizenship. Each person must demonstrate that they are “of good character”, “of sound mind” and importantly, that they abide by U.K. law and fulfil taxation obligations. Migrants to the United Kingdom who wish to naturalise as a British citizen take a citizenship test, which is aimed at demonstrating their knowledge about life in the United Kingdom and British history and customs. Citizens are expected to be proficient in the English language and attend a Citizenship Ceremony, where they pledge an oath (or affirmation) of allegiance to the Crown and make the following promise: “I will give my loyalty to the United Kingdom and respect its rights and freedoms. I will uphold its democratic values. I will observe its laws faithfully and fulfil my duties and obligations as a British citizen”. Citizenship issues were raised in the focus groups.

For some respondents, the notion and application of British citizenship appeared to be straightforward and based on being able to exercise rights and take advantage of opportunities:

I see myself as a British citizen. I have the right to work and live here, so my definition of citizenship is someone who has the right to work and live in that

country and has the rights to the passport and papers and everything, so that's my definition of citizenship. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

I feel more ... citizenship to this country than to the country where I originally come from. Because this country has given me more than my other country, I feel more of a British citizen than a Somali or Somaliland citizen. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

Some focus group participants felt they had a dual nationality or citizenship status which encompassed being both British and Somali:

[a] British citizen is someone who is willing to have a British passport ... In my opinion I am a British citizen but I'm originally Somali. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

Other respondents felt less sure about what being a citizen meant and how it described them, highlighting that assumptions by others about black people, ethnic minorities and Muslims precluded their acceptance as a British citizen:

I don't believe I'm a British citizen and I don't believe I'm a Somali citizen. I'm a citizen of the world, I'm absolutely confused—that's me! The fact is, I live in a society where people don't see me as either a British citizen or as a Somali citizen, they only see me as a foreigner. It doesn't matter if you have a British passport ... they only see you as a black foreigner. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

However, some focus group participants felt that although they technically had citizenship status in the United Kingdom, this did not mean that they had equal rights to European migrants to the United Kingdom or the majority population:

When we come into this country we don't get equal rights to someone who is European, to someone who is British; when I say British I mean somebody who is English, Scottish or Irish. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

We are not British citizens, we are not going to lie to ourselves. We live in this country, yes, but we do not feel like a British citizen; you know it, come on, everybody knows it. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

We are British by papers but there are limitations, there is no participation ... when it comes to British, no one is willing to help or even acknowledge you calling yourself a British citizen, that's how I feel. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

4.3 What Citizenship Entails

Although not new, citizenship is a contested concept. The meaning it evokes is synonymous with the social, cultural and political context in which discussions about it

arise.⁵⁶ Usually, citizenship is framed in relation to three criteria, which can be broadly summarised as: legal; philosophical; or socio-political definitions.⁵⁷

Although the participants in the focus group were aware of the constitutional requirements of citizenship, demonstrated by passing the citizenship test and attending a citizenship ceremony, for many of the research participants, being a citizen involved having access to education and services, being employed, having opportunities and being able to exercise one's rights, freedom and responsibilities:

The way I understand citizen, I'm a British citizen in this country, I'm working, I now achieved different things. I work in this country, I know my rights. I think I got same right to anyone living in this country. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

I'm a citizen of this country because I have opportunities in this country I've got work in this country. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

For me, citizenship means someone can access work, education and can from my understanding [be a] citizen if someone has the right to access to work, have the right to gain your citizenship, health, public services and everything that makes you a citizen. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

I am a citizen ... If you are able to work in this country to you are available different opportunities. I don't care that there are some people or some small groups that they are label ethnic minorities ... I feel free to do whatever I like, I feel the same to the other people. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

Also you have to contribute to the society you live, you have to educate yourself, you have to work, you have to pay taxes. That's the only way people will respect you, that's the only way people will see you as a citizen hard working, law abiding, who has contributed to the economy of this country, someone who can bring to this society, then you be seen as a British citizen. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

Others defined citizenship as abiding by the U.K. legal system and showing respect for other U.K. customs:

Respecting the values of the country, respecting the laws, the culture of this country, that would make you a citizen. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

You have to abide by the laws of the land. You have to respect the religion and culture although you have a different religion or culture, still you need as a value

⁵⁶ P. Dwyer, *Understanding Social Citizenship. Themes and Perspectives for Policy and Practice*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2010.

⁵⁷ K. Faulks, *Citizenship in Modern Britain*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.

of the citizen to respect the laws and culture of the land, that's my opinion. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

As a citizen you have to follow the rules. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

One such “rule” was thought to be to integrate and to respect other ethnic minorities and mainstream society, as the quotes below illustrate:

I think another value is integrating into mainstream society. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

Getting to know your neighbours, mixing with people you work with, knowing the culture that you live in. Learning about other people's cultures, it doesn't necessarily mean that you have to be mixing with white but mixing with other ethnic minorities, that's my value of citizenship. You need to know other people's values and culture, way of living, the different food they eat. Basically, just trying to get to know your neighbours. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

It was generally felt that expressing support for the monarchy and British football teams were not necessarily part of being a British citizen or Britishness:

If this country has a problem and invaders come and invade this country, I'll defend this country with my life. But I will not go and attack any other country, that's my point. Which means the values of this country, you will respect the values of this country, is if I see a sick person, if anybody needs help I'll help them. I'll be nice to my neighbours, I will respect their country. It doesn't mean I'm going defend the Queen or respect the Queen or go out of my way to go and kill others. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

4.4 New Arrivals vs. Longer Settlement History

It was also evident that the women in the focus group made a distinction between themselves and new Somali arrivals to the United Kingdom and to their area. The longer settlement history was significant in terms of belonging and contributions to society. The main distinction here appeared to be in terms of perceptions of levels of adaptation to U.K. culture:

The people who are just coming to the country right now, you can tell the people who have just arrived, you might see them as foreigners, and they can adapt the way that we adapted. It depends on how quickly you adapt to the culture here. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

Among the women, there was also a consciousness of how the rest of the country and the white British population in particular perceived British-Somalis. This appeared to take two forms, first a positive acknowledgement of the contribution Somalia had made to the United Kingdom, but second, a more negative recognition of how Somalis are stereotyped and not accepted as being British, as the excerpt below indicates:

I think what you're talking about is the past generation where there was a tradition for Somalis to become seafarers and part of the British navy, obviously some parts of Somalia were colonised by the British, I think those kind of traditions have faded, mainly because of the new wave of immigration after the civil war, and you only have to look at the newspapers, if a crime has been reported about a Somali person, it's not a British-Somali, or a British citizen, it's a Somali who came from this city. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

4.5 Future Prospects in the U.K.

Women in the focus group also talked about the future prospects for British-Somalis living in London in terms of opportunities for education, employment and integration. There was a sense among the group that they considered the United Kingdom to be a country with more prospects and opportunities for British-Somalis than other European countries:

I feel like the Somalis in the U.K. are trying to become better citizens here and show that they are not different to anyone else who lives here, they want to study hard and provide a better future for themselves and their families. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

Generally speaking, in the U.K. we have quite a bright future, I get the sense that people are trying to push their way forward into society, I'm not sure about the rest of Europe because I don't really know much about the other communities outside of the U.K., but yeah, I think that, especially with the push towards education that Somali parents are getting into now, that has to reap some sort of reward in the future. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

I think that a lot of Somalis are migrating from Europe to England, the reasons for that are probably that there are not as many opportunities for education. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

4.6 The Potential for Maintaining a “Somali” Identity

There seemed to be greater potential to maintain a “Somali identity” in the United Kingdom because of the longer settlement history and larger community. These factors, in conjunction with the benefits of having large ethnic minority population concentrations in certain areas, were identified by some respondents as a reason for moving to the United Kingdom. However, this did not appear to detract from the construction and adoption of a “British-Somali” identity, as the quote below illustrates:

What I hear from a lot of the older generation is that people are losing their culture in these [other European] cities, because the Somali population is very small. So they're coming over to the U.K. and joining with British-Somalis. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

As discussed in Chapter 2, British-Somali communities have a long history of settlement in the United Kingdom and this is particularly relevant in London. It seems that this large, long-established community, coupled with the educational opportunities available in the United Kingdom, is attractive to new Somali migrants from other European countries, where their settlement histories are shorter.

I think Somalis are seen as a big attribute to Britain, because there were Somalis who took part in the World War One or Two, so I don't think they're seen as foreigners. I think they're seen as a big attribute in a way, because they served for the British. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

4.7 Places and Space where Interactions Take Place

In the Camden focus group, although the consensus was that British-Somali communities were achieving more and progress had been made, it was felt that there was still a good deal of work to be done in terms of interacting with other ethnic minorities and the majority population:

I think we need to integrate as well. (Camden, woman 18–35)

Another participant talked about where Somalis met within community space and also highlighted the lack of interaction, or integration, with other ethnic groups:

So obviously one way or another, whether you go to the mosque or the coffee shop, especially Somalis they are known to go to the coffee shop a lot, talking about what's happening back home, so when it comes to the Somali community, Somalis get involved. But we are talking about integration and outside community. The local community can be someone who comes from anywhere in the world. So it could be the Bengali community, it could be white community. Yes, we do get involved in the Somali community but not other communities, I think that's what we are lacking. (Camden, woman 18–35)

The view here appears to be that British-Somalis are involved with and interested in issues perceived to affect British-Somalis and the British-Somali community, but there is less engagement with majority population and other minority ethnic groups. Another participant echoed this comment by saying:

Somalis don't communicate with other communities. They only communicate amongst themselves. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

This view that British-Somalis were insular and tend to only interact with other British-Somalis was also raised in the women's focus group:

You know the other Somalis in your neighbourhood. Like my mum who I live with knows all the Somali people in the neighbourhood, they all kind of say "hi" to each other, and they all know each other. But in terms of the people either

side [of] you, other than “hi” and “bye”, you don’t really interact too much.
(Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

For the men in the Camden focus group, some of the obstacles to interacting related to where interaction usually takes place, which precludes interaction for British-Somalis:

We can’t go to the pub, obviously, and that’s where they [others] meet.
(Camden, man 18–35)

The women’s discussion suggested that local authority estate design and layout and the demographic constitution of an area were also barriers to interaction:

Firstly, I think generally, it depends what kind of housing you live in, what kind of accommodation. If you live in a house you’re more likely to interact with your neighbours either side of you, but if you’re living in a council flat where there are multiple houses of small flats, you’re not really going to be forming relationships with people just because of the turnover of properties anyway. We live in quite a quiet estate and people don’t really interact with each other much. I think it’s to do with there not being many families, it’s more flats, like two-bedroom, one-bedroom flats. So one or two neighbours who’ve lived near us for about 10 years now, we talk to them regularly, but the other ones not so much.
(Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

From the above quote, it is apparent that there are a number of factors that are perceived to impact on a community being cohesive and sustainable. Importantly, ethnicity and background are not the only issues to consider. The development of one- or two-bedroom flats, mainly designed for single people or couples, could mean that these residents are less integrated into local communities. The design of multi-storey dwellings can also present physical barriers to everyday interaction between community members.

One female research participant, felt that the area she lived in was “friendly”, but that her family still gravitated towards the other Somali families there:

In the area I live, people tend to be quite friendly; we interact with our neighbours quite regularly as well. There aren’t a lot of Somali people where I live, I think there are three families, and we know them very well, probably, yeah, more than we do the other people. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

An example of positive interaction across ethnicities was raised in the Tower Hamlets focus group, when a respondent explained how through sport he became involved with people from a range of backgrounds. This was felt to be extremely positive in terms of integration and feeling accepted by society:

The only time I participated in local organisations was through football and sports. All of people from different backgrounds, whites, Indians, Africans, Somalis and that’s the only time I found out their way of life and the way they

live, and it's the only time I found that I'm accepted in society and that's about it. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

Sport, and in particular football, was identified as a positive area for interaction and integration by stakeholders. An important example of successful engagement is HORN STARS, which is an initiative that was established in Brent⁵⁸ in 1995.

Example of Best Practice: HORN STARS

HORN STARS was first established in 1995 with the aim of setting up a football team to engage the local Somali youths who congregated around the Harlesden, Stonebridge and Wembley area. HORN STARS was commissioned by Neighbourhood Renewal and the Home Office to carry out extensive research on the conduct of the Somali community and in particular disengaged young people. The outcome of the research was the establishment of a number of initiatives including:

- a youth club;
- a supplementary school;
- homework clubs;
- ESOL classes;
- football training.

HORN STARS is not now an exclusively Somali programme; instead, it is inclusive of a range of ethnic groups and gender. HORN STARS has worked with a number of agencies in community consultations (e.g. Stonebridge and Harlesden Neighbourhood Renewal Teams and Stonebridge Housing Action Trust to map the needs of communities in these wards.

HORN STARS has also worked with The Black Londoners Forum in conducting an audit of refugee youth crime in Brent.⁵⁹

The issue of integration was raised in all of the stakeholder interviews. The consensus among stakeholders was that in order to take advantage of the opportunities available and to thrive in the United Kingdom, Somali communities needed to integrate into wider society. Stakeholders highlighted, however, that there was still some confusion about what integration actually means, with several emphasising that it should not mean assimilation. Instead, it was suggested that Somali communities should be able to

⁵⁸ The London borough of Brent is located in north-west London and borders Camden to the west.

⁵⁹ See the organisation's website at <http://www.hornstars.org> (accessed 4 August 2014).

participate in society without losing their culture or traditional values as a group. However, this was seen as posing a challenge, since the context in which integration should take place is one of non-negotiable principles of the host population, the upholding of the liberal social contract and adherence to the law. Some stakeholders also raised the duality of structure and agency characterising integration, emphasising that there needs to be willingness from the mainstream as well as a disposition to integrate from Somali communities. As one policymaker commented:

Integration needs to be driven by government and there need to be mechanisms which promote this but members of the Somali community also have individual responsibility through learning English, wanting to belong and contribute and gaining employment.

However, other stakeholders felt that integration should be “bottom-up” and driven by community priorities, rather than being “top-down” and initiated by government, and should involve ongoing activities and interactions rather than “one-off” events.

Stakeholders also identified a number of barriers to integration, mentioning language, religion, the United Kingdom’s political system and the lack of Somali role models participating in public life. Stakeholders also felt that mistrust of authority acted as a barrier, and that being located in particular areas with people of the same community, not engaging with others through employment and feeling marginalised compounded such barriers. It was also felt that these barriers work as mutually reinforcing. This is discussed further in Chapter 10, when participation and citizenship are addressed.

4.8 How British-Somalis Define Themselves

It became clear from both focus groups that British-Somalis have multiple, overlapping identities. People could define themselves in relation to the city, by being “a Londoner”; they could also see themselves as “foreign” through the eyes of others; they could also be British, Somali, Muslim, all of these and also “other”. Sometimes identity can be pragmatic and specific, as one participant, in the Tower Hamlets focus group suggested:

I would identify myself as a Londoner. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

The people in both focus groups also highlighted the differences between self-identification and labelling by others. At times, the intersection of ethnicity/race, nationality and religion was confusing and felt to result in a lack of understanding about “who” Somalis are, and that it also leads to marginalisation and discrimination. The comments from three participants, illustrate this:

I know my identity, I know where I’m come from, I know exactly who I am. But when people see me, they see a foreigner and the fact is we cannot mix with society, they don’t allow us to mix, we don’t mix in society, I don’t know, it seems to be confusing, that’s my answer to you. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

I consider myself a Somali even though I have a British passport. But being a Somali, Muslim and black, there [are] a lot of limitations and a lack of opportunity. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

Some people prefer to call themselves Somali because they feel their sense of belonging is to Somalis because they feel that they are part of big a family. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

It seems evident that there is a perception of safety and security in choosing a Somali identity, as this denotes belonging to a specific group and is less likely to be challenged by others. Participants in both focus groups highlighted the complexity of having multiple identities and how these can overlap, be seen as contradictory and pose limits to British-Somalis integrating with other ethnic groups, as a woman explains:

Somali people ... they do sometimes not fit into any particular category. When you go to schools, because you're Muslim you get put in with other Muslims as well, but most of those Muslims are from an Asian background, because you're African you sometimes fit into the African category, but then the Africans don't identify with you because you're Muslim, sometimes the Muslims don't identify with you because you're black, sometimes you do not quite fit into a group, that's why Somali people a lot of the time just stick together and don't really branch out into other communities because they feel like they don't really fit into any particular group. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

From the comments above, it is clear that research participants experienced some structural barriers, preventing feelings of being accepted. Significantly too, having potentially multiple identities can obscure the reality of being black, Muslim and African, so for some, "being Somali" seems to be more straightforward and less likely to be challenged.

Although identifying on one level as "British", having multiple identities or labels was considered to be damaging to British-Somalis in terms of suffering from different forms of discrimination, in terms of racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia. As a participant in the young male focus group, commented:

Being black, a Muslim and being a foreigner, that's a deadly combination right there for you. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

Another respondent articulated this point further and highlighted multiple forms of discrimination and how this shapes identity formation:

You have the same rights by law but there are certain limitations to what you can access because you are black, Somali and also Muslim. You know you come against all sorts of obstacles and it's very difficult to break that barrier, and that's why a lot of Somalis consider themselves Somali, although they have a British passport and have jobs in this country and also they are tax payers, they contribute to this country but they see themselves as someone who is residing in

this country on a temporary basis and they want to go back one day. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

Another male participant explained how society negatively labeled British-Somalis as “foreigners” and prevented acceptance into wider society:

I am part of a society and I’m part of a community. I’m part of a Somali community and every day I see people from my own country, and I ask them the same question ‘cos I know what they are going to say and how they feel about it, what do they say to me that exactly they don’t like a British because they cannot integrate with British societies because they have been isolated because people don’t accept them as British citizen. Once you accept someone into British society, then they will feel like a British citizen, but once they feel isolated in a community, you’re not going to feel like a British citizen, you’re going to feel like a foreigner. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

The above quote highlights the complexities of being part of a community and also of wider society. Belonging to both is not impossible, but there are issues to navigate in terms of the perceptions of others, and there are also structural barriers to being accepted as British by the indigenous population. Others felt that going outside areas which were ethnically diverse compounded feelings of non-acceptance by British-Somali communities, as the following excerpt suggests:

When mainstream society sees a coloured person, whether you are black, Asian, the prejudice is that you are foreign, whether you have a British passport is doesn’t matter really. You are someone who has come from Nigeria or Somalia, it doesn't matter really to them, if you go to one of the white suburbs in London, if you go to Kingston or Barking. There are less ethnic minority people living in the area, so obviously you are considered as a foreigner, we may not feel like foreigners in the area that we live in like Tower Hamlets where there [are] lots of foreigners that [live] in this area. Asian and blacks, but when you go to white suburbs you feel that obviously you feel like you really don’t belong to this country but that’s the perception. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

In many ways, although providing security and belonging, ethnic, religious and cultural identity also acted as powerful barriers to acceptance by mainstream society and therefore to integration:

So the barrier would be the language, religion and the colour because you feel a part of that group. You may not feel any racism, but you also don’t feel a sense of belonging to that group and that’s the issue. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

A respondent, for example, defined herself primarily through her religious identity:

This is how I see myself, first I’m Muslim, then I’m Somali, and then black British is way back. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

One (British-Somali) stakeholder explained how religion acted as a serious barrier to integration for British-Somalis in the United Kingdom. Since religion is central, or indeed paramount to identity formation, the fear of losing religion is a big issue for parents, which means that integrating fully is thought to potentially jeopardise the morality of their children. This view was also articulated in the focus groups:

They're very protective of their children, and giving their children freedom is something that they're very reluctant to do. Only because they're worried, they've got their best interests at heart, but they think that that's something that will lead to a flood of things that they don't want to imagine, so they'd rather keep them away from all of that. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

Focus group participants also discussed the role of culture and appearance and how this makes British-Somalis distinctive:

I think another thing that you can observe with Somalis is that they're not quick to let go of their culture, they dress a certain way, they don't conform to expected standards. (Camden, man 18–35)

The findings here resonate with Kusow's (2006) qualitative study of Somalis and identity in North America. Kusow found that Somalis increasingly identified themselves through culture and nationality rather than skin colour. It should be noted, though, that there were thought to be significant differences between older and younger generations, with the younger generation considered to be well integrated, able to speak the language, mix with other ethnic groups and participate in society. It was also felt that clan identities were much less important to the younger generation, as the following excerpts illustrate:

I don't think young people are bothered about clans, it's something the older generation keep hold off. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

4.9 The Influence of Global and National Events on Identity

A number of stakeholders mentioned how the British-Somali community in the United Kingdom were very aware of the political situation in Somalia as well as of global and national events and the way that Somali communities are portrayed in the media (discussed further in Chapter 11—The Role of the Media). The overall feeling expressed by focus group participants was an awareness of negative portrayals of Somalis as a group, as the final quote in this chapter illustrates:

So I think there's a lot of bad press right now, about being Somali at the moment, and I think that's to do with what's going on at the moment, and the associations of Somalis as being violent and disconnected, and all sort of claims that stem from what's been happening back home. (Camden, man 18–35)

4.10 Summary

In the main, focus group participants were positive about living in their neighbourhood, in London and in the United Kingdom, citing the opportunities available in terms of education and employment as factors influencing this. There was recognition that identity was complex, and at times confusing and that identity formation is shaped by both an individual and collective “sense of belonging” as well as being aware of how “other” ethnicities and the indigenous population perceive and define minority groups. For the participants in the study, being Somali, British, black and Muslim overlapped. On one level, such intersectionality was not problematic as it encapsulates the complexities surrounding identity formation and belonging. However, on another level, having multiple identities also compounded potential discrimination, as there are several ways in which people experienced this. Adopting a “Somali identity” was seen by some participants as a “safe” identity since this was not challenged by mainstream society. Focus group participants and stakeholders recognised the importance and benefits of integration, but a number of barriers were identified. Some of these barriers were structural, for example not being able to speak English, not having access to employment and other opportunities to integrate and the unwillingness of mainstream society to integrate. Other barriers pertained to the agency of British-Somali communities and their choosing not to interact with other ethnic groups. Both focus group participants and stakeholders felt that integration had to work from both sides, and that the responsibility to make it happen should not be seen to lie entirely with British-Somali community members.

5. EDUCATION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the educational experiences of British-Somalis in Tower Hamlets and Camden. Somali settlers who have arrived in recent years in the United Kingdom have been less educated than other minorities, in part due to their nomadic background and the breakdown of the educational infrastructure in Somalia (Harris, 2004). Many young people missed out on their education in Somalia. However, it should be noted that data have not always been recorded by ethnicity, so trends are not readily available. The importance of education was raised in all of the interviews with stakeholders, and there were also two focus groups conducted with men aged 18–35 years in Camden and women under 35 years of age in Tower Hamlets which centred on education. Participants in other focus groups also discussed education and its links with employment and these are also incorporated into this chapter.

All respondents acknowledged the importance of education in terms of life chances, employment and integration. There were many examples of younger Somalis thriving in the educational system and achieving very high grades at GCSE, A-Level and going on to further education, and participants in both focus groups had successfully gone on to work in educational and professional settings. However, some participants had had negative experiences of education and concerns were raised by all respondents regarding the underachievement of Somali children in schools. This included experiences of being excluded and children not being fully supported by their parents and issues with the education system itself.

This chapter will first provide some demographic information regarding numbers of British-Somali children in school in Camden and Tower Hamlets and an overview of educational attainment and achievement levels. A summary of initiatives aimed to improve achievement will be outlined before the qualitative experiences of Somalis in education are presented and discussed.

5.2 Number of Somali Pupils in Schools

In the January 2013 Camden Schools Census, 8 per cent of primary school pupils were “Black African-Somali”. At secondary school level the figure was 7 percent.⁶⁰ As of the January 2013 Tower Hamlets School Census there were 1,630 Somali pupils enrolled at Tower Hamlets schools.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Freedom of Information via Camden Council. Camden Council, “Key Ethnic Minority Achievement Statistics and Information Report 2011–2012”.

⁶¹ Freedom of Information via Tower Hamlets Council. Tower Hamlets, “Key Ethnic Minority Achievement Statistics and Information Report 2011–2012”.

5.3 Educational Attainment and Achievement Levels

One key indicator of educational attainment is obtaining GCSEs at grades A*–C in five subjects including English and Maths. In England as a whole, 86.3 percent of girls and 79.8 percent of boys achieved this standard in 2011–2012.⁶² In Camden in 2011–2012, 63 percent of British-Somali girls achieved five or more A*–Cs in subjects including English and Maths. This figure is in line with all girls in Camden Secondary schools. The figure was 54 percent for British-Somali boys, which was slightly higher compared with results for boys in Camden as a whole⁶³ at 53 percent.

In Tower Hamlets in 2011–2012, 70 percent of British-Somali girls achieved five or more A*–Cs in subjects including English and Maths, while the figure was 49 percent for boys. For Tower Hamlets as a whole, the overall figure of achievement for British-Somali pupils was 58 percent, while for white British pupils the figure overall was 49 percent. In Tower Hamlets, Somali boys and white British boys performed the worst.⁶⁴ It appears that British-Somali girls are performing exceptionally well at school, while British-Somali boys' educational achievements are more in line with the overall average. It could be that perceptions among research participants of British-Somali boys' poor educational achievement are due in part to comparisons to the very high achievements of British-Somali girls.

Table 3. Pupils achieving five A*–C grades at GCSE including English and Maths, 2011–2012

	Girls	Boys
England (all pupils)	86.3%	79.8%
London borough of Camden (British-Somali pupils)	63%	54%
London borough of Tower Hamlets (British-Somali pupils)	70%	49%

Source: Statistics taken from Camden Council, “Key Ethnic Minority Achievement Statistics and Information Report 2011–2012”

⁶² See https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/219337/sfr04-2013.pdf (accessed 4 August 2014).

⁶³ Camden Council, “Key Ethnic Minority Achievement Statistics and Information Report 2011–2012”, FOI, 2013.

⁶⁴ Tower Hamlets, “Key Ethnic Minority Achievement Statistics and Information Report 2011–2012”, FOI, 2013.

5.4 Education of Girls vs. Boys

No national statistics are available on educational attainment by British-Somalis. The data for British-Somalis in the two local authorities covered in this report find that Somali girls are achieving well at school. Nevertheless, the issue of the value of education for girls was raised by a number of (female) focus group participants. For example, it was highlighted that some parents expected girls to marry relatively young and go on to have children. Such parents felt that it is not as necessary for girls to continue with their education beyond secondary school:

At the same time, as a girl of 16, 17, 18 or 19, they'd be happy for you to marry. They want you to aspire but not get carried away. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

When I studied hard my mum would say to me, "Don't overdo it, don't fry your brain. In the end you'll have children and nappies to deal with". (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

Other focus group participants explained that girls were encouraged to study and achieve educationally, but that this has to be balanced with gendered expectations:

My mum has never been against me studying or going to University, but I have to fulfil duties at home, because in her mind, one day I'm going to be somebody's wife, and I have to be able to do x, y and z, and I think that's where the difference lies. I don't think there has ever been a Somali girl who was told, you're not going to University, you're not studying, I don't think that's ever happened, but I do think there's a difference in what they expect from girls and what they expect from boys. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

Both of the women above did go on to higher education and there is recognition of the necessity and value of education for girls among the younger generations:

If you educate a girl, you educate the whole family. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

In addition, focus group participants and stakeholders also felt that British-Somali boys were penalised by the education system and were much more likely to be excluded from school than their white counterparts. The negative perceptions and labelling of young Somali boys is discussed further below.

5.5 Language Spoken at Home and at School

Although focus groups participants and stakeholders emphasised that many British-Somali parents are equipped with English language skills, there were experiences of parents being unable to speak English and engage with the school and education system. Often Somali was the language spoken at home and this was felt to disadvantage people in later life, as one focus group participant explained:

My mum wasn't speaking to me in English at home, I didn't know the past tense of that, even now I feel like sometimes when I'm at work I'll be, I don't know, I feel a bit more disadvantaged than the other people. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

English not being spoken at home was particularly problematic for parents attending meetings with teachers:

I just wanted to say about parents' evenings ... they didn't know the language, even my mum didn't know the language, and I was translating back what the teacher was saying. She would say, "She is a chatterbox", and I would say, "She's saying I'm good and I talk", trying to make it better. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

My parents, they don't really know the educational system, we got away with quite a lot; with parents' evenings we told them we were doing well when we weren't. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

Stakeholders and focus group participants felt that if parents were unable to understand what was being reported to them by their children's teachers, they could not properly address any problems or difficulties that might arise. This was ultimately felt to disadvantage Somali children, as they would not be receiving the joined-up support that they need from parents and teachers in order to thrive at school. However, it was felt that the younger generation of parents were much more able to support their children in education, as one focus group participant's comments illustrate:

The generation that are coming up now have parents that are very aware of the education system, rather than how it was maybe the generation previous to that, parents now that are bringing up their kids now they're a lot more in tune with the education system, how things work and trying to make their kids succeed. They do value education quite highly. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

5.6 The Qualitative Experiences of Somalis in Education

The underachievement of black students in U.K. schools has been well documented, although a specific focus on Somali heritage students has been lacking, in spite of a growing gap between their achievement and that of the national average.⁶⁵ As indicated above, there was a very strong sense in both focus groups that many British-Somalis in London were doing very well at school and going on to higher education and professional employment.

However, concern was expressed by all of the research participants that compared to other ethnic minorities and the general population, a significant number of British-

⁶⁵ F. Demie, K. Lewis, and C. McLean, "Raising the achievement of Somali pupils: Challenges and school responses". London: Lambeth Research and Statistics Unit, 2007.

Somali young people were not achieving satisfactorily due to a number of disadvantages relating to the education system: for example, joining school late due to arriving as a refugee and having to catch up with schooling; lack of cultural awareness; and being designated as having special educational needs (SEN) based purely on their Somali background. Further, at the Roundtable Discussion held with stakeholders, it was suggested that housing problems, for example overcrowding, could contribute to problems with Somali children's education, since there are limited spaces to study.

5.6.1 Beginning School Late

Some focus group participants described their experiences of beginning their education later than their peers. For some this was felt to be a disadvantage, since they could never "catch up". Some schools provided additional language support, while others designated children as SEN. However, several people who had started school late reported successfully passing exams and going on to higher education, although the motivation came from them rather than from the support of the education system or their parents:

I came here as a 16-year-old, and straight away they put me in sixth form, but I saw it as an opportunity quite frankly, coming from Somalia ... I was thinking "Everything is free, are you kidding me?", and yet there were people who were failing. For me it was a no brainer, I had to learn English, I had to go through the system, there wasn't anything specifically, they didn't give me extra support or anything like. (Camden, man 18–35)

5.6.2 Lack of Cultural and Ethnic Awareness

Other focus group participants discussed how schools did not make a distinction between different ethnicities, and instead included everyone under the banner "Muslim" when stipulating what was acceptable dress:

The experience that I had in terms of uniform was that Somalis fell through the gap. At the school that I went to there were two options ... a kilt and a blazer or a *salwar khameez*. It was a cultural thing rather than religious and we got penalised for not being either or. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

There were also examples of teaching staff failing to distinguish between the needs of British-Somali children who had been born in the United Kingdom and those who had recently arrived from Somalia:

I remember at school that I was taken out of class to join other Somali girls to talk about our experiences of war. I've never been there. English is my first language. I felt that I missed out on core English language lessons because I was assumed to be a new arrival from a war-torn place. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

It is worth noting that focus group participants were often talking about their experiences of the education system in the past; in some cases this was almost 20 years ago, and this was acknowledged in their accounts. However, stakeholders emphasised the ongoing difficulties and disadvantage faced by British-Somali children in school in Tower Hamlets and Camden in terms of underachievement, negative labelling of British-Somali boys and lack of cultural awareness.

5.6.3 Lack of Parental Support

An issue that arose in most of the stakeholder interviews—and one which was central to focus group discussions—was the importance of parental support for children at school. Focus group participants talked about their own generation's ability to provide support for their children, but also acknowledged that it was lacking for them when they were at school and that not all Somali parents in Camden and Tower Hamlets were currently in a position to provide this for their children. A focus group participant explained that now he was a trained teacher, he understood from an educational perspective how important it is for parents to be able to support their children in order for them to thrive at school:

We're the first generation of Somalis [who understand the education system] ... our parents didn't know that much English, so we were left to our own devices at times. I went on to do teaching so I can see now from the other side as a teacher, how it feel when the parents are not supporting you. (Camden, man 18–35)

Many of the research participants felt that British-Somali parents struggled to support their children through school because of a lack of understanding of how the system works combined with their own lack of education. This could be understood in terms of not understanding their own role in their children's education:

Parents felt like, sending you to education that's it ... the schools are supposed to do the education, home is about discipline and that's it. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

Other participants suggested that parents' own experiences of hardship in Somalia affected them in terms of being able to fully support their children at school:

[Parents] can't support you. And also the reason that they put so much pressure on us, you have to realise they come from a country where everything was hard, just to get you know, just to get that livelihood for that day, just to eat, it's a different ball game compared to in the U.K. (Camden, woman 18–35)

Focus groups respondents were aware of the shortcomings of their own parents in this area, and also expressed concern for those parents who were currently unable to support their children in school. It was suggested that British-Somali parents wanted their children to do well at school, but they did not always have the means to help them. As one teacher commented:

Somali parents in general, when I see their dedication, they want their children to do well, because they never had the opportunity; if they had more people who could explain to them the system properly, what the child should know, properly, when they go to parents' evening. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

In the focus groups, there was clearly a predisposition among British-Somali parents for their children to do well in school, but they were not always able to fully support them. Understanding how the education system works and the importance of engaging with the school through parents' evenings were highlighted as areas of concern for British-Somalis in relation to schooling and education. In addition, and almost at the other end of the spectrum, British-Somali parents' lack of understanding of the education system was also apparent in terms of having unrealistically high expectations of their children's educational attainment:

With Somali parents it's like, say for example a white kid got an A and was one mark away from an A*, they would be praised, their parents would be happy, whereas if a Somali got an A and was one mark away from an A*, they would be like, "Why didn't you get an A*?", instead of "Well done you got that," they have that type of mentality. (Camden, man 18–35)

5.7 Main Areas of Concern for Somalis Regarding Schooling and Education

The main area of concern raised by research participants regarding the education of British-Somali children was underachievement at school. Lack of role models and inspiration, lack of family support, family breakdown, living in overcrowded or poor housing conditions and being on low incomes were all considered to contribute to an overall picture of disadvantage regarding educational performance. Concerns about the exclusion of Somali boys from schools were also raised. These concerns can be understood in terms of perceptions of discrimination and these will be discussed below.

5.8 Experiences of Discrimination in the Education System

5.8.1 Underachievement

A number of stakeholders identified underachievement of British-Somali children as a significant problem. Again, concern was expressed about the available levels of parental support for children in school, particularly in households with absent fathers and lone mothers. Again, the issue of parents not understanding the system was highlighted as being significant in terms of achievement at school. However, although stakeholders and focus group participants felt that parents' reluctance to engage with the educational system was a key factor in children's underachievement, there were also examples where it was felt children were being held back by the schools.

There was a strong feeling within both focus groups that the mainstream education system failed to encourage British-Somali children to achieve, with young people being encouraged to take NVQs and BTEC qualifications rather than A-Levels, regardless of

relevant A*–C grade qualifications at GCSE.⁶⁶ Comments from focus group participants suggest that ethnicity is significant in determining study options and future life chances:

If somebody is coming from an ethnic minority, and the class teacher thinks that maybe he might not be able to do well, he will be pushed into do a vocational course, which is equivalent to a GCSE, but if you've got GCSE in science or a BTEC in science, I think it's fairly obvious which one is higher, in terms of getting further into further education, in college and going from there.

I think if you're an ethnic minority generally, the expectation is already pre-set, and [the teachers] already think that you are not going to do well. (Camden, man 18–35)

The respondent also suggested that income and social class predetermined the expectations and educational trajectory of children in schools. In this sense, young British-Somalis in school could be understood to be experiencing a “double jeopardy” due to being both “Somali” and financially disadvantaged:

Sometimes it's not just the teacher predicting what level you should go into, sometimes they use this thing called “Fischer Family projections”,⁶⁷ so if he's from a poor family background, there's automatically a system to predict what this kid is likely to get, if he's family is middle class they would expect to be A*, A, if the kid is from a poor background this system pulls it off. (Camden, man 18–35)

There were a number of accounts of how when at school, young people from ethnic minorities were encouraged to take up jobs in particular sectors, for example catering or entertainment, while their white counterparts were given a greater range of options. The excerpt below illustrates this:

The school I was in they gave us a test, it was basically a careers test ... every person who was from ethnic minority background either got dancer, musician,

⁶⁶ The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) are both academic qualifications that are awarded in the United Kingdom. The main difference is that BTECs are awarded for vocational subjects, and GCSEs are awarded for a large number of other subjects. NVQs, or National Vocational Qualifications, are work-based awards achieved through assessment and training. They are based on national occupational standards that relate to competencies in job roles. There are five levels of NVQ ranging from Level 1, which focuses on basic work activities, to Level 5 for senior management.

⁶⁷ The Fischer Family Trust provides all local authorities in England and Wales with data which estimate what a child might achieve at key stages in education based on past performance and the average achievements of children judged by the Trust to have similar characteristics. The government has urged schools and local authorities to use the system, although it has come under criticism from teachers (and schools) for forcing a target-driven approach to educational outcomes at the expense of optimising educational attainment among pupils (*TES*, 12 December 2008).

chef, and none of us were interested in that ... so then we would look at the next white kid who was in our class and it was like, oh, I got options of engineering, doctor. (Camden, man 18–35)

The men in the Camden focus group felt that young people from poorer backgrounds and ethnic minorities were encouraged to take up lower-level qualifications by teaching staff and the education system because of the emphasis on schools' performance in league tables:⁶⁸

The reason that schools put kids into BTEC is because they can pass them and that improves their league tables, so then they can justify that. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

They'll say this kid is unlikely to pass GCSE, so he can do BTEC and get something equivalent to a C. And overall in this school, most of our children have done BTEC if they are worried that they're not going to get GCSEs. (Camden, man 18–35)

This was felt to be highly detrimental to the future life chances of young people:

That's because they don't really care about the children's futures, what they are focusing on is the success rate of the school. Students are statistics nowadays. (Camden, man 18–35)

Statistics is one thing, but what they are actually doing is undermining the kids, in a nutshell. (Camden, man 18–35)

5.8.2 Exclusion from Education/Stereotyping

Exclusion from school means that a pupil is not allowed in school for disciplinary reasons. There are two types of exclusion: fixed period exclusion, which means that a pupil is not allowed in school for a specified number of days because they have breached the school's behaviour policy; and permanent exclusion, which means that the head teacher has decided that a pupil should not continue at the school because of a serious breach of the school's behaviour policy, and allowing the pupil to remain in school would harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others in the school.⁶⁹

Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) are a type of alternative education provision (AP). They are run by local authorities and provide education for children who have been excluded

⁶⁸ Secondary schools in England have performance targets they are expected to meet. Schools are deemed to be below target if fewer than 40 percent of pupils pass GCSEs including Maths and English, with grades between an A* and a C.

⁶⁹ See http://www.ace-ed.org.uk/advice-about-education-for-parents/exclusion_from_school (accessed 4 August 2014).

from mainstream education.⁷⁰ There has been long-standing concern about the correlation between school exclusions and race.⁷¹ Pupils from some minority ethnic groups in England—and black boys in particular—are disproportionately represented within school exclusion figures.⁷² A number of stakeholders involved in supplementary education and community organisations also raised concerns about the numbers of British-Somali boys being excluded from mainstream education, commenting that they were “stereotyped” as boisterous and problematic.

It was felt that young boys who are excluded from secondary education are then marginalised, at increased risk of crime and gang involvement that further negatively impact on their life chances. As one focus group participant commented:

Another key concern is being excluded. I think we do a lot of work around kids being excluded from secondary school, and when you look at the comparisons between primary and secondary there is a big difference, where kids rarely get excluded in primary school, but as soon as they get into secondary school there’s a very high level of exclusion that needs to be tackled and looked into in terms of why young people are being excluded from schools and is there any support for them. (Camden, man 18–35)

Concern about British-Somali boys being admitted to pupil referral was also raised:

Disproportionately Somali young men are admitted to pupil referral. The main reasons are that Somali boys are disruptive and don’t listen. Instead of investigating why there are behavioural issues or pupils aren’t engaged they are sidelined. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

In Camden in 2011–2012, two out of 18 pupils who faced permanent school exclusions were Somali pupils. In January 2013, two out of 70 young people in PRUs in Camden were “Black Somali”.⁷³ In Tower Hamlets, at the time of the January 2013 Census, there were two Somali pupils enrolled at the PRU.⁷⁴ The relatively small number of Somalis in the PRUs suggests that the concerns may be focused on temporary rather than permanent exclusions.

Research participants commented that the education system needs attention, as resources are not always used to best effect and measures to improve relationships between teachers and pupils are crucial. Part of the problem was seen to be the lack of

⁷⁰ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/improving-education-for-pupils-outside-mainstream-school/supporting-pages/alternative-provision> (accessed 6 August 2014).

⁷¹ D. Weekes (ed.) *Did They Get it Right? A Re-Examination of School Exclusions and Race Equality*. London: Runnymede. 2010.

⁷² D. Abbott (2003).

⁷³ FOI via Camden Council.

⁷⁴ FOI via Tower Hamlets Council.

British-Somali teachers and teaching assistants, particularly where other ethnic minorities had appropriate representation.⁷⁵

In Tower Hamlets' Race Equality Scheme there is a specific reference to the need to recruit more Somali teaching staff: "We need to continue to improve the representation of BME teachers locally, particularly for some smaller minority groups such as the Somali community who are under-represented and where take up of the training and recruitment initiatives is low".⁷⁶ In 2009, Tower Hamlets had 14 teachers of Black-Somali ethnicity out of a total of 2,358 teachers.

⁷⁵ There are no Somali specific data available nationally; see Department for Education 2010 report "BME Teachers in England".

⁷⁶ Tower Hamlets Race Equality Scheme 2009–12, p. 21.

Table 4. Ethnicity of secondary school staff in Tower Hamlets (January 2009)

Asian—Bangladeshi	457
Asian—Chinese	26
Asian—Indian	72
Asian—Other	38
Asian—Pakistani	34
Asian—Vietnamese	6
Black—African—Other	110
Black—Caribbean	140
Black—Other	60
Black—Somali	14
Mixed—Other	19
Mixed—White and Asian	16
Mixed—White and Black African	2
Mixed—White and Black Caribbean	13
Other	30
White—English	955
White—Irish	60
White—Other	226
White—Scottish	35
White—U.K.	21
White—Welsh	23
Grand total	2,358

Source: Tower Hamlets Race Equality Scheme 2009–12, p. 14.

However, one of the research participants in the women's focus group felt that focusing too much on a person's ethnicity could also be a drawback as this can compound and perpetuate negative stereotyping:

I think there is too much emphasis on us being Somali. Maybe it's because we act so insular ... we should see ourselves as part of a wider society. That's what I'm going to encourage my daughters [to do]. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

This view was echoed in a stakeholder interview, when an example was given of an exchange between a teacher and a young girl on her first day at school. On first meeting the child the teacher asked her, “Are you Somali?” When the child said “no”, the teacher then asked “Are you English?” Again the child said “no” and replied, “I am a human being”. The teacher reported this to the girl’s mother at a parents’ evening, but in a manner that her mother found disconcerting. In spite of her cultural awareness training, the teacher did not think she had made a mistake by pigeon-holing this child on her first day at school (and did not ask her name); instead, she recounted this as an amusing anecdote.

5.9 Initiatives Taken by Schools in Response to the Needs of Somali Pupils

“Learning Mentors” is part of the national Excellence in Cities initiative (EiC)⁷⁷ that was established in 1999. It involves a series of measures for improving inner city education. EiCs embody the following principles:

- high expectations of every individual;
- diversity in provision;
- networks and working collaboratively;
- extending opportunity.⁷⁸

The Learning Mentor strand of EiC is designed to support schools in raising standards through helping students to raise attainment, increase attendance and reduce the incidence of exclusions. A number of schools nationwide have adopted the learning mentoring and assessed that it has had a positive impact on individuals.

Learning Mentors need to be qualified (usually to Level 2 in support in schools) and work in primary, secondary and further education, and act as role models to students and provide encouragement and support. Learning Mentors support, motivate and challenge pupils who are underachieving and mainly work with children who experience “barriers to learning”, including poor literacy/numeracy skills, underperformance against potential, poor attendance, disaffection, danger of exclusion,

⁷⁷ The other elements of EiC include City Learning Centres, Specialist Schools, Gifted and Talented, Beacon Schools, Learning Support Units and Education Action Zones, at <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/excellence/policies/mentors>.

⁷⁸ See <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/LEARNINGMENTOMIG1089.pdf> (accessed 6 August 2014).

difficult family circumstances and low self-esteem. The role of a Learning Mentor includes:⁷⁹

- identifying, in association with school staff, pupils who would benefit from mentoring;
- liaising with parents and carers to promote a mutually respectful relationship with a school;
- helping pupils who are underperforming in their subjects on a one-to-one basis outside the classroom;
- implementing strategies and supporting pupils in confidence-building activities;
- listening to and helping pupils resolve a range of issues that are creating barriers to learning;
- drawing up agreed action plans with pupils;
- monitoring attendance of pupils, and working closely with teachers and other professionals, such as social workers, educational psychologists, education welfare officers and Connexions personal advisers.

Examples of people engaging in initiatives in schools from the focus group interviews include positive experiences of mentoring:

I actually became an academic mentor by the time I was in Year 10 and Year 11 I had learned the language, the school would ask the pupils who knew their English education was good, to mentor little kids who were younger than them that didn't know the language. I had two pupils who had recently come from Somalia, they felt more confident to ask for help, they used to go extra early. I think it's important to have that in place, the kids who are older can help the kids who are younger, but as somebody who wanted to learn more. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

The benefits of after-school clubs were also highlighted. After-school clubs in the traditional sense are largely recreation based, providing activities such as sports, arts and crafts after the school day is finished. They bridge the gap between the end of the school day and when many parents finish work. Among the British-Somali community, as well as other ethnic minority groups, there has been a long-standing tradition to enrol children in after-school clubs for the purposes of supported learning. Subjects will often include core subjects, English and Maths. Additionally, lessons in mother tongue, Arabic language and Quran study are also sought after. These sessions often take place at voluntary sector organisations during evenings and weekends. It is

⁷⁹ See <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/LEARNINGMENTOMIG1089.pdf> (accessed 6 August 2014).

not uncommon for British-Somali parents to travel long distances for sessions, as a female focus group participant explains:

So by the end of it, I ended up doing really well, because I was doing it myself, and I had no support from home, my parents didn't know anything, my elder brothers were just about surviving themselves, and I ended up getting, like, 14 GCSEs and they were all A to Cs, because I put that extra effort in, every after-school club, on the docklands I used to go, every weekend Saturday and Sunday I was at tuition. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

In addition to school-based support, there are a number of organisations that operate to support the British-Somali community in Camden and Tower Hamlets.

In Camden, the Somali Youth Development Resource Centre (SYDRC) targets Somali and other young people between the ages of 11 and 21 years who live, work or study in the borough. The SYDRC provides crime prevention work; group work; outreach to schools and home visits; networking and referrals to specialist organisations; consultation and training; and partnership working with other organisations.

The Camden Cultural Centre also delivers services to the local community and supports mainstream services by being more accessible. It provides English, Maths and SEN education for primary and secondary school children. It is open to non-Somali children to foster integration with the wider local community. Camden's British-Somali Community Centre also provides a range of activities, including mother tongue and cultural awareness classes as well as Maths and Science homework support and sporting activities.

In Tower Hamlets, the Black Women's Health and Family Support (BWHAFS) runs supplementary school sessions, for example English, Maths and mother tongue lessons.

Tower Hamlets Council also offers language classes and mother tongue in 90 venues across the borough.

However, another person noted:

The quality of the tuition centres vary. Just because they're sending their children to tuition centres, they don't know what their kids could be taught, or what level they're supposed to be taught at, some of them are being given a disservice. And that's something we should think of. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

5.10 Where British-Somalis Turn for Advice, Information and Support about Educational Issues

As with housing, employment and health, British-Somalis are most likely to speak to members of their community or community groups regarding education. As one focus group participant commented:

In the Somali community everybody knows each other; everybody talks to each other, like they are your own family. They might not be your aunty but you call them aunty and cousins. (Camden, woman 18–35)

Significantly, a very high number of British-Somali children are engaged in private tuition⁸⁰ and supplementary education in both Camden and Tower Hamlets, and there are several community-based and other organisations which provide this. It is estimated that there are approximately between 3,000 and 5,000 supplementary schools in the United Kingdom.⁸¹ As one research participant commented:

I teach in a primary school down the road, my smartest children are the Somali ones, not because they learn at home, it's because I know every single Somali one ... I know goes to tuition and they get that extra support. And by the time they come to school they are higher than the other ones. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

5.11 Summary

The importance of education was emphasised by all of the people who participated in the research. As one stakeholder commented, “Education is the biggest issue. Kids aren’t supported in the education system and it’s the only way for them to get anywhere, it’s the only thing that can change people’s lives”.

Research participants expressed concerns about underachievement at school, particularly in terms of the way that British-Somali boys were treated by mainstream education, giving examples of boys being stigmatised as “bad”, or referred to special education units if teachers cannot cope with “boisterous behaviour”.

Further difficulties regarding education included parents’ lack of understanding of the education system and being unable to properly support their children, often since parents may not have been educated themselves. It was felt by stakeholders that parents should be better supported to be involved in their children’s education, and that this could mitigate future problems such as exclusion.

A child interpreting on behalf of parents was also highlighted as a problem. It should be noted that high numbers of Somali children now engage with supplementary education, which has improved achievement levels; however, underachievement remains a problem. It should be noted that the Ocean Somali Community Association (OSCA) has formed a Somali School Governors Forum. The Somali School Governors Forum allows members to support each other, share concerns, and discuss issues in relation to children’s attainment and school matters.

⁸⁰ Adfam, “Becoming visible: the Somali community and substance use in London”, 2009.

⁸¹ See <http://www.supplementaryeducation.org.uk/supplementary-education-the-nrc/> (accessed 6 August 2014)

6. EMPLOYMENT

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the employment experiences of Somalis in London. Qualitative data from the focus group interviews, held with women over the age of 45 and men aged between 18 and 35 in Camden, and from the stakeholder interviews will be presented in relation to the following: barriers facing Somalis regarding employment; discrimination in employment and the labour market; the influences on the employment choices made by Somalis; U.K. government initiatives to improve access to employment and community responses; and where Somalis turn for advice, information and support in relation to employment issues. The chapter begins with some contextual information regarding the U.K. economy and labour market as a whole and specific data on the position of Somalis.

6.2 Somali Participation in the Labour Market

There is a long history of Somali migration to the United Kingdom being premised on economic grounds, and this gathered momentum after the Second World War.⁸² However, the decline in the manufacturing industries in the United Kingdom from the 1970s onwards affected Somali communities. Somalis who arrived in the 1990s onwards were mainly refugees and not economic migrants; this is an important factor shaping Somali participation in the labour market. Employment levels among refugee settlers are low,⁸³ and a high proportion of people who came to the United Kingdom as refugees have never been in employment.⁸⁴

The current situation facing Somalis with regard to employment in London needs to be understood within the context of the wider global economy. Like many other European countries, the United Kingdom is currently experiencing the after-effects of a prolonged economic downturn, which has inevitably impacted on the employment market. U.K. unemployment levels are currently at 7.1 percent of the economically active population. This amounts to 2.32 million people aged 16 and over who are currently classed as unemployed. There are also 22.3 percent of the population who are economically inactive (this includes those who are studying, looking after family, retired or unable to work due to illness).⁸⁵

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) gathers labour market statistics and data on the following ethnic groupings: White; Mixed/multiple ethnic groups; Indian; Pakistani; Bangladeshi; Chinese; Other Asian background; Black/African/Caribbean/Black British; Other ethnic background. The ONS also publishes labour market data

⁸² Harris, "The Somali community in the UK".

⁸³ Harris, "The Somali community in the UK".

⁸⁴ Bloch, (2004).

⁸⁵ ONS (January 2014).

for country of birth; however, for non-EU states these data provide seven broad categories of African (excluding South Africa), South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, USA and the rest of the world. It is therefore not possible to extrapolate British-Somali representation among employment figures or occupation, although evidence suggests that Londoners born in Somalia are heavily concentrated in sales and customer services and elementary occupations—the two lowest paid occupational groups.⁸⁶ One stakeholder working at a community organisation indicated that British-Somalis tend to be employed in low-paid work such as care work, cleaning where there is no progression, basic pay and little training.

Labour market statistics indicated that for the three months up to November 2013, employment levels and rates in London as a whole were at record highs. However, despite this, unemployment levels in London are still well above the levels prior to the recession. This is because economic activity rates are at a record low. Unemployment figures by borough⁸⁷ indicate that for London as whole, rates were 6.81 percent. The figure was 8.66 percent for Tower Hamlets. Data from Camden show that⁸⁸ by 2012, total employment in Camden was 5 percent higher than before the recession (2008). This figure is higher than the average employment growth for the whole of London, which is 2.7 percent. Unemployment in Camden peaked in 2011 at 5.7 percent, but since March 2012 has remained 3 percent higher than pre-recession levels. Youth unemployment has also stabilised at pre-recession levels.

British-Somalis have the lowest employment rates of all migrants to the United Kingdom and unemployment affects all parts of Somali communities, for example the young, men and women, the skilled and unskilled. Evidence suggests that unemployment can have detrimental effects on well-being, such as mental and physical health, isolation and poverty.⁸⁹

Somalis are known all over the world for their entrepreneurial and business skills, but the regulatory framework in the United Kingdom and the inability to raise capital has been identified as a barrier to establishing businesses in the United Kingdom.

Following the Roundtable Discussion, key labour market information was provided on Camden.⁹⁰ By 2012, total employment in Camden was 5 percent higher than before the recession (2008). This figure is higher than the average employment growth for the whole of London, which is 2.7 percent. Unemployment in Camden peaked in 2011 at

⁸⁶ DMAG, “Country of birth and labour market outcomes”, 63 DMAG Briefing 2005/1, at woman.

⁸⁷ London’s Poverty Profile website, at <http://www.londonpovertyprofile.org.uk/indicators/topics/work-and-worklessness/unemployment-by-borough/> (accessed 4 August 2014)

⁸⁸ See: <http://www.londonpovertyprofile.org.uk/indicators/topics/work-and-worklessness/unemployment-by-borough/>

⁸⁹ CLG, “The Somali community in England”. Harris, “The Somali community in the UK”.

⁹⁰ DMAG, “Country of birth and labour market outcomes”, 63 DMAG Briefing 2005/1, at <http://legacy.london.gov.uk/gla/publications/factsandfigures/DMAG-Briefing-2005-1.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2014).

5.7 percent, but since March 2012 has remained 3 percent higher than pre-recession levels. Youth unemployment has also stabilised at pre-recession levels.

6.3 Impact of Unemployment, Economic Inactivity

British-Somali participants in the Open Society Foundations' focus groups felt that being unemployed in London created additional difficulties because the cost of living is so high. The detrimental effects of unemployment were also recognised in terms of poverty, low self-esteem and depression. It was also thought that unemployed men in particular were at greater risk of using *khat*.⁹¹ Self-reliance was considered to be a valuable character trait among the men in the focus group, and being employed was part of this:

I think employment ... it's given me that self-belief that I can work hard for something and not rely on anybody, that sense of, you can earn your own money but also the core values it teaches you in terms of working hard ... these things you only get after you get into, I would say even minimal jobs, like I've done. (Camden, man 18–35)

The same sentiment was expressed in the women's focus group, and there was clearly an appetite for employment among the majority of these women:

I want them to send me to work. I am job ready. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

This is consistent with research that suggests that work is culturally important for Somali women, and that there may be higher levels of economic activity among women than official statistics indicate.⁹²

6.4 Barriers to Employment

Stakeholders suggested that there is a lack of trust in authorities and government departments from the Somali community, and that there is also a lack of confidence in approaching organisations. At the Roundtable Discussion, representatives from Camden and Tower Hamlets highlighted that in both boroughs there is a lack of BME employees in senior positions. In Tower Hamlets, there are only 66 Somali employees out of 1,200, and in Camden the number is just 12.⁹³

The importance of employment and its central role in promoting integration and cohesion was acknowledged by all of the participants in this research. Lack of language skills was identified as a barrier for recently arrived young women, but language is not the only barrier and conversely, for settled families, the perception of being recent

⁹¹ *Khat* is a leafy green plant that acts as a stimulant when chewed and ingested.

⁹² N. Kabeer and P. Ainsworth, "Life-chances, life choices: Exploring patterns of work and worklessness among Somali women in Tower Hamlets", 2011. London, Tower Hamlets LBC.

⁹³ Evidence presented at the Roundtable Discussion.

immigrants was also identified as a problem. Many respondents acknowledged that the current recession poses particular problems, since access to employment is more difficult and opportunities are limited.

Among the significant structural barriers identified is the lack of jobs available:

I've always been one to always rely on myself, I've never liked to ask for something from anyone, but at the same time, with the position we are in now with economy ... you get a hundred, a couple of hundred [applicants for one job], and that's not even me exaggerating, that's the statistics so it's much harder for you to get a job now. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

Two female focus group participants also highlighted the difficulties facing jobseekers in terms of the lack of employment opportunities:

The job centre will tell us to bring details of jobs. There are no jobs out there to present. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

For others, a key issue was the match between the opportunities that existed and the qualifications they had:

It's not easy, even though the job centre don't have any work for you, they tell you to hurry up and find work. You're not equipped with appropriate qualifications, they've not sent you for training, their whole aim is just a job. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

For others, qualifications are not an issue. One male participant commented that he was unsuccessful in applying for jobs for which he was over-qualified:

There are jobs where I'm over-qualified that I'm applying for and I still don't get it. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

Many of the men in the focus group, although educated, had taken jobs for which they were over-qualified, albeit often on a temporary basis.

Competition for jobs from other migrants was also seen to act as a barrier to finding work, in particular the arrival of A8 migrants from the EU:

What we don't recognise is that even the immigration system has changed, where we have opened up doors to other EU countries, especially from Eastern Europe or what have you, so they're taking jobs that were readily available. (Camden, man 18–35)

Further, a lack of role models and being habituated to unemployment and benefit dependency were further identified as barriers facing young people in particular:

You have three generations of families where nobody has worked, you'll create that sort of issue where if a young person gets into his adult life and he has never worked, a lot of problems in society will appear. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

There was a strong feeling in both focus groups that although the government currently is encouraging people to take up employment and is reducing welfare benefits as an incentive to do so, there is a job shortage that acts as a significant structural barrier.

6.4.1 The Experience of British-Somali Women

Since the profile of the women in the study differed from that of the men—they were older, were homemakers, most had never worked and lacked education and language skills—arguably the barriers they faced were different from those of the men. The lack of language skills for older women in particular was felt to be problematic:

For many people their children have grown up and they've been told to go to work. How should they go about going to work when they haven't even grasped the working language? (Camden, woman 45+ group)

For the women in the study, not having the appropriate qualifications or work experience also acted as a barrier:

When you do present the details for the jobs you've applied for in line with your experience they say it's not enough. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

Lack of training and support to find work was also perceived as being problematic:

It's wrong to tell a mother who's been stuck at home raising her children, who doesn't already know the language [to go to work without support]. She doesn't know the way in which to look for work or the language. We don't even know how to use the computer or go online. We can't read or write, how are we meant to find work? (Camden, woman 45+ group)

From the evidence gathered from stakeholders and community members, there appeared to be limited engagement with employment training programmes. There was some evidence of women being asked to stop language classes in order to find a job. This was considered to be detrimental as it limits the type of employment they can look for:

The job centre is very problematic ... if you don't do as they say, they suspend your payments. They send you back and forth. They send you on training but won't allow you to complete a language course. (Camden, woman 45+)

Women in the focus group felt that they needed training in IT skills, language education and support to help them secure employment. Both the men and the women in the focus groups felt that voluntary work was useful to gain work experience, but that it needed to lead on to securing paid work to be fully worthwhile.

For the older women in the focus group entering education and training courses—often for the first time in their lives—was a particular challenge:

Before I was told to go to work, I used to study at college. I struggled a lot during my time there, the language isn't my mother tongue, I'm older and my brain isn't what it used to be. This isn't the (right) time in my life to be studying. My brain's moved on. An older person sits through a class, the same thing repeated over; they lose it the moment they leave the room. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

For women with younger children, the lack of childcare facilities was a further barrier:

Before all the changes came in to force, I used to work at a number of different places. Since they had my records on file, they said you can work at a school, etc., but each time what hindered me was my children. One of whom I need to drop off in the morning, school begins at 8 a.m. You need full-time places if you can't find part time. I told them I needed something that serves the interests of my children, a job that I can begin when I've dropped them at school and finish before I have to pick them up. I found one, thank God, I'm employed as a carer where I work the hours that suit me, and I can refuse to work hours that are inappropriate. (Camden, woman 45+ over)

For some of the women in the study, the logistics of finding work were daunting. Those women who had been homemakers and had not engaged in paid employment were confounded by the procedures and processes for searching for employment, as the examples below illustrate:

For those who haven't worked outside the home ... teach people how to search for work. I'd like that a lot. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

How should I go about finding work? I don't even know how to. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

Women in the focus group were very clear about what needed to be in place to support them in finding work, as one participant commented:

Teach people the best way to search for jobs. They know the most effective ways to carry out job search. We'd like for them to teach us and to support us. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

The women in the focus group expressed concern regarding cuts to services, in particular community-based organisations, as they felt that this was the best place for support for accessing employment to be located. However, British-Somali community organisations were not usually established with the remit to provide employment support; their main focus of provision was English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and welfare advice, with employment support often being informal. The research team were unable to identify any British-Somali specific employment support in Camden and Tower Hamlets. Women in the focus groups generally did not like to

access job centres, finding the staff there less helpful. Sure Start⁹⁴ was considered to be really helpful, particularly in providing one-to-one support for mothers with children under five to find work. Services within their locale were considered to be the most useful:

The community centres are best placed to help. Even the community centres that used to support people are closing down because of a lack of funding. All the (public) services have been reduced. The local Citizen's Advice Bureau is being closed, you know, the Council too. But what would be good is that, in order to get people working, they receive support to find the jobs they need to make a way for that to happen. (Camden, woman45+ group)

6.4.2 Experience of Somali Men

The men in the focus group were all educated and some of them had gone on to further and higher education. Most of these research participants were currently in employment. For the men, further barriers included not being part of "networks" which facilitate access to employment through the transfer and use of social capital, as one male focus group participant commented:

It's not about what you know; it's about who you know. It's not nice to say but it's the truth. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

One respondent described a situation where he suggested to his manager that a potential (Somali) candidate for a job should submit a CV to the company, only to discover that the position had been filled by someone who was already known to a more senior manager. This was felt to be a common practice and to disadvantage Somalis as they were not part of such powerful networks.

It's networking, it's networking, but also sometimes it's unfair when you're trying to, say, for somebody who has no experience who is trying to break into this field it's very, very difficult. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

It was clearly felt that not being part of networks was a hindrance to securing employment. It was also suggested that there were cultural barriers that acted as obstacles to joining networks. In particular, participants noted the extent to which networks and relationships are developed in social events after work:

It's that cultural aspect of, you know, how you get through. Even with management, people attend parties or Christmas dos just to meet the right sort of people; I think it's cultural in this country where it's something that is the norm you have to attend these gatherings to meet the right people. It's not the right way forward, but it's quite a cultural thing. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

⁹⁴ Sure Start was a U.K. government initiative introduced in 1998. Its aim was to improve children's life chances by improving childcare, early education, health and family support.

It was felt that even if individuals had successfully gained qualifications and secured employment in their chosen field, it was difficult to become established and progress unless people belonged to the right networks, and such networks did not appear to be open to members of the Somali community:

Currently, I'm doing my Construction Industry Training Board license, and once you get that you can break into ... construction, you can break into a field and do your placement, but the issues is I don't know whether to, because I don't know no one, I don't know where to go to, who to apply to, I've checked sites and that, but it's a lost cause. (Camden, man 18–35)

Role models in the family and community were important in shaping employment choices. For example, if there was a precedent of accessing higher education or professional occupations this was considered to encourage young people to aspire to such positions themselves. The corollary, though, was that lack of achievement and available role models could mean that young people would not pursue higher education or professional employment.

The importance of social networks and the strength and quality of social relationships for labour market outcomes have been well documented,⁹⁵ and it is recognised that there is variation in the employment prospects of ethnic minorities due to social processes which impact on inclusion (or not) in the labour market. The role of network social capital is significant in how ethnic minorities fare in accessing employment since it impacts on information flows and communication.⁹⁶

Further, the degree to which ethnic minorities are integrated into the mainstream has also influenced their integration into the labour market.⁹⁷ A long migration history (of more than 30 years), formal group membership of a club or organisation, engaging with voluntary employment, and networking with mixed-ethnic groups (including the indigenous population) are all identified as having an important impact on labour market outcomes.⁹⁸

6.5 Discrimination in Employment and the Labour Market

Discrimination was considered to be a significant problem facing Somalis in London by the majority of research participants, with one male focus group member commenting:

⁹⁵ See man Kahanec and man Mendola (2007) for a summary of the literature and empirical research based on the Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities conducted by the Policy Studies Institute in 1993–1994.

⁹⁶ man Kahanec and man Mendola, *Social Determinants of Labor Market Status of Ethnic Minorities in Britain*, IZA Discussion Paper No. 3146. Germany: Institute for the Study of Labor, 2007 (hereafter, Kahanec and Mendola, *Social Determinants*).

⁹⁷ Kahanec and Mendola, *Social Determinants*.

⁹⁸ Kahanec and Mendola, *Social Determinants*.

The fact that they have stereotypical views also doesn't help our situation ... they just judge you basically, they prejudge. (Camden, man 18–35)

Another explained that negative experiences in attempting to access employment were comparable to the negative stereotyping of Somali young men by the police:

Say if we're to gather for something and we get stopped, by police or whatever ... it's like that in the employment world as well, they'll see you in the interview and they'll be like, "You know what, a black teenager who lives in Camden, no we don't want him". (Camden, man 18–35)

Another man in the study, a teacher, talked about his experiences of seeking work and the difficulties in successfully securing employment:

Prejudice in employment. I applied for so many positions when I was, I'm moving now from school to school ... I have interviews, every day I think for two weeks. Some schools as you walk in, you know when you talk to people, they have already made up their mind, you didn't do nothing. (Camden, man 18–35)

Another male focus group participant described his experience of working at the Olympic Park, where the Somali employees were negatively labelled:

They ended up calling us the mischief gang, they ended up memorising our reference numbers and everything, as soon as we came in everyone would be quiet, and it would be awkward, "Ah, the mischief gang". (Camden, man 18–35)

The situation in this case was helped by a senior colleague—also Somali—opting to manage the group.

6.6 Initiatives to Improve Access to Employment and Community Responses

An example of a government initiative to improve access to employment is Tower Hamlet Council's "Overcoming Barriers to Work Programme". Tower Hamlet's Employment Strategy 2011 identified Bangladeshi and Somali women as being particularly disadvantaged in relation to the labour market⁹⁹ and funded a year-long pilot project to understand more about such barriers and help women back into work. Programmes of support were made available for women, premised on the needs of individuals rather than generic criteria adopted by Jobcentre Plus. Enhancing literacy, numeracy and IT skills were at the core of this programme.

It is difficult at this stage to judge the success¹⁰⁰ of this initiative, however, or to gauge community responses as none of the participants in the study had participated in this particular initiative. Another initiative identified was the Future Jobs Fund, which

⁹⁹ See <http://www.londontenders.org> (accessed 4 August 2014).

¹⁰⁰ An independent evaluation of the project is currently being carried out by Accendo Consultancy.

although not Somali specific, was a scheme to help young people access employment. Companies and organisations were given government funding to subsidise wages for six months for young people who had been receiving Jobseeker's Allowance for six months. Although none of the research participants had engaged with this scheme, evidence suggests that a number of people were employed by placement organisations after the six-month period had ended.

Both male and female focus group participants provided examples of their experiences of engaging with government initiatives. For example, Omar, who works in construction, described a scheme that was meant to prioritise training and employment for local people. He explained how the opportunities meant to arise from this did not materialise due to the way that the scheme was administered:

The government have a scheme with a lot of local boroughs, what they do is any work, in regards to construction work, they are supposed to hire someone from the local borough, and what happens is the local Council will pay for that person to be trained. And what happens is, sometimes these companies they don't even get anyone who is from the local borough, they'll get somebody from somewhere else, it's very, very difficult for the person, but the government should be putting more pressure on the companies who are in the local boroughs. (Camden, man 18–35)

Another male focus group participant described a scheme that was previously operated by Camden Borough Council:

I kind of agree with what he has just said, I work in Camden Council where they used to have a work placement programme for young people where they could get experience through working voluntary through work experience. Since the recession started, that has been abolished, there was a whole place created for it, it was shut down just to save money for the cutbacks. (Camden, man 18–35)

In the women's focus group, one participant described her experiences of undertaking training to help her get into work:

They then sent me to Reed [an employment agency]; they help people. They then sent me to training where I learnt about caring. I got a certificate for this training and that's how I got my job. They put me on the path to get my certificate and supported me to find work ... But to tell someone who hasn't even taken the first step to get up and go to work, they don't know where to begin ... We're struggling, male and female alike and we need this kind of support. (Camden, woman 45+ group).

6.6.1 Training and Support

The Camden Plan was launched in 2012 by Camden Council, in part to address unemployment in the borough. As part of the plan, 25 hours of free childcare is available (10 more hours than is funded by the government), since maternal

unemployment was highlighted as a contribution to child poverty. By 2013, Camden Council published progress over 2012–2013 and indicated that it had increased the numbers of local people employed by Camden businesses, improved work experience opportunities and launched a business portal as a single point of contact for businesses with the aim of making access to employment easier. Future commitments include targeting education and training for employment for young people in the borough.¹⁰¹

The “Camden Jobtrain” was considered to be an excellent initiative for supporting people into work. Based on three sites across the borough, it provided vocational learning and support and helped people develop skills, confidence and chances of succeeding in work. It had a high success rate in that the vast majority of people engaging with Camden Jobtrain gained employment or other achievements, for example, a qualification or a place in further education or training. Camden Jobtrain was a registered charity and a limited company operating as part of the voluntary sector and was in existence for over 30 years until its funding was stopped in 2012 when it closed.¹⁰²

In Tower Hamlets, the Tower Hamlets Employment Strategy sets out a four-year trajectory to increase the employment rate in Tower Hamlets. It covers the period from April 2011 to March 2015 and recognises that equality and diversity in access to employment needs to be addressed.¹⁰³ In Tower Hamlets, the “STEP” programme worked with 100 British-Somali women over an 18-month period and helped 50 women into paid employment and 50 into further education. This was considered to be very successful by one stakeholder working with Somali women.

In Tower Hamlets, there are various opportunities for employment, including Apprenticeship Programmes and a Graduate Scheme, available from the end of April each year. The Youth Engagement Programme was developed for young people in the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) group. It was established in 2005–2006 in response to the increasing numbers of NEET young people in the borough. The Youth Engagement Programme engages a variety of learning, education, training and employment providers and offers specific opportunities targeted at NEET young people.¹⁰⁴ Two stakeholders commented that it had tangible and trusted outcomes; a particularly good example was the opportunity for young people to engage in two weeks’ training and one week’s volunteering, which then guaranteed a job interview. However, one stakeholder working in a community organisation felt that it was not specifically targeted towards British-Somalis and therefore this may affect opportunities taken up.

¹⁰¹ Camden Borough Council, “2012–2017, The Camden plan one year on”.

¹⁰² See the Camden Jobtrain website at <https://www.ucasprogress.com/provider/78521>.

¹⁰³ Tower Hamlets Council, “Tower Hamlets Employment Strategy 2011”.

¹⁰⁴ See <http://archive.c4eo.org.uk/themes/youth/vlpdetails.aspx?lpeid=484> (accessed 6 August 2014).

The Somali Community Leadership course by Tower Hamlets Council and the Somali Civic Leadership Programme by Operation Black Vote were also identified as initiatives aiming to build capacity as well as providing opportunities for learning, development and building effective networks. Some stakeholders suggested that the success of the borough's initiative could have been strengthened with additional measures to provide follow-up support after participation.

6.6.2 Capacity Building Initiatives

Somali Civic Leadership Programme

Organiser(s): Operation Black Vote (OBV) is an organisation established to champion race equality and promote civic engagement amongst the United Kingdom's minority ethnic communities.

Eligibility: candidates must live or work in Tower Hamlets and show a genuine interest in community issues.

What does it offer? Fifty Somali participants (men and women) follow a programme that gives an insight into four areas of public life. They include:

- education: school governors;
- criminal justice system: safer neighbourhood panels;
- politics: councillor;
- voluntary sector: trustees.

Priorities: to promote and actively encourage civic participation in public bodies.

Previous participants on OBV programmes have gone on to become "Councillors, School Governors and Magistrates. A notable achievement was made by Helen Grant MP, the first woman Conservative MP of African Caribbean descent."

The Somali Muslim Young Men's Project

Organiser(s): London Borough of Tower Hamlets, SOAS University and OSCA.

Eligibility: candidates must live or work in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Barking and Dagenham, Newham or Redbridge, have an undergraduate degree and show a genuine interest in community issues.

What does it offer? The opportunity to develop community leadership skills with 30 places leading to a Post-Graduate Diploma qualification.

Priorities: to support and encourage Somali residents to take up leadership roles in the community.

The Camden Equality Taskforce was set up in May 2013 to explore the role of public services in tackling inequality in the borough. Employment was identified as a key area—and specifically parental employment—highlighting the strong relationship with child poverty. BME employment was identified as an issue, particularly among Bangladeshi and Somali residents.

Following the recommendations of the Equality Taskforce, a number of interventions have been taken forward including commissioning the Camden Parents First project, delivered by the Hopscotch Asian Women's Centre and the Somali Cultural Centre. This project provides support for long-term unemployed mothers with complex barriers to employment, including exploring perceptions of gender roles in the workplace, family and community, confidence building and motivation and employability skills.

Camden LBC has been working with Somali organisations to strengthen links with a range of employment and skills provision available universally in the borough. Examples of the services for young people and enterprise support in Camden that Somali organisations have been put in contact with are listed in the following section.

6.6.3 Support for Young People

- **Camden Mentoring Programme:** mentoring support for 16–24-year-olds to access apprenticeships, into enterprise and other pathways.

- **Camden Apprenticeships.**¹⁰⁵
- **King's Cross Construction Skills Centre:** apprenticeships and job opportunities in construction.¹⁰⁶
- **Camden Scholarships:** scholarship opportunities with the HULT Business School and LCA Business School for the September 2014 academic year.¹⁰⁷
- **Work experience:** Camden Business Board and the Council are working with Inspire, an educational charity, to offer Year 10 pupils (14–15-year-olds) from Camden schools good-quality work experience placements.
- **Into Enterprise:** individualised support for young people (16–24) interested in enterprise (run by Westminster Kingsway, Prince's Trust and London Youth Support Trust and Camden).¹⁰⁸
- **New Enterprise Allowance:** Financial support for setting up your own business from Jobcentre Plus.¹⁰⁹
- **PRIME:** enterprise support for the over-50s, based at the British Library, also running taster sessions in Gospel Oak.¹¹⁰

A further example of a successful initiative in Camden highlighted at the Roundtable Discussion was the support for a group of Somali women to establish a care organisation in response to unmet need in the community; the Council now buys care services from this organisation. There is also a task force in place for BME residents—the Maternal Employment Programme—that seeks to promote Somali women into work.

In terms of future priorities, development of employment opportunities, particularly for young people, was seen as crucial. Research participants also felt that there was a strong need to make training, education and support more widely available. The importance of role models and mentoring were also highlighted.

¹⁰⁵ See <http://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/content/business/jobs-and-skills/apprenticeships-and-kx/camden-apprenticeships.en;jsessionid=FA7B1B7187C5C3193394175256C7663A> (accessed 4 August 2014).

¹⁰⁶ See <http://www.kingscrossconstruction.co.uk/portal/index> (accessed 4 August 2014).

¹⁰⁷ See <http://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/business/jobs-and-skills/current-opportunities-and-scholarships> (accessed 4 August 2014).

¹⁰⁸ See <http://www.camdenintoenterprise.com> (accessed 4 August 2014).

¹⁰⁹ See <https://www.gov.uk/new-enterprise-allowance> (accessed 4 August 2014).

¹¹⁰ See <http://www.prime.org.uk/category/about> (accessed 4 August 2014).

6.7 Summary

The importance of employment and the role of education and training in enhancing employment opportunities were recognised as being important by Somali communities in Camden and Tower Hamlets. It was suggested at the Roundtable Discussion that there were still gaps in knowledge across both boroughs regarding the levels and types of need for training and support, and to specify this would have significant benefits.

There were numerous examples of Somalis being successful in securing employment in high status occupations; however, there were also many examples of barriers to securing employment and experiences of discrimination. A significant structural barrier to Somalis gaining employment is the current economic downturn and recession, which means that jobs and opportunities are scarce. This has meant that there is greater competition for fewer jobs.

It is evident that older women need support in accessing employment as they face disadvantages in terms of language barriers, educational attainment, qualifications and work experience. However, young men are also disadvantaged in the labour market; their lack of access to established networks was put forward as a particular barrier.

7. HOUSING

7.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the housing experiences of Somali communities in Camden and Tower Hamlets. A focus group specifically addressing housing issues was held with members of the Somali community in Camden, and interviews with stakeholders also provide qualitative data on the experiences of Somalis across both boroughs. Data gathered from these interviews indicate that overcrowding, poor housing and disrepair combined with substantial difficulties in accessing social housing and private renting are significant problems facing Somali communities in London. Such difficulties are compounded by a lack of understanding of systems, perceptions of unfair treatment and few Somali staff being employed in the housing sector. Before the findings are discussed, however, it is necessary to outline the implications of the recent reform of the benefit system and its impacts on housing options for Somalis.

In the United Kingdom, there are three types of tenure; owner-occupation, social housing (encompassing local authorities and housing associations) and private renting. Owner-occupation is the dominant tenure, with 68 percent of the population owning their home outright or with a mortgage. Social and private renting accommodates 32 percent of the population.¹¹¹ However, in the capital there is currently a shortage of available homes, and low-income families in particular are experiencing difficulties in accessing affordable housing.¹¹² It is estimated that 95 percent of Somali households in the United Kingdom rent their accommodation.¹¹³ The average rent for a one-bedroom housing association property in Camden is approximately £115 per week.¹¹⁴

In London overall, there are fewer owner-occupiers and both social and private renting play larger roles for lower income employed households and those households in receipt of welfare benefits, with owner-occupation running at 55 percent and renting as a whole at 45 percent. In the United Kingdom, the criteria for allocating social housing are outlined in the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Housing Act 2002 and the Housing Act 2004. Those groups that are prioritised for rehousing include: those who are homeless, or who are threatened with homelessness; priority needs groups, such as families with children and the elderly; people living in unsuitable accommodation, for example a home without an inside toilet; people living in overcrowded accommodation; those who need to move on medical or welfare grounds; and people who need to move to a particular area to prevent hardship.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-15747103> (accessed 4 August 2014).

¹¹² Hughes (2012).

¹¹³ CLG, "The Somali community in England".

¹¹⁴ "Annual review of Housing Associations and Co-ops 2012–2013", p. 21.

¹¹⁵ J. Rutter and man Latorre, "Social housing allocation and immigrant communities", Manchester ippr, 2009.

From 1993 to 2010, social renting declined from 30 percent to 23 percent, while private renting increased from 12 percent to 19 percent.¹¹⁶ There has been very little social housing development since the 1980s, and a large amount of the stock has been purchased under the “Right to Buy” legislation, which allowed local authority tenants to purchase their council homes. It is expected that the private rented sector in London will grow over the next two decades to meet this shortfall by default rather than by design.¹¹⁷

Rent levels in the private rented sector are not set by government; rather, the market determines these. Additionally, the sector as a whole is not regulated in the same way as social housing, and households who rent privately have less security of tenure. Furthermore, the growth in the private rented sector has important implications for lower income households, particularly in the light of welfare reform.

7.2 The Housing Position of Somalis in Camden and Tower Hamlets

7.2.1 Access to Social Housing: Local Authorities

Access to social housing in England is determined by two factors; first, whether an individual or household is eligible to apply; and second, whether there is sufficient availability in the area where housing is being applied for. The availability of social housing varies between areas. In London, the demand is extremely high, much higher than in other parts of the country and this impacts on the likelihood of households being rehoused. Ineligibility for rehousing could be due to a household not living in an area for long enough; if they have been involved in unacceptable behaviour; or whether they have breached a previous tenancy. A local authority can refuse to rehouse people even if they are eligible and in priority need if they have breached a previous tenancy.

Since the Localism Act 2012, local authorities have more freedom in setting their own housing allocation policies, but they must still meet certain criteria and make the information available to the public. By law, local authorities have to give “reasonable preference” to certain “priority need” groups. These groups are:

- people who are legally classed as homeless (or threatened with homelessness): the law classes a person as homeless when they have no home that is available and reasonable to occupy;
- people living in unsanitary, overcrowded or otherwise unsatisfactory housing;
- people who need to move for medical or welfare reasons;

¹¹⁶ C. Whitehead, P. Williams, C. Tang and C. Udagawa, *Housing in Transition: Understanding the Dynamics of Tenure Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research, 2012 (hereafter, Whitehead et al., *Housing in Transition*).

¹¹⁷ Whitehead et al., *Housing in Transition*.

- people who need to move to a particular location (for example, to be nearer to special medical facilities) and who would suffer hardship if they were unable to do so.¹¹⁸

Usually, local authorities operate “points-based” or “band-based” systems, which take account of length of waiting time and housing need. Categories usually range from “A” to “D”, with “A” being the highest priority, or most urgent for rehousing.

A number of local authorities operate “Choice-Based Lettings” systems. Eligibility and availability criteria still apply under these systems. Once a household has been accepted onto the waiting list, applicants identify available properties, check whether they are eligible to apply for them (depending on their “banding” and household type) and then apply, or “bid”, for the property. They are informed of the outcome by the local authority. Local authorities offer secure (lifelong), introductory (for the first 12 months) and flexible tenancies (for a fixed period).

Local authorities have strategic responsibility for housing in their area, although some functions can be devolved to other providers (Registered Social Landlords—RSLs) and the private sector.

7.2.2 Access to Social Housing: Housing Associations

Like local authorities, housing associations provide affordable rented housing intended for people on lower incomes or in receipt of welfare benefits. Most housing associations offer secure, assured, assured short-hold and starter tenancies. In Camden, there are 47 housing associations,¹¹⁹ while in Tower Hamlets there are 57.¹²⁰

7.2.3 The Implications of Welfare Reform

Historically, rental costs for private and social rented housing were generally met by housing benefit payments if a household was in receipt of welfare benefits. However, in 2012 the Department of Work and Pensions introduced major changes to the welfare and benefits system. The main changes include the introduction of “universal credit”, which will mean that from 2015 all existing benefits, including housing benefit (now known as local housing allowance), are incorporated into one payment, paid directly to claimants. Welfare reforms also affect the amount of “non-dependent deductions” that are made from housing benefit. Non-dependents are adults aged over 18 (i.e. adult children within households) who would be expected to contribute towards the household rent.

¹¹⁸ See <http://england.shelter.org.uk/>.

¹¹⁹ See <http://camden.gov.uk/ccm/content/contacts/non-council-contacts/contact-housing-associations.en> (accessed 4 August 2014).

¹²⁰ See http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgs/101-150/150_housing_associations.aspx (accessed 4 August 2014).

Importantly, now there is also a limit on the total value of benefits that any one household can receive—the “overall benefit cap”. British-Somali households in receipt of housing benefit are 10 times more likely to be impacted by a benefit cap than white British recipients as they often have larger families.¹²¹ The cap relates to the household as a unit, and does not take account of the size of the household unit. For example, a couple in receipt of benefits have the same cap as a couple with any number of children (£500 per week).

Example: Changes in the Benefit System and Impacts on Households

The tenant, a lone parent, has lived with her two daughters (aged 9 and 7) in her two-bedroom, privately rented house in Camden for the last 5 years. She receives Jobseeker’s Allowance while she is looking for work. The rent is £445 per week and the full cost was previously met by housing benefit. However, since the changes to the benefits system were introduced, there is a “cap” on the amount of benefit that she is eligible to receive. The weekly amount of local housing allowance for a two-bedroom property in Camden is now £300, leaving a weekly shortfall of £145 per week. The tenant’s options are to pay the shortfall from her remaining benefits, which will mean that she does not have sufficient money to spend on food and utilities, or to move out of the area, away from family and friends, where rental costs are lower.

Many local authorities are currently exploring ways to relocate people to other parts of the country where housing is more affordable; however, there are implications regarding separating families and communities. The National Housing Federation (the body representing Housing Associations in the United Kingdom), the Chartered Institute of Housing (the professional body of social housing practitioners) and Shelter (the main U.K. homeless charity) are all critical of aspects of the welfare reforms, arguing that low-income families will experience further reductions in their income, resulting in hardship. The situation is particularly problematic in London, since there is a serious shortfall of affordable rental housing in the private sector. One focus group participant living in private rented accommodation explained the impacts of welfare reform as follows:

Everyone faces a difficulty in one way or another. Private housing is causing a lot of problems for people. I lived in privately rented accommodation but left before the changes came in. This comes with a lot of problems. For example, someone whose child is in secondary or at A-Level will be told that they will no longer have their rent

¹²¹ A. Muman, “Equality analysis of welfare reform impact”, Tower Hamlets Homes, 2013.

paid for and will be moved. The private landlords don't want to lower the rents. These families have lived in these homes for a long time; their children attend local schools. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

The benefit cap limits the overall amount of benefit a household can receive. It is the latter which is a particular problem for Somali households, since often a family is faced with the option of remaining in overcrowded conditions in the capital or being pushed to the outskirts of London where rents are cheaper, as the following quote from a focus group participant illustrates:

There is a woman who got reunited with her husband and small girl is waiting for a house. They said we are either going to place you outside of London or you remain in your overcrowded place and keep bidding. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

Several of the stakeholders interviewed felt that welfare reform disproportionately affects British-Somali communities. Often, a family will opt to stay where they are despite being overcrowded, to avoid disrupting children's education and importantly, to retain links with the community.

7.3 Housing in Camden

Demand for social housing in Camden is very high. At the end of 2010–2011, there were 21,961 households on Camden's housing register. The majority of people on the housing register will never receive an offer of social housing, since approximately 1,000 properties become vacant each year. In 2010–2011, 977 general needs properties were let through Choice-Based Lettings (CBL). Overwhelmingly, these were flats or maisonettes. Social housing and private rented housing in Camden are less likely to meet the standards set by the Decent Homes Standard and minimum legal requirements, particularly for homes in multiple occupation.¹²²

Camden Council's housing strategy states that their priorities up to 2016 are to make better use of empty homes, improve the regulation of the private rented sector, and by 2016 bring all homes up to the Decent Homes Standard.

Forty-two percent of Camden Council's properties are one-bed or studio flats. A further 32 percent are two-bed units. There are very few large properties; only 1 percent of properties are five-bed or bigger. Just under half of Camden's properties are on large estates or in tower blocks.¹²³ There do not appear to be any plans to build more housing.

¹²² Camden Borough Council, "Camden Housing Strategy 2011–16", at http://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/cms-service/download/asset?asset_id=2683563 (accessed 4 August 2014) (hereafter, "Camden Housing Strategy 2011–16").

¹²³ "Camden Housing Strategy 2011–16".

7.4 Housing in Tower Hamlets

Figures from the most recently published Housing Strategy (2009–2012) indicate that 35 percent of households are owner-occupiers, 23 percent are private renters, 14 percent live in a council rented home, and 28 percent rent with a housing association. Tower Hamlets Homes manages the council stock and estates of Tower Hamlets Council. Like Camden, Tower Hamlets is an area where demand for housing vastly outstrips supply. About 23,000 households were registered on the Common Housing Register in 2012.¹²⁴ In terms of housing standards, 44 percent of “Tower Hamlets Homes” properties, 15 percent of housing association homes and 33 percent of private rented homes did not meet the Decent Homes Standard, and the cost of raising Tower Hamlets Homes council housing stock to the Decent Homes Standard is currently just under £426 million.

In terms of overcrowding, 7,648 households on the housing register lack one bedroom (overcrowded) and 1,798 lack two bedrooms or more (severely overcrowded). This means that around 41 percent of households on the housing register currently live in overcrowded households. Just over 2,000 homes per annum were available for social rent annually from new supply and council and housing association re-lets. Tower Hamlets Council’s main priorities are stated as:

- delivering and managing decent homes;
- increasing new housing supply sources (making use of empty homes and working with the private sector and RSLs);
- tackling overcrowding.¹²⁵

7.4.1 The Housing Experiences of British-Somalis in Camden and Tower Hamlets

One stakeholder commented that the housing and health needs of British-Somalis in London are “vast and endless”, denoting the scale and nature of the problem facing this community. Somali families are often large and there was a good deal of anecdotal evidence from stakeholders and participants in the focus group of overcrowding, poor housing conditions and disrepair in both social and private rented housing.¹²⁶ There were examples of positive experiences and satisfaction with landlords, but experiences were generally rather negative, as the discussion below suggests.

¹²⁴ “Tower Hamlets Housing Strategy 2009–12”.

¹²⁵ Tower Hamlets published an overcrowding and under-occupancy statement in 2013, in which they highlighted their plans to prioritise these issues.

¹²⁶ I. Cole and D. Robinson, *Somali Housing Experiences in England*. Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University, 2003.

7.4.2 Overcrowding

Focus group participants talked about their own experiences of overcrowding and provided anecdotal evidence of other families living in similar conditions in private and social rented properties. Often, British-Somali households are large and there is a shortfall of suitably sized accommodation in both Camden and Tower Hamlets, as the quote below typifies:

I have a neighbour who has three kids and is living in a one-bedroom home.
(Camden, woman 45+ group)

British-Somali families also face further overcrowding if additional family members join the household, as the quote from one of the focus group participants suggests:

I've been living in a home owned by a private landlord for 23 years ... the council say the landlord should help. I was overcrowded and I got no help, in total there are four flights of stairs and I have an elderly mother but they refused to allow her to register with us. They told her to find separate accommodation.
(Camden, woman 45+ group)

From the above excerpt, it is evident too that there are differences in terms of who is accepted as comprising a household. There is also confusion regarding whose responsibility it is to rehouse overcrowded households. Significantly, there is also evidence of “hidden homelessness”, where households reside in accommodation with “other” households, as the following four excerpts illustrate:

We face overcrowding. I live with my sister in her home, which has two rooms and one living room. There are a lot of us, in my family there are three of us and in her own family there are three, in total there are six people living in this two-bedroom property. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

We are (a family of) three people in two bedrooms. An elderly person is residing with us, she doesn't have a room of her own. She just sleeps in the sitting room.
(Camden, woman 45+ group)

I live in privately owned property for the last 22 to 23 years. At a later stage, I was joined by my elderly mother, and I reported this to the council, who said we won't add her as a tenant in this house as she is elderly. The house has stairs and has only two rooms. They told me to look for a separate house for her, but she is elderly and would not be able to live on her own and wouldn't get the help she needs. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

I haven't settled into a place of my own; I stay with my sister in the living room.
(Camden, woman 45+ group)

7.4.3 Poor Housing and Disrepair

There were also numerous accounts of poor housing conditions and disrepair affecting people living across tenures, in local authority, housing association and private rented accommodation. All landlords have a contractual duty to maintain rental property in a reasonable state of repair, although local authority secure tenants have the “Right to Repair” from their landlords. The right to repair scheme includes a list of repairs, known as “qualifying repairs”, which have to be done within a certain time limit. These are small repairs that can be done quickly and easily, or urgent repairs where there is a potential threat to health, safety or security. If such repairs are not conducted, the secure tenants can finance the work themselves and withhold rent.¹²⁷

Respondents reported long waiting times for repairs to be completed and poor communication and responses from landlords regarding repairs, as the following quotes illustrate:

Housing association:

I have lived in a housing association accommodation for the last seven years. I do not have a problem with the house itself, but with the repairs team. If anything gets broken, no matter how small, this will take a long period to be fixed (say a year). (Camden, woman 45+ group)

Local authority:

It took me around eight months of chasing them; but in the end it got fixed. The long waiting period for a repair to take place is tiring and a waste of time. As well as the waiting for the appointment, the time it takes per visit for the work to be done. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

A further focus group participant also explained that they reported damp to their property, but the council claimed that it was condensation and urged them to better ventilate the house. This person eventually engaged a solicitor to act on their behalf, but the situation remains unresolved:

Since they could not help me with this, I appointed a solicitor. The solicitor came to my house, checked all the difficulties I reported and he agreed to send them a letter. He wrote a letter regarding this, but they did not respond, it fell on deaf ears. The solicitor contacted me again, enquiring if they paid any visit to my house; I said no. He took them to court and a man came to my house from their department and demanded I show him all areas the solicitor saw. He took a video recording these areas. This was last year February, but until now no one contacted me. I told the solicitor that there'd been no word or update. He said that he will take them to court again. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

¹²⁷ See <http://england.shelter.org.uk>.

There were numerous reports of poor housing conditions, disrepair and poor responses from landlords to tackle these problems. One respondent commented on the disparity between how wealthy Camden is believed to be as a borough and the reality of funding levels available from the local authority:

This is one of the richest boroughs in London, yet it is not reflected in the actual work (the council) carries out in this respect. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

7.4.4 The Link between Poor Housing and Poor Health

The link between poor housing conditions and poor health is well documented and long established,¹²⁸ and a number of respondents reported health problems that they felt were linked to their housing conditions. For example, one focus group participant commented:

The heating was inadequate and we noticed damp. It felt as though we were sat in the middle of puddle. I developed arthritis and asthma. Three of my children developed asthma as well. My arthritis deteriorated further particularly—in my hands and legs are abnormally cold. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

7.5 Barriers to Accessing Housing

The stakeholders who were interviewed for this research put forward a number of reasons why British-Somali households might experience barriers in terms of accessing housing. First, a lack of understanding of how housing systems work was suggested. Both Camden and Tower Hamlets Councils publish their housing strategies and allocation schemes, and this information is widely available (through websites, posters, etc.). RSLs operating in both boroughs also publicise information on available housing and access.

However, although social housing providers make such information available, it was evident that approaching and engaging with housing providers—and in particular understanding processes—remained difficult for many focus group participants. This was thought to be in part due to language difficulties or unfamiliarity with such systems and affects the application and bidding process for social rented housing.

Access to private renting was also thought to be problematic due to the requirement that tenants pay a deposit and a month's rent in advance before securing a property. Given the high cost of rents in Camden and Tower Hamlets, private renting can be prohibitive for low-income households. Private rental costs vary within and across both

¹²⁸ C.J. Martin, S.D. Platt and S.M. Hunt, "Housing conditions and ill health", *British Medical Journal* 294 (1987).

boroughs.¹²⁹ The rental market in Tower Hamlets is cheaper than in Camden.¹³⁰ Data gathered from the focus group also indicate that British-Somali households experienced difficulties in accessing housing and also experienced homelessness,¹³¹ with several accounts being put forward. For example, one focus group participant said:

I'm homeless, living with my sister and my mother. I was joined by my husband and children, who came as part of family reunification. Camden Council agreed to put me in a hostel. When my family came, they said, "your husband can't live in this hostel, it's just for women" ... I've been registered homeless for six years. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

So, even if a household is accepted as being homeless, there are limited housing options available due to pressure on the housing stock in London and the impact of the overall benefit cap, as the following excerpt reinforces:

I stayed with my sister and used my mum's house as a care of address as I was homeless at the time ... (at the council) I was seen by a friendly female housing officer who asked me where should I be relocated, in town or outside London; I told her that I look after my mother who is over 80 years old, therefore I cannot reside far away from her and therefore need housing in this area. She said, "you are lucky as I cannot place you in temporary housing as you already have been registered in Camden for six years". She logged into the computer and it awarded me 490 point score in one go. She said, "you are so lucky because in the whole time that I've worked in housing, I've never seen the computer award such a high score for someone". She told me to start bidding for a house ... Once she received this paperwork, she increased my point score to 540 ... So,

¹²⁹ Example—weekly private rental costs for Camden: £300+ for a studio/very small one-bedroom flat; £550+ for a two-bedroom flat/house; £600+ for a three-bedroom house/flat/maisonette; £1,000+ per week for a four-bedroom property; there are very limited numbers of five-bedroom properties and those available seem to be in the "luxury" bracket with weekly rents of around £3,750+; data from "Right Move" (a private rented lettings agency), at <http://www.rightmove.co.uk/property-to-rent>.

¹³⁰ £300+ for a studio/one-bedroom flat; £350+ for a two-bedroom property; £500+ for a three-bedroom property; £600+ for a four-bedroom property. Again, there are limited five-bedroom properties in Tower Hamlets, with rents from £2,500+; data from "Right Move" (a private rented lettings agency), at <http://www.rightmove.co.uk/property-to-rent> (accessed 4 August 2014).

¹³¹ In England, a person is "legally homeless" if they are "roofless" (that is, without accommodation) or if they are threatened with homelessness. Homelessness also refers to living temporarily with friends, living in a hostel, living in very overcrowded conditions, living in an environment where there is a risk of violence or abuse, living in poor conditions, which may adversely affect health. People may also be considered to be homeless if they are living somewhere illegally (e.g. a "squat"), living separate from family or living somewhere that is unaffordable. See <http://england.shelter.org.uk>. Local authorities have a statutory duty to assist those households that are eligible, in priority need and are legally homeless.

I am still bidding and I am a homeless and need a home ... I am still homeless but was told to keep bidding.¹³² (Camden, woman 45+ group)

Many of the barriers affecting British-Somali families in accessing housing are shared by other low-income households in Camden and Tower Hamlets. A chronic housing shortage, particularly of affordable housing to rent, characterises Greater London and competition for this scarce resource is high. Households face the prospect of relocating to the outskirts of London, having to supplement shortfalls in benefits paid and living in overcrowded conditions. There was also anecdotal reporting of British-Somali families who had been encouraged to take up large properties in the private rented sector (by housing staff), and these families were now experiencing hardship due to shortfalls in benefit paid.

The difficulties facing British-Somali households are compounded by English language difficulties, not understanding or knowing how to navigate systems and having to compete with other groups for depleting housing stock.

A further problem identified with the private rented sector are the new requirements that private landlords verify the immigration status of prospective tenants. This was felt to be potentially discriminatory for BME households.

7.6 Sources of Advice, Information and Support about Housing Issues

There are 17 community voluntary sector advice agencies operating in Tower Hamlets offering advice to residents on issues ranging from debt, money management, housing and welfare benefits.¹³³ In Camden there are seven specialist Housing and Homelessness advice centres.¹³⁴

There are also a number of British-Somali organisations operating across Camden and Tower Hamlets, and stakeholders and focus group participants suggested that in the main British-Somali households prefer to access local community-based organisations rather than engage with “official” channels. A good deal of information is also passed on by word of mouth, but difficulties can arise if people are misinformed by other community members.

There was a sense among some stakeholders that there was some reluctance to approach mainstream services, again due to unfamiliarity or reports of other people’s negative experiences. However, some focus group respondents clearly engaged with the

¹³² Some Registered Social Landlords use a “bidding system” to allocate their housing. Applicants who have been accepted on to the register for rehousing are placed into “bands” (broadly ranging from urgent to non-urgent categories) and can apply (bid) for vacant properties for which they are deemed eligible.

¹³³ See http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgs/651-700/676_legal_advice.aspx (accessed 4 August 2014).

¹³⁴ See <http://www.camdenadvice.org/where-to-go-for-advice-in-camden/advice-on-housing-and-homelessness> (accessed 4 August 2014).

Citizen's Advice Bureau and had taken legal action when their housing needs were not addressed, as the excerpts below demonstrate:

It became necessary for me to make a complaint by going to Citizen Advice Bureau [CAB] and to Somali Community organisation; both were supportive. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

I went to a solicitor to make a complaint but he did not help me. After this, there was a serious leak and I went to visit another solicitor to make another complaint and he took photos of those areas that had the damage. This solicitor was really helpful, the heating got fixed and he even managed to issue them a penalty. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

7.7 Discrimination in Access to Housing

As indicated above, there are a number of barriers impacting on British-Somali households when attempting to access housing in Camden and Tower Hamlets. A number of focus group participants suggested that such difficulties could be due to discrimination or poor treatment in general by front line housing staff:

Our housing association staff do not have any respect for anyone; they will even hang up the phone (on you). They are very rude and shout at you. I would say that 20 percent of their staff will treat residents OK, but the remaining 80 percent are just not nice people. They would not record and report issues you raised. If you were to ring them three times today, they would claim there is no record of any calls you made. It's because of this that I started taking the name of staff members and the time I spoke to them. Despite the record I keep, I do not get anything done. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

One stakeholder suggested that there was evidence of private lettings agencies and estate agents refusing to rehouse Somali families in the "more desirable" areas. The researchers asked other stakeholders whether they were aware of this practice, and another stakeholder confirmed this to be the case.

Focus group participants and stakeholders mentioned the absence of British-Somali staff in housing organisations, and this was felt to contribute to a lack of understanding of the needs of Somali communities in both boroughs.

7.8 Factors Influencing Housing Choices

On a macro level, the overarching factor influencing the housing choices of British-Somali households in London is structural and economic. The majority of British-Somali households in the capital cannot access owner-occupation, so their housing choices are limited to social housing or private renting. As indicated above, there are significant structural barriers operating in the rented sector; diminishing local authority

stock and limited housing association dwellings and also high rents and the availability of suitably sized properties in the private rented sector.

7.9 Initiatives to Improve Access to Housing

A positive example of an initiative to improve access and dialogue between the British-Somali community and a housing provider is the Somali Tenants Engagement Project conducted by Tower Hamlets Homes (THH).¹³⁵

Example of Good Practice: Tower Hamlets Homes

Tower Hamlets Homes set up the “Somali Tenants Engagement Project” in April 2011 in response to finding that Somali tenants were twice as likely to be in rent arrears as white British tenants. At this time, baseline information on their Somali residents was limited, but they found from initial engagement with the Somali community that Somali tenants were experiencing poorer outcomes across a range of their services.

The main objective of the Somali Tenants Engagement Project was to carry out a range of strategic and operational improvements regarding access and outcomes, and also to improve service level satisfaction for Somali residents. The overarching aim was to reduce inequality of services between different communities.

Through a combination of resident engagement and working with community organisations THH successfully supported over 200 Somali households regarding rent arrears, overcrowding and provided information in accessible formats. The result of this was to dramatically improve understanding of the needs of Somali tenants and ensure that THH services were more accessible. As a result of the project, satisfaction levels among Somali residents increased by 33 percent by March 2012.

¹³⁵ THH is the largest social housing organisation in Tower Hamlets with 22,500 properties and 12,000 tenants, a large number of whom are British-Somali.

What they did

In response to feedback from Somali residents, THH implemented the following actions. They:

1. piloted frontline services relating to rent arrears;
2. used name-based intelligence, to proactively contact and profile Somali tenants to ensure that THH were better able to meet their specific and diverse needs;
3. developed and published the largest number of written Somali translations in the United Kingdom to ensure that communications are more accessible;
4. developed a suite of Somali talking leaflets in consultation with Somali customers and partner organisations, in order to overcome language and literacy barriers;
5. provided employment opportunities for Somali women, who are under-represented in the labour market in the borough;
6. developed a range of business tools, in order to support the provision of services to Somali customers, such as automated letter templates;
7. produced and published a report to share learning and best practice with other U.K. social landlords;
8. improved satisfaction of Somali tenants with services overall, specifically relating to communications and engagement.

How they did it

THH worked with the Somali Integration Team, a voluntary organisation based in Tower Hamlets, in order to use name-based intelligence to proactively contact over 200 tenants who they believed might be Somali and then asked them about themselves.

They collected the information through telephone calls by utilising a Somali-speaking project officer. This overcame language and trust barriers, which they recognised had prevented equal access to their services in the past. They used a market research company to purchase phone numbers for those properties they did not have contact details for. They then posted forms and visited tenants at home to collect outstanding information where possible.

The project allowed for information sharing between various stakeholders and engaging with British-Somali residents. As a result, THH were able to communicate more effectively with their British-Somali residents and share information in an appropriate manner.

Through the project, several hundred households have been provided with support, particularly in relation to managing rent arrears and overcrowding. Additionally, a number of overcrowded households have been moved to larger properties. Some of these households had been living in overcrowded conditions for over a decade.

As a result of the project, THH has employed some British-Somali women and frontline staff to help them better address the needs of the community. A further and important outcome of this project is the separate categorisation of British-Somalis as an ethnic group in monitoring information. THH identified that an additional 7 percent of their tenants were Somali through the Engagement Project. It is evident that ethnic categorisation is important, especially since socio-economic inequality disproportionately affects new migrant groups. Stakeholders working in the borough of Tower Hamlets were very complimentary about the work of THH and suggested that this model could be used by other housing providers across London.¹³⁶

7.9.1 Non-executive Board Membership

Stakeholders suggest that for the needs of British-Somalis to be properly addressed and understood by housing providers, they need to be represented on the management boards of housing associations. For this to happen, individuals would need to be co-opted or elected to have influence. They would also need to have the necessary skills and expertise to perform their duties as a board member.

An examination of a sample of five housing associations operating in the two boroughs examined in this report found that¹³⁷ none of the 67 members on the boards of these five housing associations were of Somali background. Housing Associations' management boards have responsibility for the strategic management of the organisation and vacancies on the board are usually advertised. Of the sample of housing associations selected, beyond statements of being committed to diversity, there was no evidence of initiatives specifically designed to improve diversity and representation, apart from the Genesis Housing Group, which publicises the role and diversity of resident board members.

¹³⁶ J. Caspell, S. Hassan and A. Abdi, "Meeting the needs of Somali residents: Somali tenants engagement project final report, April 2012". London: Tower Hamlets Homes, London, 2012.

¹³⁷ The five housing associations were: Origin Housing, One Housing Group, Circle Housing, Genesis Housing and Poplar Harca.

7.10 Summary

There are a number of issues facing British-Somali households in terms of housing in Camden and Tower Hamlets. Significantly, London is characterised by very high housing costs, a chronic housing shortage and the concentration of lower income groups in the rental sector. Low income also affects housing choices. The shortage of appropriate affordable housing in the social and private rented sector compounded by the impacts of welfare reform, poor housing conditions and difficulties navigating and negotiating complicated systems present a range of problems for British-Somali communities in the study areas and across London as a whole.

There is evidence of hidden homelessness, with households living in accommodation with other households. There is also evidence of families being eligible for rehousing, but being unable to move due to a shortage of available properties within London. This means that often the only option is to move to the suburbs of the capital or further afield. There is, however, evidence of good practice and there are initiatives to improve the housing circumstances of British-Somali communities.

8. HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

8.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on health and social protection. It begins by considering the health status of British-Somalis, it then explores the experiences of British-Somalis when using health and social service provisions and initiatives to improve access to social services and healthcare; and finally, it considers where British-Somalis go for information and support in relation to healthcare issues. The topic of health was addressed in two focus groups with older women (aged 45 plus) in Tower Hamlets and Camden. Concerns regarding health were identified as a big problem facing British-Somalis, and this reflects the wider literature on poor health outcomes and accessing services.

8.2 The Health Status of British-Somalis

Much of the literature discussing the health status of British-Somalis focuses on the mental health experiences of members of the community. It must be noted that mental health as a distinct topic was not raised in either focus group; rather, participants paid attention to physical conditions and ailments. Socio-economic factors such as education, income and occupation play significant roles in the health outcomes of Somali communities.

Overcrowded and temporary accommodation increases the risks of exposure to damp, disrepair and instability, which compromise well-being. Typically, health conditions associated with the community include increased prevalence of asthma, vitamin D deficiency and eczema. These conditions—as well as more prevalent cases of diabetes—are exacerbated by lifestyle and material deprivation.¹³⁸

Feedback from a healthcare professional working in Tower Hamlets highlighted that poor health outcomes in relation to obesity-related conditions for the Somali community are a serious concern and need to be addressed as a priority.

8.3 Experiences of British-Somalis Using Health and Social Service Provision: Interpreters

One important issue around accessing healthcare for British-Somali communities is the lack of interpreters, especially interpreters with medical knowledge. One participant, who was diagnosed with a thyroid condition, was initially told by an interpreter about an abnormal tissue growth in her throat and was worried by this news:

¹³⁸ See Hermione Harris, “The Somali Community in the UK: What we know and how we know it”, the Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK, London, 2004 at <http://www.icar.org.uk/somalicommunityreport.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2014).

I did not know what it was, and I was worried about this for a long time, thinking that it might be a cancer. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

The Royal Free Hospital in Camden and St Barts and the Royal London hospitals in Tower Hamlets all offer interpreting services. A number of GPs across both boroughs also have designated interpreters in place. However, evidence from the focus groups and stakeholder interviews indicates that in spite of this, patients still bring relatives or community members to interpret for them. A combination of factors contributes to the under-usage of interpreters among British-Somalis in Camden and Tower Hamlets. Key barriers include a lack of confidence and trust. Additionally, participants indicated that these services were only really available for specialist hospital appointments where advanced bookings are possible. For emergency and GP appointments it is unlikely that interpreters would be accessible.

Some community members are mistrustful of people not known to them and prefer to bring family members for support in what is often perceived as a stressful situation. If such support is to be better utilised, awareness should be raised as well as efforts to build confidence in data protection and confidentiality. Another woman described her experience with her GP, when she was warned that doctors were investigating the potential causes of her low blood cell count:

She informed me that my count was low and that she feared that I might have AIDS infection. She asked me where I came from. I said that I am from Africa. And she said that is why she asked me this question. She said the majority of people from Africa carry AIDS infection. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

She went on to describe the fear she felt while waiting for conclusive results:

I was panicking until the results of the blood test came out. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

Lack of understanding of patients' origins, culture and background can therefore potentially compound the difficulties faced by British-Somali communities in accessing healthcare via GP surgeries. Additionally, it was noted that currently accessing interpreters was difficult and time consuming, and as such was only a realistic proposition at specialist appointments.

In Camden, the demands for interpreters and Somali-speaking medical staff was clear, as one research participant commented:

We've got to have the representation. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

Previous studies also indicate that language is the single most important issue for Somali women when engaging with health services.¹³⁹ A lack of British-Somali staff in general was highlighted as a problem. The language barrier faced by service users

¹³⁹ K. Bulman and C. McCourt, "Somali refugee women's experiences of maternity care in west London: A cast study", *Critical Public Health* 12(4) (2002), pp. 365–380.

creates challenges, but crucially Somali-speaking staff could potentially bridge the gap and bolster relations.

Camden's participants gave accounts of their experience with Somali medical staff at their GP practices, and these accounts were overall very positive in terms of both competencies and approach. As one woman explained:

He specialised in Paediatrics in Somalia and he was retraining. He'd even carry out blood tests for those who needed it. He worked just the same as the others. He was very good. He'd ring us at home. He'd explain that having the smear test was in our best interest. He was a very good person who helped people a lot. We really do need more people like him. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

While this example is positive, it was also explained that this person had since left the practice and had not been replaced.

Another participant emphasised that Somali staff are needed at every level:

In areas where there is high concentration of Somalis we need Somali speakers at reception or who can interpret on our behalf as we really struggle with (our interactions) with the doctor. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

The lack of representation in frontline services added to the difficulties experienced, as a sense of mistrust lingers and language needs remain unaddressed. Sahra, a female participant from Tower Hamlets, reflected on the difference between communities and her perception that those that are represented in surgery staffing experienced better services:

There are Bangladeshi staff in GPs and they have their needs met. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

From a service provider's perspective, it is challenging to meet the needs of patients who speak little English and are unable to read/write. Often, materials translated into Somali are underutilised, as older generations may not be literate as they have not received any formal schooling. These challenges can be overcome with the recruitment of a Somali member of staff; he or she could be present at the time of the consultation or at least when explaining treatments and medications. A stakeholder dealing with chronic illnesses and the elderly identified her fears for patients by commenting: "How do people understand their medication?"

Stakeholders further identified that low uptake of screenings for cervical and breast cancer as well as delays in assessments for dementia have serious ramifications for accessing the appropriate treatment. It seems that support in the earlier stages could provide much needed guidance in a confusing and uncertain time in someone's life.

8.4 Experiences of Poor Treatment and Discrimination

Miscommunication and misdiagnosis were significant concerns for all of the participants in the Tower Hamlets focus group, as an account of one woman's experience demonstrates. She described her concern about her newborn's inability to suckle. This baby had already been diagnosed with a hole in the heart. Her doctor was unwilling to pay attention to the other symptoms that she was worried about and complained about her repeated visits to the surgery:

As an experienced mother, I felt that something was wrong with my child ... I asked them to look at her throat. The child was unable even to cry loudly, only faintly. They told me to just go back and that her heart will just mend itself. They only realised the health problem I reported after three years. They then referred me to Greater Ormond Hospital for a follow-up. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

The child later had an operation to fix the hole in her heart, as it was later diagnosed that this particular type of heart defect needed surgery.

Another participant also experienced difficulties in obtaining a correct diagnosis for her daughter's hearing impairment. Initially, repeat prescriptions for antibiotics were given. In both circumstances she did not feel that her child received the appropriate level of care from her GP, and that only her persistence ensured that the child was correctly diagnosed and treated. She felt that in both cases misdiagnoses had adversely affected her daughter:

I persisted so that doctors look and check her ear internally especially since they did not handle her previous health problems well ... we faced a lot of difficulties. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

She explained how the experience left her worried and fearful about engaging with healthcare providers in the future:

As a mum, I am worried; be it the doctors at GP, at hospital, the interpreters provided. I am worried about my self-confidence among other things. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

Participants in Camden highlighted that in their experience reception teams are on the whole professional, courteous and make appointments as necessary. The challenges they identified seemed to relate to the GPs themselves. A patient reported being told, "this is not your home" when returning and insisting on appropriate treatment for her daughter's skin condition. After five attempts, she attended the GP surgery where she was previously registered and was prescribed medication that cleared up the condition. Another participant complained that her GP would not refer her for further tests and did not feel that her symptoms were being treated seriously:

When I tell the GP about my condition he won't refer me. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

Some women felt that there was little point attempting to access healthcare via GP surgeries and instead went directly to hospital Accident and Emergency Departments, although treatment was not always forthcoming there either:

The A&E department have got to know me and ask me, “why have you come here at this hour, this isn’t a hotel”. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

Another issue raised in Camden’s focus group was a lack of follow-up support following tests and scans. These delays caused anxiety and frustration for patients, and ultimately opting not to engage with the health system at all, as one research participant explained:

I did everything, but given that I was on at them for five years and they didn’t do anything for me, I left them alone. I don’t even tell them about the pain in my leg. I get on with my work, I gasp from the pain at night ... I don’t go to them anymore; I don’t talk to them about my pain because they don’t do anything at all to help. What’s the point in going in? They advise you to take painkillers, “take paracetamol”, they say. I buy paracetamol myself, I don’t want to keep taking it, can I please be seen to properly and have the proper tests run to find out what’s causing the pain in one side of my body? I just gave up on them entirely. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

The impact of these comments and experiences were highlighted in the Tower Hamlets focus group. A sense of feeling disrespected and not being accepted was palpable from the comments of some participants:

I am just another foreigner in his eyes. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

They won’t give you a chance, even if you were to speak to them in English, you are nothing to them. This just will force you to seek private healthcare. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

Another woman felt that British-Somalis were victims of discrimination and vulnerable to abuse:

Contrary to what is written in English Law, where it says discrimination on basis of colour, creed, ethnicity, language, etc., it’s what we experience. We experience that these [abuses] do exist and we face them. You just feel that after all you are black and Muslim so why care—just give her this drug, whether she survives or dies, who cares. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

Another participant, although acknowledging that British-Somalis experienced poor treatment regarding healthcare, felt that this was due to carelessness on behalf of medical staff rather than deliberate discrimination:

I think it is not due to discrimination; perhaps it is more carelessness. These doctors got paid anyway, whatever result. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

In her assessment of a malpractice case discussed in the focus group, a participant made the following claim:

It clearly is one rule for us and another for natives. If a similar thing were to happen to a white woman, she will sue them and get them into trouble. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

Another research participant felt that it was useful to take her son, a trainee doctor, with her to appointments, since:

They pay more respect to those who speak in English. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

A woman, from Tower Hamlets, gave an account of her unsatisfactory experience of engaging with the NHS and subsequently opting to pay for private healthcare for her young baby. The private doctor questioned whether her child was born in the United Kingdom or Africa when he discovered a serious, previously undiagnosed eye condition. The woman questioned why the NHS had failed to diagnose her child's condition at birth, despite her repeatedly raising concerns. She explained that she was told:

Because your child is black, it was not easy to see that there was no pupil. He gave the reason that if your child had blue eyes, this defect would have been spotted. What has the colour of my child's eyes got to do with it? If that is the case, how come this privately paid consultant could spot this straight away? (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

Some participants said that they were not aware of how to act if they experienced medical malpractice. Others indicated that they did know how to act, and some had sought legal advice and submitted complaints but were still left dissatisfied by the outcome. As one participant commented:

You cannot win against them and this system. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

8.5 Initiatives to Improve Access to Social Services and Healthcare

Sure Start, an initiative for children and families in the most disadvantaged areas, was designed to provide childcare, maternal healthcare and employment support. Although not Somali specific and impacted by government cuts, this support is designed to provide sustained and consistent access to specialist advice around nutrition, behaviour and child development.

Examples of improving access to social services and healthcare in relation to mental health and tuberculosis highlight the need to address stigmatisation, understanding and using family and community links to bolster rehabilitation efforts. Language and culture-sensitive approaches were also deemed crucial.

8.6 Where Somalis Turn for Advice, Information and Support about Healthcare Issues

Primary care physicians are the first port of call for medical advice. Where appropriate, referrals are made and secondary healthcare services for specialist advice on the NHS were also accessed. Where funds are available private medical care was sought as well, but as it was noted by one research participant:

It depends on knowing where to go and getting funds. It depends upon economic capability. My family supported me with funds but this is not fair, to have to go private. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

A number of the participants in both focus groups had experiences of private healthcare and believed those interactions were pivotal in getting correct diagnoses and swift treatment for themselves and their families. These services were accessed in London and abroad. One participant commented:

I even went to Germany to double-check this and they did prescribe me these medications ... you will be left with no choice other than heading wherever you can get better health treatment. (Camden, woman 45+ group)

Through both sessions on health it became apparent that Somali women often turn to one another for support and information. Community networks also provide support and guidance regarding appropriate care pathways; at the very least, a concerned family member or a friend, at best a professional healthcare worker, will be sought to attend a doctor's appointment. The limitations of this support mechanism were recognised, given the fear and anxiety miscommunication can create.

Issues were also raised regarding professional interpreters, who are on occasion not felt to be fulfilling their duty to the patient. As one woman commented:

This disappoints you because even though this person needs to earn a living, he must do good job and perform [his role] well. (Tower Hamlets, woman 45+ group)

8.7 Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Given the sustained media attention and recent government efforts to address FGM, the research team raised the issue in a focus group with 18–35-year-old women in Tower Hamlets. The discussion highlighted the real concerns around the practice and serves to debunk some of the myths surrounding FGM and Somali communities in the United Kingdom. This is discussed further in Chapter 9 (Policing and Security). It was widely felt within the group that FGM was not a topic often raised, and that there was a good deal of sensitivity around the subject, as one research participant commented:

It's not really something that comes up in everyday conversation. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

Another participant added:

It's very rarely talked about or mentioned; I feel like the only times I've ever been asked about it is when someone outside of the Somali community is enquiring about it. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

When asked where the discussion around FGM should concentrate, participants in the focus group felt that it should be on addressing the health needs of those women who had experienced FGM, rather than preventing future incidents of FGM, as it was not considered to be an issue for the younger generation of women. One woman commented:

I think probably the health, discussions about what it means for the women who have had it done. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

One research participant described the difficulties in locating designated FGM support services and her experience of encountering ill-informed NHS staff, while another woman in the group indicated that there were 21 NHS trusts that run specific NHS services, 11 of which are in London.

She went on to explain that challenges have arisen, as these clinics are independent of mainstream NHS services. This arrangement was understood to have been a precaution against entering sensitive cultural debates around FGM. She also noted that specialist supporting posts in relation to FGM were only part time. Additionally, she highlighted that local residents preferred to travel further afield to safeguard their identities; they were reluctant to seek treatment at the nearest hospital.

The subject of FGM was raised in two focus groups, and respondents in both emphasised that although it was a traditional practice it is now obsolete, and only affected the older generation. As two young women explained:

I don't think the issue is now safeguarding young girls from having it done, I think it's more treating those who have had it done, trying to find out where these services are available. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

I think now a lot of Somali people are aware of the fact that it's not a part of the religion and that it's a cultural thing, I think the majority are aware of that, even the older generation ... that's why I think for the Somali community it isn't a massive issue. (Tower Hamlets, woman 18–35)

These findings are supported by previous research, which indicates that living in the United Kingdom from a younger age is associated with the abandonment of FGM, and that this practice tends to be associated with older generations.¹⁴⁰ This issue was also raised at the Roundtable Discussion, and British-Somali stakeholders argued that the

¹⁴⁰ L. Morison, A. Dirir, S. Elmi, J. Warsame and S. Dirir, "How experiences and attitudes relating to female circumcision vary according to age on arrival in Britain: A study among young Somalis in London", *Ethnicity and Health* 9(1) (2004), pp. 75–100.

media campaign around FGM that was taking place in early 2014 has misrepresented the Somali community. It was also suggested that those organisations that have an understanding of the community are best placed to tackle this issue and should inform police and media strategies to tackle FGM.

Example of Good Practice: Maslaha

Maslaha, an organisation working across sectors in London, has produced a resource “Talking from the Heart”¹⁴¹ in conjunction with Somali communities, GPs, therapists, imams, community organisations and Somali musicians to raise awareness of depression and anxiety.

The resource has been endorsed as an example of good practice by the Royal College of GPs, BME and mental health organisations, Somali organisations, as well as being used nationally by organisations such as Mind. It has also received coverage in *The Guardian*.

8.8 Summary

For British-Somali communities in London, there are clearly difficulties in accessing appropriate healthcare. The pressure placed on the NHS, the length of appointment times allocated to patients, compounded by lack of English language skills and difficulties navigating sometimes complicated systems, pose problems for older British-Somali women in particular.

Further difficulties are caused by a lack of cultural sensitivity and awareness on the part of medical staff, a lack of interpreters and British-Somali staff in GP surgeries, and instances of miscommunication and misdiagnosis. Some participants felt that they faced discrimination in accessing the health system, and this can lead to chronic conditions being left untreated and is potentially further detrimental to health. Stakeholders reported a reluctance to engage with social services by British-Somali communities, and none of the research participants in any of the focus groups indicated that they had any involvement with social services.

¹⁴¹ See <http://www.talkingfromtheheart.org> (accessed 4 August 2014).

9. POLICING AND SECURITY

9.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses issues around policing and security. The findings from stakeholders (including representation from the MPS) and two focus groups with men in Camden form the basis of this discussion. The chapter will present and analyse findings regarding the experiences of British-Somalis in relation to criminal justice and policing; highlight U.K. policies and processes of addressing anti-Muslim violence and hostility; outline initiatives to recruit British-Somalis into the police and other security forces; and finally, discuss the impact of national anti-terror legislation on Somali communities in the city.

9.2 Experiences of British-Somalis Relating to Criminal Justice and Policing

9.2.1 Hate Crime in London

An All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Islamophobia was set up in 2010 to gather evidence on Islamophobia and make recommendations on how to address it.¹⁴² The APPG is yet to report on its findings.

There are two official sources for the number of hate crime offences in England and Wales: the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) and police recorded crime. The survey records higher levels, as not all hate crime offences are reported to the police.¹⁴³ There were an average 278,000 hate crimes per year recorded in 2011–2012 and 2012–2013.^{144,145} “Hate Crime” is defined as “any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic”.¹⁴⁶

Hate crime can involve injury, theft and vandalism and the majority of recorded incidents related to assault.¹⁴⁷ The most commonly reported hate crime was race, at 154,000 incidents per year, followed by religion, at 70,000 incidents per year. Following the murder of soldier Lee Rigby in Woolwich, south-east London, in May 2013, there have been increases in the number of hate crimes against Muslims, with hundreds of incidents carried out across the United Kingdom. The Metropolitan

¹⁴² See <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmallparty/register/islamophobia.htm> (accessed 4 August, 2014).

¹⁴³ Office for National Statistics (ONS), “An overview of hate crime in England and Wales”, Home Office, Ministry of Justice, December 2013 (hereafter, ONS, “An overview of hate crime”).

¹⁴⁴ Based on combined data from the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 CSEW.

¹⁴⁵ ONS, “An overview of hate crime”.

¹⁴⁶ ONS, “An overview of hate crime”, p. 10.

¹⁴⁷ ONS, “An overview of hate crime”.

Police recorded 500 anti-Muslim crimes between May and December 2013.¹⁴⁸ In London as a whole for the year 2013, there were 723 recorded incidents of racial and religious hate crime. The figures for Tower Hamlets and Camden were 15 and 20, respectively.¹⁴⁹

9.2.2 Trust and Confidence in Policing

It was suggested by some law enforcement stakeholders that British-Somali young men who had previously lived in Somalia may be susceptible to mistrusting authority, since the law enforcement infrastructure in their country of origin had broken down. Participants in the Roundtable Discussion also highlighted that there are high levels of distrust between the police and young Somali men. Previous studies on migrants and trust also indicate that the legitimacy of authority figures in part rests on perceptions of the fairness of the behaviour exercised by law enforcers; and trust between citizens and those in power.¹⁵⁰ However, there was recognition among the men in one focus group of the necessity of having a police force:

Every civilised country has a police force. (Camden, man 18–35)

You need the police to uphold the law. When you have laws you need people to uphold them. (Camden, man 18–35)

Feedback from both focus groups included some positive comments about the police:

But at the same time, there are some police officers that I've come across and they are very respectful and they are good at their jobs and they know how to approach young people. But ... the bad outweighs the good, that's my take on it. (Camden, man 18–35)

It's just that they have dealt with so much crap, they just think initially, "Okay, he is just another one ..." You could be a good guy but they don't know that. (Camden, man 18–35)

To be honest, I have never had problems with the police other than one time. (Camden, man 18–35)

I like the police, I think they're safe. (Camden man 18–35)

To be fair, there are some police officers that are polite and come across like they want to help you. (Camden, man 18–35)

It's hard to tell the ones that want to make a difference and the ones who are there for the wage. (Camden, man 18–35)

¹⁴⁸ *The Guardian*, 27 December 2013.

¹⁴⁹ See <http://www.met.police.uk/crimefigures/>.

¹⁵⁰ Tyler (2001).

However, there was a consensus that positive experiences of engaging with the police were limited:

It's not the majority, it's just a few, it's a handful. (Camden, man 18–35)

9.2.3 Mistrust of the Police

Stakeholders also raised the issue of mistrust of the police, and that this mistrust was passed on by word of mouth. An example was given of a young Somali man who was falsely arrested and remanded in custody. It was only the actions of his family who were able to navigate the system that secured his release, and it was strongly felt that others in the same position would not fare so well. The quotes below from focus group participants illustrate the power of word-of-mouth information:

The police are institutionally racist, everybody knows that. They are not really going to help you out ... They are going to do everything ... to make your name look bad. (Camden, man 18–35)

I've had an issue with proper racism that I thought was really undermining me. I was with my Somali cousin as well, except he is light skinned and I am dark skinned Somali. And we both got stopped and searched by two policemen; one of the policemen he was saying, "Hello, how's your day? What you been up to? What team do you support?" And meanwhile, I was getting searched. And I said, "Hang on, you stopped both of us, why am I the only one getting searched?" Due to the fact that I was with my cousin, it shows that maybe the darker you are, the more you fit the description. (Camden, man 18–35)

Findings from the focus group also suggested that participants were concerned about making complaints against the police if they felt they had been mistreated. Two young men highlighted the difficulties involved by commenting:

Yeah, but it's the hardest thing to do is sue the police because they've got the IPCC [Independent Police Complaints Commission] and that's them investigating themselves. (Camden, man 18–35)

Say, for instance, if I know my rights, say, for instance, if a police van just comes up and attacks me and my friends, you might think it's a lie but I have got a lot of friends that this has happened to, and they beat you up to the point where they don't leave marks, but obviously, you're in pain. You try and go to a police station and complain, but with the police they are investigated by the police which is the IPCC, which means they are being investigated by their own. That's one thing. And also, they're going to need help, they're going to want to do a health check on you, and they'll say, "Where are the bruises and cuts?" There's none, that's number two, and number three, above all, no one is going to believe you. It's your word against theirs; no one is going to believe you. (Camden, man 18–35)

9.2.4 Stop and Search

Feedback from some stakeholders suggests that the Somali community in London is under pressure from the police and feels unfairly targeted by the authorities, which has led to stigmatisation. Participants in the Roundtable Discussion identified stop and search as a major factor in undermining the relationship between the police and the Somali community. A police officer has powers to stop and search an individual at any time under Section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) Act 1984 if they have “reasonable grounds” to suspect an individual is carrying:

- illegal drugs;
- a weapon;
- stolen property;
- something which could be used to commit a crime.

Under Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, a police officer has powers to stop and search *without* the existence of reasonable suspicion if the individual is located in an area which has been designated a “Section 60” area. These provisions were originally introduced to prevent football hooliganism and serious violence. A number of civil rights activists have expressed concern about the use of the Section 60 stop and search, and whether the quality of intelligence is sufficiently high, with regard to whether there is a credible threat of serious violence in a given area.¹⁵¹

Under Section 60, police have wider powers of discretion and it has been established that these powers have been used disproportionately against Asian and Black minorities.¹⁵² There has been acknowledgement by the government that excessive use of the Section 60 stop and search creates resentment among communities that are disproportionately targeted, it is costly and results in very low numbers of arrests (3 percent in some cases), and that there is need for reform. However, these reforms may be subject to delays.¹⁵³

Experiences of “stop and search” create tension and a mistrust of public authorities, which results in many incidents of crime in the community not being reported. In the interviews with stakeholders, there was acknowledgement from a law enforcement perspective that BME communities were disproportionately affected by stop and search, and that more efforts need to be made to redress this imbalance. The MPS had the highest “excess” stops using the PACE section for each of the three ethnic minority

¹⁵¹ R. Delsol, “Runnymede Trust stop and search powers”, at <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/section-60-stop-and-search-powers.html> (accessed 4 August 2014)(hereafter, Delsol, “Runnymede Trust stop and search powers”).

¹⁵² Delsol, “Runnymede Trust stop and search powers”.

¹⁵³ See N. Watt, “Theresa May’s stop-and-search plan delayed by government wrangling”, <http://www.theguardian.com/law/2014/jan/22/theresa-may-stop-search-plan> Wednesday 22 January 2014, 01.45 GMT.

groups (black, mixed, Asian or other) at 88 percent in 2010–2011 and 84 percent in 2011–2012.¹⁵⁴ “Excess” in this case refers to the over-representation of ethnic minorities in stop and searches. The fact that a small minority of Somali men in London have been involved in gang crime appears to perpetuate negative interactions with the police. The result, however, is mistrust of the police, as the quotes below from men in one of the focus groups illustrate:

I do not like the police. I don't like them at all. Trust me. I wouldn't call them in a life or death situation. (Camden, man 18–35)

I wouldn't call them for protection. (Camden, man 18–35)

They do abuse their power. (Camden, man 18–35)

Table 5. Stop and searches by London borough (2008/2009)

Police Force Area	Disproportionality ratio		Excess stop and searches			Stop and search rate per 1,000		
	Black/white	Asian/white	Black	Asian	White	Black	Asian	Total
Wandsworth	9.1	2.2	6,164	922	36.7	332.8	80.9	65.0
Lambeth	7.3	1.0	9,998	13	31.6	229.4	32.5	73.5
Tower Hamlets	7.2	3.1	3,880	7,120	54.8	395.8	171.7	112.8
Hammersmith and Fulham	6.9	1.8	4,214	342	44.1	305.2	77.8	75.4
Kensington and Chelsea	6.9	1.2	3,945	162	57.8	400.4	70.1	88.5
Ealing	5.9	2.3	4,065	2,750	32.4	192.7	74.3	57.3
Westminster	5.8	1.2	9,762	563	129	750.4	150.0	187.6
Camden	5.6	1.2	5,205	411	70.1	390.4	85.4	94.0

Source: Data from

http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/raceinbritain/ehrc_stop_and_search_report.pdf (accessed 6 August, 2014).

Stop and search rates are highest in Westminster at 188 per 1,000. Other inner London boroughs with rates above 100 per 1,000 are Islington, Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Southwark, while Brent has the highest rate (91 per 1,000) for outer London.

¹⁵⁴ K. Hurrell, “Race disproportionality in stops and searches, 2011–12”, Equality and Human Rights Commission Briefing Paper 7, 2013.

Significantly, black stop and search rates are even higher than overall rates, with all boroughs recording rates over 90 per 1,000. The highest rates are in the inner London boroughs of Westminster, Tower Hamlets, Camden, Islington and Kensington and Chelsea.¹⁵⁵ Tower Hamlets and Camden are therefore the boroughs with the second and third highest rates of stop and search among minority ethnic communities in London.

The findings from the focus groups suggest that young Somali men in particular experience significant discrimination by the police. All of the young men in both groups felt that the police excessively used stop and search, and they felt victimised and under surveillance but not protected by the authorities. There was a very strong feeling of mistrust of the police, and institutions and research participants felt that the police held judgemental attitudes towards and negatively stereotyped Somali youths. This was also compounded by a lack of understanding of one's rights among the young men. One young man posed the following question:

[C]an they stop [me]? They have nothing to suspect. I'm not a dealer, I'm not a terrorist. I do my thing, I go college and then I go home. (Camden, man 18–35)

Several participants described their experiences of being stopped by the police when going about their daily business:

There was one time I was driving through Chalk Farm and they stopped me ... it was because I was driving through NW5 and they were like, "What are you doing here?" And you were there, and I said, "Cool, I'm driving through, it's not like I'm here, and even if I am here what's it got to do with you?" And they said, "It's 'cos you're Somali you shouldn't be here". They saw my license plate and, "You're from NW1, what you doing here in NW5?" Can I not drive through certain areas? When was the last time they introduced that rule where you can't drive through certain areas. (Camden, man 18–35)

I've had an experience with them I think twice, I've been stopped twice in my life, since I've been here, ironically twice I was wearing tracksuit bottoms. (Camden, man 18–35)

So literally, I would be stopped and they would say, "We've been told about a guy who fits your description, mugging an old lady, so we want to know who you are", and then they called the station and they let me off after 10, 15 minutes. (Camden, man 18–35)

There was a time I was meeting my mum at the hospital, at UCL hospital and I was on the bus. I jumped off the bus, she kept calling me, calling me, so when I got off the bus I started jogging, I was jogging for a bit. As I slowed down, there

¹⁵⁵ See Equality and Human Rights Commission, *Stop and Think A critical review of the use of stop and search powers in England and Wales*, March 2010, at http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/raceinbritain/ehrc_stop_and_search_report.pdf (accessed 4 August 2014).

were two undercover police running behind me, but I didn't know, they were out of breath, they were, like, "Oh God, you're fast". The other one come and he jumped on me, he threw me up against the wall and started restraining me for no reason whatsoever. So I'm confused. I'm thinking, "What have I done?" They were, like, "There's a lot of drug dealing in this area and we thought you just did a deal and you were running away now". I was, like, I was in shock. (Camden, man 18–35)

Another focus group participant expressed concern about the younger generation of British-Somalis in London, and how they too might be affected by targeting by the police in the future:

We all have brothers and sisters here. I don't want my little brother to go through what I went through, that's one of the main issues, and if the police are targeting the black youth and that, I'm sure my brother is going to be there and I don't want my brother to get stopped and searched. (Camden, man 18–35)

Other focus group participants highlighted further difficulties in interacting with the police if stopped and searched:

They just come across rude and it's hard for you to be polite to them. (Camden, man 18–35)

How you going to be polite and respectful towards someone that's being rude and aggressive towards you. Respect goes both ways, you understand. (Camden, woman 18–35)

It's the questions they ask you as well, they are judging you straight away as well, and you can tell they are being racist as well. They will ask you questions like, "Have you been arrested before?" And they think you're a certain type of person straight away. (Camden, man 18–35)

I get that all the time, "Have you been arrested before?" No, and then they laugh at me like, "How have you not been arrested before? Come on, mate, you're lying to me". (Camden, man 18–35)

"What do you do? You go [to] uni, what? How [do] you go [to] uni?" (apparent police response). They are surprised! Yeah, the best surprise. (Camden, man 18–35)

There are numerous initiatives that are run by the MPS to engage with young people at a local level at a strategic level. For example, in 2011 the Communities Together Strategic Engagement Team (CTSET) was pivotal in the creation of the pan London Somali Youth Forum, which is an organisation providing a forum for young British-Somalis. Its focus is on promoting social cohesion and civic participation. Not all focus group participants were aware of this scheme, but one young man was very positive about it and encouraged the others to engage with it:

They've recently set a steering group for stop and search; I'll give you some information about it. You guys should to get involved in that ... looking at the police and young people and other citizens so they can build up on this. (Camden, man 18–35)

The CTSET also has a dedicated Community Engagement Office for the Somali community. An officer works closely with HORN STARS (mentioned in Chapter 4) based in Harlesden and is currently involved in developing a project called TEAM (Together Everyone Achieves More). The main aim of TEAM will be to achieve meaningful engagement between members of the Somali community and the MPS, and increasing long-term and meaningful co-operation between the police and minority communities in London, by tackling radicalisation and extremism of young people.

A further example of attempting to rebuild relationships between Somali communities and the Metropolitan Police Service, raised at the Roundtable Discussion, was the Safer Neighbourhoods Scheme. As part of this scheme, communities received regular visits from the police and this was seen as very positive in fostering good relations. However, cuts to funding has dramatically reduced the scope of the scheme, reducing the number of officers each ward from five to one, which will affect the potential for community engagement.

9.2.5 Risks of Involvement in Crime

The view was also expressed by a number of stakeholders that Somali young men are at risk of involvement in crime and of being criminalised through being excluded from school, lack of employment opportunities and services, which has implications for their life chances and the overall safety of the community. There was acknowledgement that negative behaviour was perpetrated by some young boys, but that victimisation of Somali youths by the police happened regularly. Some stakeholders highlighted the difficulties that young men experienced if they become involved in the criminal justice system. It was felt that often they had no one to represent them, and that their families were unable to support them if they got caught up in the criminal justice system. Lack of male role models and lone-parent families were also highlighted as factors influencing young men's potential vulnerability to being involved in crime.

When discussing citizenship and participation, it was strongly felt by male participants in Camden that young Somali men were potentially vulnerable to crime due to lack of opportunities. Funding cuts to youth services were seen as particularly damaging for future generations, and the importance of educational and employment opportunities were highlighted as priorities:

Most Somali community organisations are focusing on the elderly, or over-25s, so the youth are missing out and that's where they feel left out. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

First priority they need is to engage the youth. If they engage the youth, reducing the crime they do in the local area, we are helping people living in the borough. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

9.3 Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)

Focus group participants also raised the issue of excessive CCTV in the areas where they lived. It was representative of the way they felt over policed and under protected at the same time. As the exchange below shows, the CCTV cameras left them feeling under surveillance, but did not make them feel safe:

To be honest, they have too many cameras. I heard whenever you go out of your house at least 60 cameras catch you in the day, that's what I heard, that's a lot of cameras. (Camden, man 18–35)

But it don't do shit. (Camden, man 18–35)

That's true. (Camden, man 18–35)

It just watches you; if you get stabbed, no one cares. (Camden, man 18–35)

However, others commented that a visible police presence was a positive thing:

But they say there is quite a heavy police presence in Camden, I'm sure everyone has noticed that. (Camden, man 18–35)

That's helped a lot for people who haven't been feeling secure. (Camden, man 18–35)

9.4 Working for the Police

The MPS recruited 62 police officers from BME backgrounds in 2010–2011. This number represents 18.1 percent of all new recruits for this period.¹⁵⁶ In 2010, 2,700 police officers (9 percent of the total) were from BME backgrounds.¹⁵⁷ It is not possible to disaggregate these figures to identify the number of Somali police officers in the MPS, or in Camden and Tower Hamlets.

When focus group participants asked about whether they would consider a career in the police force, the following exchange ensued:

Hell, no. (Camden, man 18–35)

A paid job? Yeah, I would. (Camden, man 18–35)

¹⁵⁶ See http://www.met.police.uk/foi/pdfs/priorities_and_how_we_are_doing/corporate/policing_london_business_plan_2011-14.pdf (accessed 4 August 2014).

¹⁵⁷ See <http://content.met.police.uk/Article/Representative-workforce-and-professional-development/1400022598246/1400022598246> (accessed 6 August 2014).

Actually, I don't mind. (Camden, man 18–35)

You would be part of the solution. (Camden, man 18–35)

You could change the whole system. (Camden, man 18–35)

I wouldn't, I wouldn't join the police. (Camden, man 18–35)

Why wouldn't you? (Camden, man 18–35)

The only thing that would appeal to me is the wage packet. (Camden, man 18–35)

In order for me to join them, I would want to see change. I don't want to make change; I want to see them take steps. (Camden, man 18–35)

There seemed to be some willingness to join the MPS among the young men in this focus group. It was felt that more representation of Somalis in the police force could better serve the needs of the community and promote change from within. However, some felt that in order for a career in the police force to be attractive, there would have to be some indication that change was likely. The issue of divided loyalty, to the community and to the police as an employer, was also raised in the following exchange:

Think it about, what if you saw your brother doing something bad, would you lock him up? If you were a police officer and you saw me doing bad, what would you do? (Camden, man 18–35)

I would lock everyone up, sorry mate. (Camden, man 18–35)

Other participants in the group felt that it would be positive if there was greater representation of black people in the police force:

I think more young people, and more black people being more represented within the police, you have the whole force and they've only got white face, and it's not representing London. So it's important that the police represent many different communities, and if you look at the community safety officers, you get people from all walks of life, you get black people, you get Asian people, and they get the Intel for the community. But when you look at the Metropolitan Police, you get mainly white faces. (Camden, man 18–35)

From discussions with stakeholders and focus group participants, it became clear that priorities differed from an MPS and community perspective, and there was evidence of some misinformation from MPS regarding forced marriage and FGM in particular. From a law enforcement perspective, forced marriage and patriarchal control were highlighted as areas of concern for Somali communities. However, reports from stakeholders and focus group participants indicate that forced marriage is not practiced within Somali communities. As one female participant in another focus group explained:

[People] get really confused sometimes because when they see a Somali woman covering, they associate us with the Asian culture, and then they see Somali women are very loud and boisterous, then they are, like, oh OK, I was wrong about that. I think they are very confused by the Somali community in general, 'cos sometimes they think you're forced into marriage, and they ask, "Do you get arranged marriages?" and I'm, like, what are you talking about? We don't do that. (Camden, woman 18–35)

9.5 Impact of National Anti-terror Legislation on Somali Communities

Somalia is considered by MI5 to be among the top three countries worldwide which pose a terrorist threat,¹⁵⁸ and this has an impact on British-Somali communities in the United Kingdom. Some of the focus group participants felt that a direct impact of anti-terror legislation was to create difficulties in leaving and entering the United Kingdom. Further difficulties included people not wanting to be recognised as Muslim due to potential discrimination. One focus group participant described how he regularly gets stopped by security services when attempting to re-enter the United Kingdom:

Well, I get a lot of trouble with airports, whenever travelling. When I came back from Somalia, even though I was with my mother and my brother, I got stopped, I got asked questions and every time I do get stopped, every time I do travel, I do get stopped and taken into a room. Is it because I'm from Camden, or something to do with Camden, or my ethnicity? It might be. But as lot of times they ask me questions where they ask me about my religion, my views on my religion. (Camden, man 18–35)

While another elaborated on this:

I've got a British passport, am I different from anybody else? Why am I being singled out? And when it keeps happening to you, you start to feel like you're not wanted, that you're a second class citizen ... that's why some people, it scares a lot of people to actually want to learn about their religion. They fear, you know, if you do grow a beard you're going to get stopped, if you do wear Islamic clothing you're going to be painted with a particular brush, it's difficult. (Camden, man 18–35)

There have been numerous reports in the media of young British-Somali men being targeted for recruitment by MI5. In May 2009, the *Independent* newspaper highlighted that five British-Somali men in London had been approached by MI5 to join them as

¹⁵⁸ S. Rayment and C. Freeman, British Muslims recruited to fight for 'al-Qaeda' in Somalia, 18 February 2012 (accessed 6 August 2014) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/somalia/9090606/British-Muslims-recruited-to-fight-for-al-Qaeda-in-Somalia.html>.

informers. They were threatened with being subjected to travel restrictions and being labelled “terrorists” if they did not comply.¹⁵⁹

Reactions to the possibility of working for the security services were mixed:

Even MI5 has advertised in *Camden Journal* saying we want Somalis. (Camden, man 18–35)

I applied to it, no one got back to me. (Camden, man 18–35)

When was this? (Camden, man 18–35)

Snitch. (Camden, man 18–35)

One focus group participant felt that being directly contacted by MI5 was intrusive and felt threatening:

Even getting phone calls from MI5 asking if you want to work for them, and you ask questions like, “Why do you want to speak to me?”, and when they give you threats and say, “We can make your situation easier,” it’s not something that you want to do, it’s not something that you want to hear as a young person growing up. (Camden, man 18–35)

9.6 Where British-Somalis Turn for Advice, Information and Support about Policing and Security Issues

Many stakeholders and almost all of the research participants identified word of mouth as being the most common source of information regarding policing and security issues. This was thought to be potentially problematic, as it engenders and perpetuates suspicion of the police and access to information is limited. It seems clear from the discussion above that there is a lack of knowledge of one’s rights, particularly where stop and search is concerned, but also in relation to negotiating the criminal justice system. It was felt that educating and raising awareness among young people was key but that the MPS also needed to be educated regarding the needs of the Somali community. As one research participant suggested:

We really need someone to step up for us and give us lesson on what rights we’ve got and what rights they’ve got. So at least we on the same page and we can understand each other. (Camden, man 18–35)

Raising awareness and educating the community and the MPS was felt to be a necessary prerequisite for Somalis to trust the MPS and come forward. Greater transparency and improved handling of complaints against the MPS were also perceived to be necessary to improve relationships and increase trust. One research

¹⁵⁹ See R. Verkaik, “How MI5 blackmails British Muslims”, 21 May 2009 (accessed 6 August 2014) <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/exclusive-how-mi5-blackmails-british-muslims-1688618.html>.

participant suggested that an APP¹⁶⁰ could be developed to raise awareness of the rights of individuals:

Yeah, the APP. To be honest, I think ... if you made it, an APP with all your rights ... if you made one and out it up there ... it would make big money.
(Camden, man 18–35)

9.7 Summary

Although there was recognition that the MPS played an important role and that there was a need for law enforcement among the men in the focus groups, it was felt that Somali young men experienced discrimination from the police. Stakeholders also commented on the lack of trust between young Somali men in particular and the MPS, and identified exclusion from school, lack of employment and postcode as being factors that made young people vulnerable to crime.

The excessive use of stop and search was highlighted as a significant problem, and that this also perpetuated a lack of trust and poor relations between Somali communities and the MPS.

Concern about lack of knowledge of one's rights was expressed by focus group participants, and stakeholders also cited families being unable to support young men who had been arrested or charged with offences as being problematic.

Some positive examples of initiatives intended to improve relations between the police and the Somali community were identified, and there was some willingness among the men interviewed to work for the MPS. However, it was felt that the culture of the MPS would need to change to be attractive to young Somali people. It also seems evident that there is some discrepancy between the MPS' priorities and the priorities of the Somali community, particularly around forced marriage and FGM.

¹⁶⁰ An "APP", short for "mobile application", is application software designed to run on smartphones, tablet computers and other mobile devices.

10. PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP

10.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss and analyse research findings regarding participation and citizenship. Feedback from stakeholders and a focus group with men aged 18–35 years old in Tower Hamlets forms the basis of the discussion. Chapter Four included a discussion of citizenship in the United Kingdom, including who is a citizen of the United Kingdom and what it entails, drawing on official definitions and feedback from Somalis who participated in the research. It should be noted that there is some overlap between this and Chapter Four, which focused on identity and belonging, as notions of citizenship, participation and integration relate to and underpin individual and collective belonging and identity formation.

This chapter begins by discussing the participation of British-Somalis in civil society, politics and policymaking. It then addresses the experiences of British-Somalis in trying to influence policy and decisions at the local and national levels, and considers the extent to which British-Somalis feel that they are able to influence such decisions. It also examines British-Somali membership of mainstream political parties and, finally, looks at Somali organisations at the local level.

10.2 Participation of British-Somalis in Civil Society, Politics and Policymaking

British-Somali civil society in London and across the United Kingdom is heavily involved in the rebuilding efforts in Somalia. Like many diaspora communities, efforts are sustained through a number of channels such as remittances and business opportunities. Charitable campaigns are launched to fund vital gaps in provision, for example medical care for remote towns and villages. These campaigns are often highlighted through Somali language satellite stations, mosques and fundraising events. Political developments are also keenly followed by the community.

Equally, British-Somali led community and voluntary sector organisations have championed the community's development in London by providing supplementary schools, welfare advice, youth activities and residential trips. There are 236 "Somali" charities officially registered with the Charity Commission in the United Kingdom.¹⁶¹ The number of Somali mosques and madrassas appears to be increasing in response to the community's desire for knowledge and additional places of worship. Classes are delivered in Somali and English, and special prayers, such as *Taraweeh*, are performed during Ramadan (as they are in other mosques across the world). In Tower Hamlets, there is also the Somali Friends of Labour Group and the Ocean Somali Community Association (OSCA), which has recently formed a Somali School Governors Forum.

¹⁶¹ See <http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-54/working-with-somali-diaspora-organisations-in-the-uk> (accessed 4 August 2014).

It was acknowledged by stakeholders that in spite of the long history of Somali residence in both Camden and Tower Hamlets, participation in mainstream civil society, politics and policymaking was extremely limited. Several stakeholders raised the need to increase political participation to create a more diverse political body, and the solution to this was considered to be to increase the number of Somali candidates in local government elections.

A number of decision-making bodies that Somali communities could become involved in were identified by stakeholders. For example: the Independent Advisory Group (police); representation as school governors; participation in the community cohesion forum; and participation in the community policy consultative group. The stakeholders interviewed did not have any knowledge of Somali involvement in these bodies, and research for this report was unable to access this information. From the focus group, there were some examples of local level participation in civil society:

I deal with the local community, helping those enquiring or having problems accessing services, but any services they are having problems accessing. It could be in health, or employment, benefits, in immigration, so it could be in that we help them anyway we can. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

However, there were constraints that prevented this:

To be honest with you, I have never participated in any society community groups, or even voluntary and I know it's a good thing to participate in groups. But I never had the time. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

10.3 Experiences of British-Somalis Trying to Influence Policy and Decisions at Local and National Levels

Feedback from stakeholders regarding Somali involvement in decision-making indicates that representative democratic mechanisms are under-utilised, with many Somalis not voting in local and national elections. It was suggested that communication with Somali communities regarding opportunities to influence decisions was limited, and that this results in limited awareness of the importance of exercising voting rights and participation. All stakeholders strongly felt that further efforts were needed to encourage engagement with democratic processes and political participation among Somali communities, and not just at the time of elections.

Several stakeholders commented that Somalis are very politically aware regarding the United Kingdom and internationally, and that they are particularly sensitive to foreign policy. This was also evident from all of the focus groups. However, it was felt that there were few participatory mechanisms, and that these were not well publicised. One stakeholder commented:

Somalis are a political people. They know lots about Somali politics, but they don't participate fully in the U.K. because barriers exist. People won't contact councillors and politicians because they don't feel that they are represented by

them, and also there are no real mechanisms for consultation. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

Stakeholders identified a number of barriers to Somali communities engaging with formal democratic processes. For example, people are unaware of the importance of engaging; although consultation meetings take place, they do not always involve interpreters, which means that people will not attend. Stakeholders commented that more communication regarding constitutional rights and responsibilities was urgently needed, and that lessons could be learned from the Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets regarding political mobilisation. It was highlighted at the Roundtable Discussion that the Somali community is politically engaged in the Kilburn ward of Camden, possibly as a result of a Somali media campaign. Some focus group participants felt that the British-Somali community lacked an understanding of the importance of voting, while others suggested low participation reflected disillusionment with the political system:

One of the things we are lacking is that the Somali community is not aware how important it is to participate in local elections because they don't know how important it is to vote in this country or how important it is to vote. Because the person they vote for could improve their health services. I don't vote, that's just me. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

I did vote in the past a few times, but recently I have become discontent and stop votes because the politicians they were not answering some of the questions, for example the country is in a recession, people are going through difficult times, I didn't feel they did anything about it, so what's the point? (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

Anyway, politicians are known to be liars, they'll say they'll do everything for you up to the time they get your vote and they'll do nothing. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

Other focus group participants highlighted the lack of representation of Somalis and the need for collective action to effect change:

As Somalis, obviously, your voice is not listened to because you're not represented, so that one thing Somalis are lacking. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

In the council we don't have a voice because we have no Somali councillor. We have to show power to make it exist to have power. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

There was consensus among the focus group participants about the value of collective action, and how such action could bring about benefits and change for Somali communities. Several participants suggested community engagement and collective mobilisation as solutions to marginalisation:

Well, I think it's difficult if you approach your local MP or councillor, they'll see you an individual and may not take your views on as much for one vote, but

if you go together as a group or a pressure group, for example as 10 or 20 people, they might listen and say, "I'll listen to the things you're saying and I'll give you a response". As Somalis, we are lacking, we don't have a pressure group, so it's not going to change anything to be honest with you. (Tower Hamlets, man, 18–35).

Nothing can be achieved because you are one person, but if the community comes together we can go forward. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

I think they should be listening and engaging the community, there is a lack of engaging. They should employ Somali people in the council; if they are not engaging, then the problem will not be solved. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

Somali people they know what we need and understand our problems, from elderly to the youth they know our needs. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

Another participant indicated that they would vote for someone Somali, as they felt that they would best represent the Somali community:

Yes, definitely, if someone who is of a Somali background came around and said, "I'm running, vote for me", I would definitely vote for them and support them. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

Other focus group participants suggested that greater knowledge, better communication, training and education would act as incentives for Somalis to participate in democratic mechanisms:

I need knowledge, but I don't know where to go and how to find it. I feel that we are lost in this system and we need someone to give us advice ... to train people in the system to be in the system. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

What I think they should do ... to start including them in the decision-making is to give them more rights. For them to call them, if there is meetings we don't know about, most people don't know about it because there is a big gap between the community and the council. There is a communication problem, for them to shorten that gap and include more people, they should give more rights to the Somali community and given the know-how and training and more rights for them to bring the community and council together. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

There should be more of a consultation process in place for all Somali groups, whether they are elderly, youth, women, men, all age groups. Views and feedback to be respected and put forward. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

They should be ... educating the local community, because we are ignorant to what happens in democracies. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

10.4 Influence on Decisions at Local and National Levels

Focus group participants reported feeling unable to influence decisions on a number of levels due to isolation and feeling insecure:

A lot of us do don't feel too secure in the country we are living in or the borough we are living in, and that's probably one of the reasons why we don't have a voice in this country. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

You may have difficulties accessing other stuff, maybe because it's due to language barriers, a lot of Somalis in our community, they don't have a voice in the community because they basically are isolated from mainstream society. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

The lack of representation of Somalis in local and national positions was therefore seen to be a deterrent to participation, and this is then compounded by people not coming forward to participate:

The Somali community [is] disinterested and not engaged. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

How do you expect people to know we have problems if you are not willing to talk about it? (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

It's really frustrating, the problem is there but they are not willing to say, they are complaining but they're not putting it forward. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

My concern is not having the voice that should have because there is a big Somali community in the U.K., especially Tower Hamlets. There is a lot more that we should be doing to improve our community. There should be more councillors, more MPs more going to University and making something of themselves. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

Some stakeholders also commented that lack of empowerment and inequality compounded the lack of political engagement of Somali communities in London, with one stakeholder commenting that British-Somalis were “a very resilient yet vulnerable community”.

While there are no clear statistics, stakeholders felt that membership of political parties was low among Somali communities, and participants in the focus group discussion echoed this claim, highlighting that voting levels were also low. One focus group participant commented:

They don't encourage Somali to join political parties and if they do, then they don't have a chance to be stand and be elected, that's one thing they need to consider, so Somali can be a part of the decision-making. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

10.5 Somali Organisations at the Local Level and its Members

A number of stakeholders commented on the lack of information on the numbers and demographics of Somalis in both Camden and Tower Hamlets. There are a large number of Somali community organisations in both boroughs, but few are active. Stakeholders suggested that community organisations played an important role in representing and advocating for Somalis, but that some may not be accessible to all due to clan affiliations.

Some stakeholders commented that if they wanted to engage with Somali communities, they would contact women's organisations first and foremost, as it is the women in the community who run the household and are the decision-makers.

A number of stakeholders commented on the funding for community organisations, which has been severely cut. Some stakeholders felt that this would mean that those inactive organisations would cease to exist, but that there could also be difficulties for those organisations providing much-needed advice and advocacy services in both boroughs. A small number of stakeholders recognised that only the most entrepreneurial organisations would survive in the present climate.

There are 32 voluntary and community organisations/groups in the borough of Tower Hamlets that directly target residents identifying as Somali. These run a range of services targeting children's underachievement through to services seeking to reduce isolation for housebound elders.

Two organisations use LBC buildings. The Somali Community Centre, Lismore Circus, receives 100 percent rent relief, approximately £8,000, lasting until March 2015 and the Somali Elderly and Disabled Centre, St Paul's Crescent, receives 100 percent rent relief, approximately £4,000, lasting until March 2014.

There is also funding for Somali community organisations for specific projects that help address key issues around health, education and welfare. Stakeholders in Camden identified a number of examples of organisations that receive such support. The first example is the British-Somali Community (BSC), a woman led refugee community organisation, run by and for Somali families in Camden. It receives funding for two projects. The first is for a two-year project to improve the health and well-being of Somali women, and the second is two years of funding for the Parent Support Project, which aims to raise awareness amongst parents and young people about the role of schools, police, social services, etc., their legal obligations and rights of parents. There is also support from Camden for the Somali Cultural Centre (SCC).

The SCC promotes education through the provision of language and other classes, as well as providing advice and information on issues relating to poverty. It received support for a Dementia Awareness Project (see above) and for advice services including an intervention service, so people do not enter crisis, and advocacy for people dealing with social services and schools.

Finally, there is the Somali Youth Development Resource Centre. The SYDRC aims to advance the education of Somali youth and to provide a range of activities. It receives funding for three projects: an early intervention programme to support young Somalis at risk of exclusion and those involved in gangs and gang-related crime; young men offending or re-offending; and a volunteer mentoring project which implements an early intervention approach in working with Somali young people. The SYDRC also receives funding to train a cohort of Public Space Champions to act as mentors or community mediators to improve Somali women's access to public space. Due to an increase in charges for football pitch hire, the SYDRC has received funding for one year to offset the cost of this to the organisation.¹⁶²

10.6 Involvement of British-Somalis in Local Participation Mechanisms and Affirmative Measures Taken to Ensure Inclusion of Somalis

In the main, stakeholders felt that there was very limited involvement of British-Somalis in local participation mechanisms. An example was given regarding the absence of the Somali community on the agenda for meetings about borough priorities and targets that effectively act as a barrier and create invisibility at the local level.

There was recognition of the need to increase Somali representation in local and national government. An example of affirmative measures taken to ensure the inclusion of Somalis is the recent establishment of the Somali friends of Labour Group. A further example of affirmative measures is the "Uprising" initiative, which is a mentoring and leadership programme for promising 19–25-year-olds. This initiative was established in 2009, and there are a number of young Somalis involved in this. The rationale behind Uprising is that there is a need to explore and capitalise on the leadership potential of people from a variety of backgrounds. Young people who are placed on this programme learn—through experience—how political and other power systems operate in the United Kingdom and how people influence such systems. One stakeholder commented that it will take five to 10 years for the programme to have an effect in the world of politics and employment, but that a new generation of board members and representatives is being developed.

10.7 Summary

For some of the research participants, citizenship in the United Kingdom was straightforward, comprising of rights and opportunities in terms of education and employment. Integration was seen as a key component of citizenship, however, and there were recognised barriers to integration.

It seems evident too, that although Somalis are politically aware, both in terms of events in the country of origin and in the United Kingdom, they are not fully engaging

¹⁶² Information received from the Stronger Communities Manager, Camden London Borough Council, on 1 April 2014.

with participatory democratic mechanisms and their involvement in civil society is limited. There were no examples of affirmative action aimed at Somali communities and there was an historical lack of ethnic monitoring information.

11. THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

11.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the role of the media and the experiences and impact on Somali communities of reporting by local, national and international sources. The findings in this chapter are based on stakeholder interviews and two focus group discussions, one with men aged between 18 and 35 in Camden and the other with older men in the borough.

11.2 Experiences and Impact on Somali Communities of Reporting of Somalis by Local Media

There were several comments from stakeholders and focus group participants about the role of the international and national media, and also about local sources. Each will be addressed in turn.

11.2.1 National and International Media Representations of Somalis

Stakeholders and focus group participants felt that international and national reporting on Somalia as a country tends to focus on negative stereotypes of a famine-ravaged, war-torn chaotic country characterised by civil war and piracy. Somali communities in the United Kingdom are also often portrayed as refugees fleeing violent circumstances. Reporting on Somalis who are living in the United Kingdom is also considered to be rather negative, as the focus is on asylum seeking, large family size, benefit dependency and reliance on welfare services, religious extremism, terrorism and FGM. As two focus group participants commented:

[The media is] negative, completely negative in every sense of the word.
(Camden, man 45+ group)

Somalis are completely hated. (Camden, man 18–35)

Another focus group participant gave a more detailed example of negative media reporting:

Yes, there were negative stories in the *Daily Mail* ... I think. They wrote about Somali families who lived in two areas, Westminster and Camden. They did it in such a bad way, where they gained entry to their homes, filmed and took pictures of the children and the whole family without any consent or authorisation. They took pictures and found out their full names, the names of their children and size of their family. They found out all their personal information, things that could jeopardise their safety and casually printed it for the world to see. This is made all the worse because it was negative piece, and for one family the consequence for them was that they were removed from the house they lived in. "These people are refugees, who live in expensive, homes

worth thousands of pounds.” The very same people who gave them the accommodation wanted them out.¹⁶³ (Camden, man 45+ group)

Some tabloid newspapers were considered to be very damaging for Somali communities in the United Kingdom. A stakeholder described these as having “shouty sensationalist headlines” and a focus group participant gave an example of this:

They basically had a title in the *Sun* saying “Going back to Somalia with your winter fuel allowance”. When I read that, I read the small print and it said that only 17 Somalis were actually committing these crimes, but they had the headline saying “Somalis using the winter fuel allowance”.¹⁶⁴ But you know that sense when you’re constantly targeted, and you’re easily targeted and it’s unfair, I believe. (Camden, man 18–35)

Another focus group participant commented:

I personally think that the media just say what they want because they have to make money. They need a story to make money, so they just make up their own stories. People in the media are not educated enough to know about us, so they just make up their own stories, no matter how extreme it might be, or how wrong it might be, they need the money, so they just make up their own stories. (Camden, man 18–35)

The impact of such negative reporting can, however, have significant impacts on the lives of Somalis living in London, as the following excerpt illustrates:

I actually saw someone who lives in my area, a girl, she always has a headscarf and full everything, and I see her with no headscarf and tracksuit and I was thinking and I seeing this. And I said “What’s going on?” and she said, “I’m so scared, I don’t want to get attacked”, and it’s causing people to do that. (Camden, man 18–35)

In addition to negative reporting on Somalis and Somalia, Somali communities in the United Kingdom are also affected by the negative portrayals of practising Muslims in the United Kingdom, and also derogatory reporting of black communities and ethnic minorities in general:

We [Somalis] are that distinctive, so we are portrayed when it comes to Muslims, you know there’s that negativity, and we go under the blanket, when it comes to black, we go under that blanket. Then when it comes to Somalis, we have the piracy and the failed state of Somalia, and we go under that blanket. So it’s like negative on top of negative. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

¹⁶³ This article appeared in the *Daily Mail* newspaper on 18 July 2012 under the headline, “Jobless Somali refugees are put up in lavish £2m, six bedroom house paid for by the taxpayer”.

¹⁶⁴ This article appeared in the *Sun* newspaper on 9 July 2013 under the headline, “Somalia winter fuel con”.

Another participant commented that there was a tendency by the media to prefix any reporting of ethnic minorities by their ethnicity or nationality:

All papers in writing and imagery, when they cover Somalia or Somalis here, they look at someone's ethnic origin. When the media as a whole writes a piece on someone, whether it's positive or negative, they always mention the person's ethnicity or place of origin. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

Focus group participants recognised the powerful role of the media in shaping public perceptions of Somalis and Somalia, and there was some acknowledgement that there were examples of positive reporting:

In relation to Somalia, they write about the relationship between the U.K. and Somalia and the efforts being made to bring stability, the newly established Somali government that Somalia is on the right path now. At the moment, they write nothing but positive stories. There was a time when everything was negative, war and destruction. The actions of one person can raise the esteem of a whole nation or it can destroy it. When the Americans and the UN were in Somalia, and a white man was killed there, when the helicopter was brought down. The image of the body being dragged through Mogadishu haunted Somalis around the world. Whenever the media brought Somalia, that image was replayed. So if there is a positive act, there's a positive impact for everyone and if there is a negative act, you'll feel the effect and the repercussions. (Camden, man 45+ group)

Another focus group participant commented that the British media perpetuated the notion that British-born Somalis were not in fact British, and that the behaviour of individuals was generalised to the whole Somali population:

The British media in particular refuse to accept in their reporting pieces British-born Somalis as British citizens and often associate the negative actions of one individual to Somalia. (Tower Hamlets, man 18–35)

The important role of the media was acknowledged by all research participants, and it was acknowledged that negative reporting could have potentially serious consequences in terms of how Somali communities were perceived.

An issue that was discussed at length in both focus groups and also raised by stakeholders was the lack of positive role models for Somalis. It was generally felt that the success of Mo Farah at the 2012 Olympic Games was very positive for Somalis in the United Kingdom. Farah is an extremely positive role model for Somalis, Muslims and young people, and all research respondents were unequivocal about this. As one focus group participant commented:

Mo Farah represents Somalia. Many people who had no prior knowledge or experience of Somalia had only these negative images as a point of reference; now he's given Somalia a positive face. He's also become a role model for young

Somalis, that if you too work hard, you can succeed and be famous as well.
(Camden, man 45+ group)

However, another research participant felt that Mo Farah's success was overlooked by certain parts of the media and damaging representations of Somalis as a whole still resonated:

I think in the media Somalis have been so tarnished and damaged to the point where when something positive happens, like when Mo Farah wins something for Great Britain ... they don't really care. That's positive news for us, but for them they don't care, they've still got the mentality that they're Somalis or worthless or you know what I mean. (Camden, man 18–35)

11.2.2 Local Media Representations of British-Somalis

Some research participants commented that British-Somalis are largely absent in the local media; however, the general feeling in one of the focus groups was that local media reporting of British-Somalis was improving to reflect the educational successes in the community, as the quotes below illustrate:

What's written in the media depends on the locality, here or elsewhere in the U.K.; on a micro level we live here in Kilburn, London. There are a number of local newspapers, some are owned by public organisations, others are private companies. In all honesty, for the most part the things they write about specifically in relation to the Somali community are the educational achievements of Somali pupils at GCSE or A-Level. How students have succeeded. Last week, they wrote in a local paper that comes out of Camden the story of one or two Somali girls who did really well at GCSE, they got A* or something. Similar stories were in the *Metro*, the *Guardian* and even in the local paper, the Camden one. (Camden, man 45+ group)

The achievement of Somali students has improved immensely and that improvement is something that merits a piece in the paper. (Camden, man 45+ group)

There was the case of the British couple who were kidnapped on holiday, one Somali man from the U.K. went there and secured their freedom. This case alone did a lot of good for relations. There are Brits and media outlets who are on the whole focused on the negative, but recently things have been positive. (Camden, man 45+ group)

Local media in Camden, for example the *Camden New Journal*, was considered to provide a more balanced representation of British-Somalis.

11.3 Level of Engagement of British-Somalis with the Media and Journalists

From the focus groups it became clear that engagement with the media and journalists in London was very limited.

I only know the radio station's frequency and to watch the news on TV.
(Camden, man 45+ group)

One participant was aware of local websites and radio stations, and was also aware of how to access and contact mainstream media organisations:

They have websites, local papers have them as do local radio stations and their contact numbers are posted as well. Local papers can be found on main roads near to the different stations. You can call them, you write to them via email regarding any topic of interest. We don't have any reason to contact them, but we do when there are parties or when there are elections in Somalia ... There are even people who work for the large news media companies, who come to Somali businesses (internet cafés, money transfers, coffee shops) and interview people. For example, they say, "We want to compare Somali weddings with the wedding ceremonies of other cultures here in the U.K." To reiterate my point, the media will only cover a pressing issue that has recently emerged. (Camden, man 45+ group)

11.4 Media Sources British-Somalis Rely on for News and Information about Local, National and International Issues

In recent years, a number of satellite television channels have launched, linking Somalis the world over. Many of these stations, such as Universal and Horn Cable, are based in London and have core hubs in other Western cities as well as large cities in the horn of Africa and elsewhere. They cover current affairs stories both locally and internationally, and they broadcast lectures, dramas and charitable fundraising campaigns. Somali state-run media outlets also broadcast into Somali homes. While starting from humble beginnings and still in the process of development, these channels are seeking to challenge the reign of long-standing traditional news media such as the BBC Somali (radio) Service in delivering rapidly changing news direct to television.

Based on the findings from stakeholders and focus groups participants, word of mouth is the most common source of information for British-Somalis. While BBC Somali radio and also British-Somali radio stations (e.g. Somali Voice and SOA based in London) are relied on for information, Al-Jazeera is a popular television channel. Examples of weekly or monthly Somali print publications in circulation in the United

Kingdom include *Kasmo* and *Jamhuuriya*, although there is no daily Somali-related newspaper. Websites such as Hiiraan Online are popular for news updates.¹⁶⁵

11.5 Summary

British-Somalis in the United Kingdom have a keen interest in the media, both in terms of events in Somalia and issues facing British-Somalis in the United Kingdom. However, the British media are considered to play a major role in inciting hate crime and creating obstacles to integration and cohesion.¹⁶⁶

Stakeholders and focus group participants felt that international and national reporting on Somalia as a country tends to focus on negative stereotypes of a famine-ravaged, war-torn, chaotic country characterised by civil war and piracy. British-Somali communities in the United Kingdom are also often portrayed as refugees fleeing violent circumstances.

Reporting on Somalis who are living in the United Kingdom is also considered to be rather negative, as the focus is on asylum seeking, large family size, benefit dependency and reliance on welfare services, religious extremism, terrorism, gangs and crime and FGM.

¹⁶⁵ Additional websites include: <http://www.Midnimo.com> (UK based); <http://www.BBCsomal.com> (UK); <http://www.Qaranne.com> (UK); <http://www.Jamhuuriya.info> (UK) (accessed 4 August 2014)

¹⁶⁶ CLG, "The Somali community in England".

12. CONCLUSIONS

This research fills a gap in knowledge about the experiences and concerns of British-Somali communities in London, using the boroughs of Camden and Tower Hamlets as foci. Qualitative data relating to identity and belonging, education, housing, employment, health and social protection, policing and security, participation and citizenship and the role of the media have provided insights into the lived experiences of Somalis in London.

British-Somalis are a distinct ethnic group and are often stereotyped. They are perceived as a tightly knit and closed community by official bodies, and there is evidence of a reciprocal lack of understanding and trust. British-Somali communities in Tower Hamlets and Camden have historically experienced underachievement at school (although recent evidence suggests that this is changing), high levels of unemployment, and poor health and housing outcomes.

Greater inclusion and equal participation for British-Somali communities in Camden and Tower Hamlets requires addressing obstacles in accessing services and a lack of understanding from providers and organisations. There is evidence of a lack of knowledge about how “the system” works among British-Somali communities, and there is also concern from stakeholders that cuts in resources could further marginalise these communities. Poor relationships with “official” bodies, most notably between the police and young male British-Somalis, are a major area of concern. Young men are at risk of being criminalised and are also at risk of being victims of crime. A lack of positive role models and negative stereotyping by the media compound these difficulties.

There is an increase in lone-parent families and absent fathers, with Somali women often facing a “triple burden” in terms of motherhood, employment and managing the home/bringing up the children. The research also finds evidence of successful initiatives in both boroughs in addressing these challenges. There are a number of voluntary organisations delivering and supporting service that fill the gap left by the mainstream service providers. Early years education, supplementary education, youth clubs and women’s organisations play a vital role in Tower Hamlets and Camden, but these organisations operate in extremely challenging times and their future is in the balance due to cuts in funding and competition for increasingly scarce resources.

As indicated above, the issues around integration and developing appropriate policy and practice responses are part of the focus of the wider research. Research participants presented a number of definitions of integration, with a common theme being that it differs from assimilation and needs willingness from the mainstream to be fully achieved. It was suggested that taking account of multiple identities could be a way of recognising this complexity. Freedom of the individual was presented as being important, but in the context of a mainstream liberal contract and respecting the rule of the law. Integration was seen to comprise social and economic integration as well as

citizenship and belonging. Language was presented as being key to integration, and the recognition of British-Somalis as a distinct group, or different, in the circumstances where that difference is relevant, was also considered to be important.

Barriers to integration were thought to include: negative images of British-Somalis (media stereotyping); discrimination by the mainstream and other BME groups; language and religion as obstacles; the political system (representative democracy), where there are very few visible Somalis; the existence of few positive role models in general; and the fact that Somali communities do not “speak out” enough. All of these barriers were considered to be mutually reinforcing.

With regard to consultation and participation among Somali communities in Tower Hamlets and Camden, all stakeholders indicated that Somalis were not represented at local and borough levels, and that although there were opportunities for participation and exercises in consultation, these mechanisms were not effective. The local and national media were considered to be detrimental to positive images of British-Somalis, and the overwhelming focus appears to be on negative stereotypes.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 General Recommendations

As part of their equality schemes, councils should continue to monitor key integration indicators such as English competency, employment, educational attainment, housing, health, discrimination and civic participation, and work with British-Somali civil society organisations and other stakeholders to identify effective, evidence-based interventions to address inequalities experienced by Somali residents. In particular, councils should:

1. ensure that strategic bodies and planning processes for key services such as housing, health, policing and civic participation involve members of the Somali and other communities and take into account data and other evidence relating to these communities;
2. ensure that the development, implementation and monitoring of equality schemes are effectively coordinated, so that relevant local government departments, external stakeholders and community-based organisations can address the multiple factors that contribute to inequalities;
3. consider introducing the monitoring of Somalis and other communities in assessing key outcomes and access to services in areas such as housing, health, education and employment;
4. work with community organisations to understand and address the factors behind inequalities in areas such as education, employment, health and housing; in other words, target the “problem” rather than the community by working with both mainstream services and community organisations to reach disadvantaged individuals and tackle the factors behind their exclusion;
5. review recruitment policies to ensure they provide equal opportunities and representation of Somalis across key areas of service delivery.

13.2 Identity and Belonging

6. Councils should work with British-Somali civil society organisations to assess British-Somali participation in community events and use of public spaces, then if necessary take steps such as more targeted publicity to increase British-Somali involvement and use.
7. Councils should work with British-Somali civil society organisations to ensure that information about sports, leisure and youth activities are effectively disseminated to the British-Somali community.
8. British-Somali civil society organisations should review their own information and advice services, assess Somali access to mainstream advice services and

study models such as “neighbourhood mothers” and “health communicators” in Copenhagen. This will enable measures to improve the information and advice available to British-Somalis in London, particularly around how to lodge complaints or otherwise deal with instances of poor service or discrimination.

13.3 Education

9. British-Somali civil society organisations should assess the need for support for parents to enable them to play an effective role in their children’s education and develop initiatives to provide support.
10. British-Somali civil society organisations should take the lead in examining the reasons for high levels of exclusion among British-Somali pupils and work with schools and education departments to develop guidance for school leaders on approaches that address behavioural issues and prevent unnecessary exclusions.
11. Local Education Departments and partner organisations should develop mentoring, work placements, internships, career guidance and other initiatives to ensure that improved educational attainment translates into increased levels of employment among British-Somalis and other groups with low employment rates.
12. Councils should sustain good practice in relation to cultural awareness training for educators with input from the Somali community.
13. Councils should sustain and replicate education and support for parents to help them support their children through the education system.
14. If schools can identify a need for teachers and assistants who speak Somali, or have an understanding of elements of Somali culture that are crucial to education, they could recruit on that basis.
15. In order to achieve a more representative workforce, British-Somalis could be recruited through the following means: careers advice; mentoring; bringing Somali teachers into schools to talk to pupils; raising awareness through community organisations about careers in teaching; providing training for community members to become classroom assistants; and developing programmes to encourage British-Somali parents to help in the classroom.
16. Schools with pupils of British-Somali and other non-EU immigrant backgrounds should consider applying for subsequent rounds of the Mayor’s

English: The Key to Integration in London,¹⁶⁷ which enables schools to provide language training for mothers as a first step in encouraging greater parental involvement in education. Future funding rounds are eligible for refugees.

13.4 Employment

17. Councils should encourage Jobcentre Plus, the Work Programme, local employment services and British-Somali civil society organisations to help British-Somalis to make better use of mainstream services and enable employment service advisors to address more effectively the challenges which are often faced by British-Somali clients. These can include limited English, overseas qualifications, overseas work experience and unfamiliarity with recruitment practices in the United Kingdom.
18. Jobcentre Plus and other local employment services should work with British-Somali civil society organisations to ensure that British-Somalis are aware of the support that is available for small businesses.
19. Councils should consider funding applications to the EU Asylum and Migration Fund to be launched in 2014 for projects that should help British-Somalis and other non-EU migrants overcome barriers to employment by building on evidence from previous EU-funded initiatives and local projects such as Tower Hamlets' Overcoming Barriers to Work.

13.5 Housing

20. Local housing advice services should review the accessibility and effectiveness of their services for Somali clients and take any action necessary to ensure that British-Somalis have the same access to high-quality housing advice as other residents.
21. Councils should consider establishing tenant engagement projects such as the one in Tower Hamlets that provided support for British-Somali tenants and helped to avoid rent arrears, rehoused tenants from overcrowded properties, employed British-Somali staff and introduced monitoring of British-Somali tenants.

13.6 Health and Social Protection

22. Somali and other community-based civil society organisations should be proactive in understanding, monitoring and engaging with the work

¹⁶⁷ The project aims to raise the literacy and academic English levels of non-EU migrant pupils in London who have English as an Additional Language (EAL) and the English language skills of non-EU mothers.

programmes of their local Health Watch, Health and Well-Being Board and Clinical Commissioning Group.

23. In engaging with their local health bodies, Somali and other community-based civil society organisations should consult these bodies on how best to gather and present evidence on the accessibility and effectiveness of healthcare services used by community members, particularly in areas such as mental health and obesity; where necessary, community organisations should seek assistance from infrastructure organisations such as the Council for Voluntary Services in building their capacity to gather evidence that can inform health planning and commissioning.
24. The local Health Watch, Health and Well-Being Board and Clinical Commissioning Groups should seek to engage Somali and other community-based civil society organisations in gathering evidence that can help them commission and deliver health services that are accessible and effective in meeting the needs of diverse communities; where necessary, these bodies should work with infrastructure organisations to build the capacity of community groups to gather the evidence needed to inform services.
25. In addition to seeking evidence from community-based civil society organisations to inform planning, commissioning and delivery, the local Health Watch, Health and Well-Being Board and Clinical Commissioning Groups should work with Somali and other community groups to ensure that information on health and healthcare services reaches everyone in the community.

13.7 Policing and Crime

26. The police should work with British-Somali civil society organisations to improve Somali participation in police community engagement structures, in order to address issues such as involving the community in some policing matters, ethnic profiling, stop and search and information on contacting the police.

13.8 Participation and Citizenship

27. British-Somali civil society organisations should seek advice and support from organisations like Operation Black Vote on how to promote civic and political engagement by Somalis.
28. British-Somali civil society organisations should seek assistance from voluntary sector infrastructure organisations and engage proactively with local government and other public bodies to make better use of evidence from their services in helping to build the local evidence base on British-Somalis by contributing to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and other evidence

gathering exercises that inform service development and other initiatives in the areas of health, employment, educational attainment, housing and civic participation.

29. British-Somali civil society organisations should ensure that the voices of all members of the community are heard in developing activities and services for the community, and in working with local government and public services to ensure that services are accessible and effective for all members of the community.

13.9 The Role of the Media

30. London's Somali civil society organisations should approach the Media Trust, PEN UK and other civil society organisations for advice and support on how civil society organisations and activists can establish relationships with media professionals and local media, in order to improve coverage of issues involving British-Somalis in the United Kingdom.

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ANNEX 2. LIST OF INTERVIEWEES (STAKEHOLDERS)

Aartsen, Mike	Communities Together, Strategic Engagement Team, Metropolitan Police Service
Abby, Abdi	Legal and Social Policy Director, Minority Development and Advocacy
Ali, Rushanara	Member of Parliament (MP) (Tower Hamlets)
Ahmed, Ali	Third Sector Strategy Officer, Directorate of Development and Renewal (Tower Hamlets)
Campbell, Gerry	DCI, MPS
Caspell, James	Equality and Diversity Manager, Tower Hamlets Homes
Deria, Mohammed	Educator (Tower Hamlets)
Egal, Ubah	Social Worker/voluntary sector (Camden)
Eslamdoust, Maryam	Councillor (Camden)
Farah, Ahmed	HORN STARS (Brent)
Haque, Emdad	Equality and Diversity Manager, North and East London Commissioning Support Unit, NHS
Hull, Andy	Executive Member for Finance and Performance at the London borough of Islington
Isse, Ibrahim	Somali Youth Development Resource Centre (SYDRC)
Jama, Safia	Somali Integration Team (SIT) (Tower Hamlets)
Kilvington, John	Voluntary sector (Camden)
Meredrew, Toni	Secretary and Founder, Account3 (Tower Hamlets)
Olad, Awale	Councillor (Camden)
Said, Bilan	Diabetes Team Manager, Women's Health and Family Services (Tower Hamlets)
	Local authority employee (Tower Hamlets)
	Local authority employee (Camden)

Minority communities – whether Muslim, migrant or Roma – continue to come under intense scrutiny in Europe today. This complex situation presents Europe with one its greatest challenges: how to ensure equal rights in an environment of rapidly expanding diversity.

At Home in Europe, part of the Open Society Initiative for Europe, Open Society Foundations, is a research and advocacy initiative which works to advance equality and social justice for minority and marginalised groups excluded from the mainstream of civil, political, economic, and, cultural life in Western Europe.

Muslims in EU Cities was the project's first comparative research series which examined the position of Muslims in 11 cities in the European Union. Somalis in European cities follows from the findings emerging from the Muslims in EU Cities reports and offers the experiences and challenges faced by Somalis across seven cities in Europe. The research aims to capture the everyday, lived experiences as well as the type and degree of engagement policymakers have initiated with their Somali and minority constituents.