The Afghan Muslim Community in England

Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities
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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction and context

This report is one of 13 reports on England’s Muslim ethnic communities commissioned by the Cohesion Directorate of Communities and Local Government (CLG) in order to understand the diversity of England’s Muslim population and to help enhance its engagement and partnership with Muslim civil society.

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

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

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

This report details the research findings for the Afghan Muslim community. Individual reports for the other twelve communities covered by the study as well as a separate report synthesising the overall research findings are available from CLG.

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

1.2 Migration and England’s Afghan Muslim population

Instability, economic impoverishment, and continued violence have led to waves of Afghans seeking refuge in neighbouring countries and other parts of the world. There have been two distinct peaks in migration, the first following the Soviet invasion in 1979, and the second after outbreaks of conflict between 1992 and 2001. A large exodus to Western countries followed the Taliban capture of Kabul in 1996 and after US air strikes in 1998.
There are significant variations in the estimates of the Afghan population in England. The 2001 census estimated the total number of Afghans in the England, by country of birth, as being 14,481, with 73 per cent (10,832) of these residing in London. The only other region with a population in excess of 500 (according to the 2001 census) was Birmingham. The majority of people born in Afghanistan living in England (10,829 or 71%) categorised themselves as Muslim. However, the current figure of Afghans in England is likely to be considerably higher, primarily due to the large number of asylum seekers and refugees that have entered the country since 2001. Also, many dependants who were born in refugee camps in Pakistan may not record Afghanistan as their country of birth and the country of birth figure provided by the census does not include dependants born in England.

According to respondents in this study, the majority of Afghans in the UK are Pashtun, followed by smaller numbers of Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara. It is also likely that many other smaller ethnic groups are also represented in the UK.

According to the 2001 Census, the local authorities with the largest populations of Muslims born in Afghanistan were in the west London boroughs of Brent, Ealing, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Harrow and Barnet, with the largest community resident in the London Borough of Ealing, particularly in Southall, Ealing, Acton and Greenford. This aligns with community consultees’ responses as to where the key communities are located.

1.3 Identity, religion and language

Afghan identity in the UK needs to be viewed in the context of the historical legacy of the social and political culture of Afghanistan. This includes the long-simmering internal divisions within Afghan society underpinned by ethnicity, kin-based and person-centred tribal politics that pre-existed the 1979 Soviet invasion, the impacts of the Taliban regime, and the war and internal conflicts that have marked the country’s recent history. As a consequence of this legacy, for Afghans living in the UK, nationhood, history, culture and religion are potent informers of identity, with many in the diaspora masking ‘their identity in order to disguise difficult issues and real problems’ they seek to put behind them.

The community in the UK is diverse and fragmented along many ethnic, regional, political and linguistic lines. Afghanistan is also a country with strong regional identities, which makes its émigrés less likely to group together. There is often considerable mistrust and suspicion of Afghans outside of specific social networks, which consist mainly of kinship and friendship ties that already existed back in Afghanistan. The relationship between different ethnic groups is a complex one, and while ethnic divisions are deep, there is also a great deal of mixing and friendly exchange between groups. This is partly the result of a shared experience of migration/exile from a common homeland. However, these relationships can appear quite contradictory and confusing for young people born and

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brought up in the UK. On the one hand they pick up very negative views about other ethnic groups from their parents, whilst at the same time witnessing a reasonably high level of friendliness across the ethnic divides.

There are also internal pressures that dictate the ways in which many Afghans perceive or promote their identity. These inform the extent to which people are prepared to assert or hide their religious identity, as well as the levels of integration they achieve or desire with wider society. As with most migrant communities, the older generation is less willing or able to adapt to the host society than the younger generation. However, the ways in which the second generation is choosing to differentiate itself is proving problematic for the first generation which worries about the loss of Afghan culture and values among the young, as well as expressing fears about them adopting the ‘worst’ traits of British culture. However, many of the second generation reject the fears and concerns of the older generation and profess to be quite comfortable about renegotiating their Afghan and British identities to create a newly emerging Afghan-Britishness.

In Afghanistan the dominant religion has traditionally been the sect of Sunni Islam following the Hanafi School of Jurisprudence. A large proportion of the Sunni population in Afghanistan also adheres to the Deobandi tradition, which is believed to have had a strong influence on the Taliban. The majority of Afghans in the UK are also Sunni Muslims, but there is a significant minority of Shi’a, particularly those of the Hazara ethnic group. There are also reported to be some ‘important Sufi families’ in London and a large Afghan Sikh community.

Views about religion are contradictory. Some sources suggest that there is a ‘stricter’ form of Islamic practice driven by people who have arrived during the later stages of the recent conflicts in Afghanistan, as well as a visible tendency towards greater religiosity among young people. Others however suggest that most Afghans in the UK are more culturally Muslim than devout in their religious practice, and that there is a sizeable part of the community with communist sympathies that does not subscribe to any form of religion at all.

Culture and ethnicity appear to play a more significant role in the way Afghans identify themselves than religion. Most respondents expressed their relationship with Islam as something personal and in the background, something that informs their values and attitudes to life, but which does not play an outwardly visible role.

In the past, Afghans attended mosques established by other communities, including contributing to the building of mosques in collaboration with other Muslim groups. However Afghan cultural practices, particularly funereal rites, differ substantially from those of other Muslim communities, and this factor is thought to have contributed significantly to the development of separate mosques for the community. It certainly seems to have been a strong influential factor in the decision to build the Afghan mosque in Neasden, along with pressure from other communities concerning accepted rituals and forms of worship.
Lack of English language skills amongst the first generation, and women in particular, was identified by respondents as one of the key challenges for the Afghan community. The effects of not speaking the host language are thought to be severe and wide ranging. However, many also believe that the teaching of both Afghan and English is necessary in assisting the integration of young children.

1.4 Socio-economic status

The community is thought to be facing considerable economic, social, health and welfare problems. Some of these are internal to the community, but some are related to a lack of awareness and inadequate or inappropriate support from public authorities. Many Afghans have experienced a loss of social, economic and professional status in exile. Afghan academic and professional qualifications are rarely acknowledged, and the employment that highly qualified people are able to find is generally much lower in status than the role most of them occupied in Afghanistan. This dynamic is particularly acute for men who have to engage in what is perceived as ‘lower-class’ employment, and is thought to have led to high levels of undiagnosed depression in the community.

There is no data on the prevalence of this kind of downward mobility but anecdotal evidence suggests that it is widespread. However, regaining qualifications at the expense of supporting family, whether in the UK or Afghanistan, is impossible for most. Respondents highlighted that jobs such as mini-cab driving, pizza delivery and restaurant work that are commonly being taken by newer Afghan arrivals are not just due to the lack of qualification recognition, but due to a lack of training opportunities, which are often linked to English-language difficulties.

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

In common with most new migrant communities, intergenerational differences are a key issue and concern for Afghans in the UK, and according to some respondents, the biggest problem the Afghan community faces internally. The speed with which Afghan children and young people have learnt English, and integrated into British society and culture has led many to suggest that they have left their parents ‘behind’. This idea of children getting ahead of their parents has a number of important implications for intergenerational communication and the wellbeing of both generations. Older Afghans feel that as parents they do not get the respect that they should from their children and worry about their children becoming too ‘westernised’. For their part, younger Afghans believe that their parents and other older Afghans do not understand what it is like to grow up in Britain. Many of the issues raised by young respondents centre on tensions relating to the extent to which both young people and older Afghan migrants should adopt British culture or seek to preserve their existing practices. However, contrary to young people’s views about the older generation not understanding what it is like for them, older respondents showed
a high level of understanding about the pressures that young people are expected to negotiate as a result of cultural conflict.

Afghan women face particular difficulties in negotiating a place for themselves in the UK. Language difficulties and multiple pressures on women and girls to behave in a certain way limit their ability to engage in many Afghan and wider community activities. Isolation for women without childcare support who stay at home with the children is compounded by not being able to go to language classes or participate in other activities. Some women are said to be forbidden from learning English by their husbands, and many who are free to attend find English classes too difficult because of not being literate in their mother tongue.

Given all these pressures and constraints, it is difficult for most women to play an active role in the public life of the community. Although there are some women who are active in the Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs), it is rare for them to be in positions of leadership. Respondents also suggested that the male dominance of many RCOs stops women from going to them for assistance concerning anything that might be considered private or ‘dishonourable’, such as domestic violence or separation/divorce. On a more positive note, some respondents felt that the situation is improving slowly, and as younger Afghans who have been to school in the UK grow up, the situation for women and girls will get better.

1.6 Other issues affecting the community

As a community with a high proportion of refugees fleeing extended conflict, political ideology is a particularly sensitive topic for Afghans in the UK. For example, someone who fled the Communists and supported the mujahedeen may be living next to someone who supported the Communists and fled the civil war. This often leads to divisions and distrust between people in the community. Ethnicity and political ideology are also often intertwined and differences between groups are said to have been consistently exploited by political factions as a tool to gain the support of their ethnic constituency against other groups. Some of these divisions and conflicts persist amongst different ethnic and political groupings in the UK.

Respondents from the community mentioned that many Afghans were suffering high levels of depression and mental ill health which has not been picked up by statutory health service providers. The consequences of conflicts in Afghanistan and post-traumatic stress, coupled with cultural differences and a lack of language skills are some of the reasons suggested for the problem. Members of the first generation are thought by some respondents to be particularly at risk of becoming part of a generation of Afghan refugees who exist in a state of limbo – unable to live in the present, and constantly looking to the past. Because of the lack of existing research, it is impossible to indicate how widespread the problem is, and this is an area that could benefit from focused research by health and social welfare agencies.
There is also anecdotal evidence suggesting a growing concern about the increasing numbers of very young people and children arriving unaccompanied in the UK. According to respondents, these children find themselves moving from home to home as families try to accommodate them, or are dispersed to foster homes in different parts of the country, often completely isolated from any regular contact with the community or other Afghan children. It is not possible for us to make an assessment of the scale of the problem, and we believe that this is an area that could also benefit from further research.

1.7 Cohesion and integration

All respondents were in favour of improving integration of Afghans into UK society and believed that only a small minority of hardliners are against integration. Three key themes concerning integration emerged in interviews and focus groups. Firstly, that integration processes are seen as not having been very successful to date. Secondly, respondents did not feel that all Afghans in the UK understand the meaning of integration. Thirdly, many felt that for integration to be successful efforts have to be made on both sides.

1.8 Media and links with country of origin

The coverage of Afghanistan and Afghans in the UK media is felt to disproportionately negative, and it is perceived as serving to reinforce stereotyped images about the country and the community. However, beyond the coverage relating to Afghanistan, respondents were quite positive about the quality of the British media on the whole, particularly the BBC World Service and website. There are also many Afghan media sources in Pashto and Dari accessed by Afghan communities in the UK. These include satellite channels, newspapers, web based news and social networking sites.

There are strong trans-national ties between Afghans in the UK and Afghanistan, and kinship relations shaped by family obligations and financial responsibilities are integral to these links. The increased ease and reduced cost of travelling to and from Afghanistan since 2001 for those who have the appropriate immigration paperwork, has helped people visit more regularly. Despite the fact that for many Afghans in the UK, sending money to relatives is extremely difficult as they themselves struggle with unemployment and benefits, many do send back regular remittances to relatives back home. Because of the ongoing instability and insecurity for people in Afghanistan, financial support is also considered very important for the benefit of wider society. Hence as well as assisting their own families, there is a high level of fundraising for charities working in Afghanistan, whether through small-scale private organisations, or for large international organisations such as Red Crescent societies.

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3 The two official languages of Afghanistan are Pashto and Dari. Pashto is mainly spoken by people of the Pashtun ethnicity in Afghanistan and the neighbouring north-west of Pakistan (sometimes referred to as Pathans in Pakistan). Dari is a type of Farsi or Persian spoken in Afghanistan and is similar to the Farsi/Persian spoken in neighbouring Iran and Tajikistan. It should be noted that although its official name is Dari, Afghans often refer to it as Farsi or Persian.
1.9 Civil society

Afghan civil society infrastructure in the UK is dominated by community-based organisations or RCOs, without any dominant religiously informed organisations. With numerous Afghan associations and clubs catering for specific groupings, many Afghan RCOs tend to duplicate each other’s programmes and compete for funding from the same sources. Attempts to build a representative umbrella organisation have so far not been very successful.

RCOs programmes appear to be dictated by a combination of perceived community needs and funder priorities. The primary functions of these organisations are to serve as information/advice/referral points, organise cultural events, and to offer supplementary schooling. Community organisations also act as a bridge between the community and wider society, especially in helping to integrate newcomers to Britain who do not speak English, or who are unfamiliar with mainstream British systems and services.

Because of funding difficulties and the changing priorities of committee members, RCOs tend to come and go quite quickly. Many are established, operate for a while, and then disappear, sometimes reappearing as new funding becomes available. Others continue to operate an advice service with volunteer staff but do not run specific programmes due to lack of funding. Hence different RCOs are more or less visible to outsiders at different times, depending on funding availability and the networking capacity of committee members.

Whilst Afghans have a high level of respect for Britain and the British government, this sits alongside strong criticisms of British involvement in Afghanistan and of government policies on immigration and asylum. Outside of these criticisms, views and perceptions about the government are changing and over a period of time the community has developed a greater understanding and awareness of British political processes and government intentions, which has helped to overcome the initial fears and mistrust many people had.

The widely shared view amongst Afghans that their community is on the margins of UK society is thought to impact on levels of community engagement, with many believing that they and their organisations are largely invisible to government and most local public authorities. The view that the government and local authorities do not understand or acknowledge the distinct needs of the community, and hence continue to focus on the more established ethnic minority communities such as those from South Asia and the Caribbean is widespread.

Older and established RCOs are thought to be in a better position to develop good relations with borough councils compared to newer organisations. Building relationships is also easier for those that operate in specific boroughs than for organisations that provide London wide services. The latter organisations find it difficult to target their partnership and fund raising efforts as their activities range across a number of boroughs.
Much of the interaction with public authorities is shaped by personal contacts and relationships, and through ad hoc events rather than through structured channels for engagement and participation. The need for stronger partnerships between institutions such as schools, social services and RCOs in order to promote integration processes was consistently highlighted by respondents from community organisations.

In relation to developing more formal and structured channels for communication and engagement with the government and public authorities, the overwhelming view, though not a universal one, was that the RCOs would be the most appropriate channel because of their contacts with and understanding of the community. However there was also a strong suggestion that they need more development, support and supervision to enable them to fulfil this role.

Although not directly asked about this, some respondents spontaneously raised the issue of extremists. In their view, whilst extremists are a small minority, there is a danger of disaffected people who feel rejected or unable to integrate into British society getting drawn in by fringe elements at some mosques that are critical of the policies of the United Kingdom. They stressed that authorities should recognise the differences between communities on this issue, and work with each in ways that are appropriate to that particular community rather than using broad general approaches across the whole Muslim community.

In common with most other ethnic minority communities, the main barriers to effective engagement and service provision highlighted by respondents was access to skills and capacity building training, and the lack of funding, or funding restrictions that make it harder for small voluntary sector organisations to compete with well-established local, national or regional organisations. Respondents highlighted the potential for enhanced cooperation between funders and grantees, with more technical support provided by grant-givers. They felt that funders, including local authority funders, should have a greater responsibility for promoting engagement and for being more involved in the projects they fund.

Another area considered important is the provision of employment and entrepreneurial skills training for Afghans. Training provided in partnership between RCOs and local training providers could help alleviate some of the fears people have about accessing training provision. Finally, some indicated that Imams may need support and training as many have poor English language skills and are not familiar with British policies and laws.

Specific recommendations arising from community respondents include:

- Targeted funding and capacity building support, especially for the development of women’s associations and the provision of services for young people
- Training for skills development within civil society organisations, particularly in fundraising, financial management, service delivery and project management
• Employment training and support for all adult members of the community
• Improving engagement by identifying and working with those RCOs that can bridge the gap between local authorities and Afghan communities
• Support for the development of a collective representative forum for the Afghan community in the UK – perhaps through independent external mediation to bring together the various factions that exist in the community
• Direct recognition and representation of Afghans in local consultations and decision making forums.

Other recommendations:
• Research into mental health problems and trauma arising from war and refugee status
• Development work with professionals to enable them to more effectively support children and adults at risk from trauma and related health problems
• Further research into the experiences and situation of women with regards to: migration status, domestic violence, education and training needs
• Research into the situation and experiences of unaccompanied children and young people.
2 Introduction

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

- Afghanistan
- Algeria
- Bangladesh
- Egypt
- India
- Iran
- Iraq
- Morocco
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- Saudi Arabia
- Somalia
- Turkish speaking communities

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

2.1 Objectives of the research

There were four objectives for the research:

- **Mapping:** Develop population maps for each ethnic community outlining the spread of the population and identification of high density clusters
- **Identification of denominations and pathways:** Collect information on the grassroots institutions/key individuals working with ethnic communities and the breakdown of these ethnic communities by denomination/sect/clan
• **Identifying strength of links and capacity of ethnic communities:** Collect information on the strength of links between each ethnic community and country of origin (including influential institutions/individuals/media channels/religious influences). Also collect information on the relative strengths and weaknesses of civil society infrastructure for each ethnic community, highlighting where capacities need to be developed.

• **Identifying how Government can best engage with ethnic communities:** Develop recommendations on the ways in which CLG can best engage with and understand Muslim ethnic communities in England, including recommendations on avenues of communications and delivery to these communities.

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

1. Where are the key ethnic groups of the Muslim population located?

2. What are the latest estimated sizes and demographic make-up of the key ethnic communities?

3. Which denominations and/or other internal groupings do these ethnic groups belong to?

4. How can CLG best engage with them?

5. What are the strength of links between the ethnic communities and country of origin?

6. How developed is the level of social infrastructure for each group?

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

### 2.2 Report structure

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

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

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

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<th>PHASE</th>
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| 1     | Population mapping | Review of:  
• Existing literature  
• National data sources  
• Local data sources and consultations with Local Authority, other public bodies and community representatives. These were conducted to cover all 13 communities in this study. |
| 2     | Qualitative data collection | Community interviews (205 total, 12 with Afghan community)  
Focus groups (30 total, 2 with Afghan community) |

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

3.1 Project Phases

Phase 1: Population mapping
The first phase consisted of collecting mainly secondary quantitative data but also some primary qualitative data about locations of Muslim ethnic populations and known civil society organisations. The main method for data collection on population characteristics was through a comprehensive review of a broad range of secondary data sources, including the Census, Annual Population Survey, output of migration and population think tanks and academic research centres. This initial literature review assisted in developing a detailed picture of data currently available in the public domain, and in identifying key gaps in the existing knowledge base. It also helped in identifying key locations for each diaspora to be targeted in the community research which followed as well as identifying key stakeholders and community respondents.
Robust and up-to-date population data is difficult to obtain outside of the 2001 Census but we were able to obtain some anecdotal information from local authorities and community groups about migration since 2001. However, the 2001 Census data still informs the baseline of the population figures quoted in this study. This data has been supplemented where possible by a limited amount of additional local authority information or other sources where reliable estimates have been made.

In relation to Afghans specifically, there is minimal existing research on the community in the UK. Much of the existing research focuses on refugee experiences and there has been some research on the health experiences and needs of the community, although this was done prior to the 2003 intervention.

**Phase 2: Qualitative data collection**

Qualitative data collection has been undertaken primarily through 12 one-to-one interviews with key respondents (‘those who might be expected to know’) and two focus groups with individuals from the Afghan community. This phase of the research was carried out between April and July 2008.

**In-depth interviews**

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

- Key data sources
- Denominations and pathways
- Key influencers and institutions
- Key issues and needs for the specific diaspora
- Links with countries of origin
- Civil society structures and capacity needs
- Current levels of contact and key barriers to engagement with public authorities
- Media consumption
- Appropriate communication channels for engagement and involvement.

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

Respondents were chosen on the basis that they offered a range of different types of knowledge and perspectives on community issues and dynamics.
Selection of respondents involved drawing up a ‘long list’ of key contacts in each community in consultation with community interviewers, expert advisers and contacts made during the first phase of research. Shortlists were produced to ensure that there was adequate female and youth representation and a regional spread that reflected the distribution of the community in England. Additional names were added on the basis of subsequent recommendations made.

Interviews for the Afghan community research were conducted by a researcher who has studied the community in the UK for the past three years and had existing contacts with many key individuals and organisations. This added legitimacy to the process of enquiry that was critical in opening up discussion and enabled us to gather rich data.

Of the 12 respondents, five were women and seven were men. Their occupations included Refugee Community Organisation (RCO) managers/coordinators (7), student (2), interpreter, journalist and writer. Three were in the age range 20-29 years, four in the range 30-39, four in the range 40-49 and one was over 60 years old.

A quality control process was used by CI to ensure consistency and quality across each community. This involved:

- **Piloting**: Each community researcher was required to carry out 2/3 pilot interviews in each community to refine approaches and questions where necessary. This included a detailed discussion with each researcher following the pilot interviews, with expert adviser involvement where necessary, as well as a review of the interview field notes to ensure that relevant data was being picked up by researchers.

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

**Discussion groups**

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

Focus groups were designed to include a mix of participants from different community networks and different occupational backgrounds that might be expected to hold a wide range of views. Participants were recruited by the core research team through local community organisations and CI networks.
One male and one female focus group was conducted which were attended by individuals over 35 years of age. The focus groups were conducted in London in July 2008.

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<th>Table 1: Location and profile of discussion group participants</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
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<td>Group 1 (Female)</td>
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<td>Group 2 (Male)</td>
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Language translation was required for some members of the female focus group. Groups were facilitated by CI directors and analysts, with additional support from community researchers.

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

### 3.2 Analysis of Data

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

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

Intercultural understanding of responses and non-responses was also essential in considerations of the data generated. A set of commonly held assumptions and understandings in any cultural group may mean that some things are simply left unsaid – because they are commonly understood in the group and do not require articulation. In addition literal translation or interpretation may simply misrepresent or miss the significance of what is being articulated. In this context in particular there will often be a distinction between what is said, and might be noted or recorded, and what is meant. In looking for meaning, silences and body language were often as important as what was said. A good example of potential misinterpretation that came up many times was body language indicating discomfort and unwillingness to pursue a particular line of enquiry.
Finally, and most importantly, we were **reflexive** in our approach, critically reflecting on the role and influence that our own research intervention may be having on key respondents and focus groups, using critical judgment and being conscious of the need to interpret with integrity in relation to what we were seeing and hearing.

### 3.3 Limitations of the research

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

- The sample sizes for each community were relatively small and respondents were not intended to be a representative sample of the relevant communities.
- Because the interviews were not based on a random sample, the study does not claim to provide an analysis of the Afghan population as a whole, nor was this the intention of the study. We have analysed views and comments in the context of existing data, knowledge of the current political and social context for these communities, and the comments of other respondents.
- Many aspects of the topic guide were designed to identify the key needs and challenges facing the community. Hence the research tended to generate data on problem areas and challenges, particularly in focus group discussions when respondents felt they had limited time to ensure that their voices were heard. This may not reflect many of the positive and optimistic views of respondents. However, respondents were often aware that the discussions may come across as negative in tone, and were quick to try and balance this by highlighting perceived positive aspects of both their communities and their lives in the UK. We have endeavoured to set out the ‘best’ story (in terms of explanatory power) in the context of what is already known about why some of our respondents might express negative feelings.
- In the current context, the politicisation of the research field meant that all respondents were conscious of being part of a community under public and government scrutiny. Respondents were made aware of the purposes of the research through a ‘showcard’ that explained the research as well as possible uses of the research. They were informed that this research would potentially be used to inform a publication that would enter the public domain and would cover aspects such as religion, intra-community dynamics and links with country of origin. A climate of some scepticism within Muslim communities, discrimination, both real and perceived, and awareness of government interest in ‘what is happening’ on the ground, meant that respondents were often sceptical about the use of the information that they were providing. Many will have had agendas (for positive as well as negative reasons) when asked.

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4 The topic guide is included in the Technical Report, available from Communities and Local Government.

5 The showcard is included in the Technical Report, available from Communities and Local Government.
about issues for their communities, which may have influenced their responses (eg representing their community as having few or no problems, or conversely, as having many or major needs and/or issues with public authorities).

- This also created a number of practical difficulties in research terms, including difficulties in getting interviews with particular types of respondents, hesitancy and caution in some responses, and a closing off of some lines of questioning in relation to religion, identity and differences.

- The researchers’ analytical response to these difficulties was to be critically attuned to who was speaking, their location in the community, the interests that they may have, and to judge their comments in the light of this context. Researchers were aware that there are dynamic and charged debates and movement taking place within these communities on a whole range of issues ranging from religion, its expression and orientation in the context of being Muslim minorities living in a non-Muslim society, to negotiations about roles, responsibilities, duties, gender relations, and relationships with country of origin. This awareness underpinned the analysis of the data and the conclusions drawn from responses received.

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

In phase one of the study an examination of literature revealed a real lack of documentation on Afghans in the UK so it was difficult to identify obvious ‘community leaders’ or representatives that would be widely seen as such among Afghans in the UK. Hence the viewpoints of the selected respondents may not necessarily be representative of other Afghans. Another limitation of the sample is that all the interviews were carried out in English with people who, by virtue of their education or experience, were comfortable interacting with a European researcher. Additionally, only one interview was conducted with an Afghan outside of London, so this report is predominantly about Afghans living in London where the bulk of the Afghan population resides.
4 Country History

Modern Afghanistan is usually traced to the unification of Pashtun tribes by Ahmad Shah Durrani in 1747. The country has an estimated population of 28.7 million² characterised by exceptional ethnic diversity and religious homogeneity (99% Muslim⁷). It is a country that has suffered through numerous invasions by foreign powers and inter-tribal and inter-ethnic tensions. These conflicts have caused significant civilian displacement, starvation and loss of life, in addition to widespread damage to the country’s physical, economic and political infrastructure.

Figure 1: Map of Afghanistan (RIGHTS NOT SECURED, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC)

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The country became caught up in the struggle for influence in Central Asia between the British and Russian empires, which fuelled three British Afghan Wars in 1839-42, 1878-81 and finally in 1919, when Afghanistan won independence from national British control. A brief period of liberal government ended in a coup in 1973 when Prime Minister Daud overthrew King Zahir Shah and established a republic. This saw the first influx of Afghan refugees into the UK.⁸ Daud was himself overthrown in a counter-coup in 1978 by the

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² FCO. Country profile: http://tinyurl.com/5vgygb4

⁷ 80% of Muslims in Afghanistan are thought to be Sunni and 19% Shi’a. The remaining one per cent are a mixture of Christian, Sikh, Bahá’í and Jewish. (Source: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour (2008), Afghanistan – International Religious Freedom Report 2008, U.S. Department of State).

⁸ Humayun Ansari (2004), The Infidel Within, Muslims in Britain Since 1800, London: C. Hurst. p. 163
People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan which tried to impose a socialist state. Armed resistance by conservative Islamic groups against the new regime led to the Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 in support of the Communist state, sparking off a long and destructive war, which again saw Afghans seeking refuge in the UK and elsewhere.

Since that invasion, war and political instability has displaced more than a third of the Afghan population. Prior to 1979 there had been a small number of Afghans living in the UK as international students, businessmen or diplomats. Three thousand Afghan refugees arrived into the UK as a result of the 1973 coup and following the 1979 Russian invasion. Many of the Afghan refugees were either of a liberal political persuasion or belonged to more moderate tendencies within Islam.

The USSR withdrew in 1989 under pressure from externally supported anti-Communist mujahedin rebels. After the Soviets left, the struggle for power between mujahedeen groups led to civil war, primarily between the Pashtun Taliban and the opposing mujahedeen commanders in the predominantly Tajik and Uzbek United Front (the Northern Alliance). By 1994 the Taliban began to emerge as the dominant power, taking Kabul in 1996 and controlling most of the country by 1998. Many people associated with the Communists were forced to flee, as were many of those living in Kabul.

Following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, a joint US, Allied, and anti-Taliban Northern Alliance undertook military action to overthrow the Taliban regime. After the Taliban was ousted from Kabul, a UN-sponsored conference established a process to reconstruct the country's political framework. This included the adoption of a new constitution, a new presidential election and National Assembly elections in 2005. Hamid Karzai became the first democratically elected president of Afghanistan in December 2004 and the National Assembly was inaugurated a year later.

Since restoring diplomatic ties with Afghanistan in December 2001, the UK has consistently affirmed its long-term commitment towards helping Afghanistan to achieve stability, security and its development plans. However, despite considerable progress toward building a stable central government, pressure from a resurgent Taliban and Al-Qaeda networks, particularly in the south and the east of the country, continues to present serious challenges for the new government. Several killings of religious leaders and attacks on mosques have been attributed to Al-Qaeda and Taliban members who objected to their victims’ links with the Karzai administration or to their particular interpretations of Islam. Since 2006, anti-government elements have killed many clerics in Kandahar and nationwide, as well as killing or injuring large numbers of civilians in suicide attacks. There have also been attacks on both Muslim and non-Muslim employees of international organisations.

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9 Braakman, 2005.
10 Ansari, 2004, p. 163.
The Constitution of Afghanistan states that “followers of other religions are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of law.” However, it also states that Islam is the “religion of the state” and that “no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam.” The right to religious freedom has not always been respected in practice and several high-profile cases involving religious freedom, including condemnations of conversions from Islam and religious censorship, have increased concerns about citizens’ ability to freely practice minority religions, and have sparked demonstrations in major cities.\(^{11}\)

Non-Muslim minority groups face considerable discrimination and persecution. The local Sikh and Hindu populations, although allowed to practice publicly, continue to face problems obtaining land for cremation purposes and face discrimination when seeking government jobs, as well as harassment during major celebrations. Within the Muslim population, relations among the different sects of Islam continue to be difficult as historically the minority Shi’a community has faced discrimination from the majority Sunni population. For example, in the country’s education and legal systems, teaching and legal practice has always relied in the civil code based on the Sunni Hanafi School as opposed to the Jafari School used by the Shi’as.

Insecurity, unrest and human rights violations continue for people in Afghanistan. This, in conjunction with the destruction over decades of economy and infrastructure, means that Afghans will continue to leave Afghanistan, and some of those who leave will continue to make their way to the UK. The experience of fractious, ethnically divided and violent politics, coupled with negative experiences of the state and a highly stratified society, has instilled a high level of suspicion of public authorities and mistrust within the community. This history and these dynamics are to some extent re-enacted in London, with ‘class, regional, ideological, political, ethnic and divisions of trauma [continuing] to affect how Afghans interact with one another.’\(^{12}\) But this is just one element of a complex community and many second generation Afghans, whose lives revolve around school, western media and British friends, are unable to relate to the experiences of their parents.

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\(^{11}\) Ibid.

\(^{12}\) Braakman, 2005.
5 Migration History and Trends

Instability, economic impoverishment, and continued violence have led to waves of Afghans seeking refuge within the countries that border Afghanistan, particularly Iran and Pakistan, and also in Europe, Canada and the USA. There have been two distinct waves of migration. The Soviet invasion created the first wave of migration, which constituted primarily of Afghans from the rural areas. Around 3,000,000 Afghans took refuge in Pakistan and almost 2,000,000 in Iran.\textsuperscript{13} The mass movement from Afghanistan which began in 1979 finally peaked in the mid-1980s.

Renewed outbreaks of conflict between 1992 and 2001 prompted another flow of refugees to Pakistan and Iran, though Afghans found that they were not as welcomed by the host governments as before. From 1992, Iran reduced Afghans’ rights to social facilities, and Pakistan refused to register those who fled the Taliban in 2000. A large exodus to Western countries followed the Taliban capture of Kabul in 1996. This included many wealthy, educated, middle-class and urban Pashtuns and Tajik elites who migrated to North America and Europe due to being targeted by the Taliban after US air strikes in 1998.

Between 1994 and 2004, 238,000 Afghans applied for asylum in Europe, with around one in five (some 50,000) seeking refuge in Germany, followed by the Netherlands (36,000 or 15%). Other important destinations included the UK (15%), Austria (13%), Hungary (6%) and Denmark (5%).\textsuperscript{14} Between 2000 and 2004, a period of significantly increased asylum applications from Afghan nationals, the UK was second only to Austria among receiving European countries.

For those able to get to the UK, many found that they were dispersed to regions around the country. Chart 1 shows the numbers of asylum seekers entering the UK between 1980 and 2006. The peak in 2001 aligns to the invasion of Afghanistan by international forces that year in response to the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington D.C. in September 2001. Over 50,000 Afghans fled the country in 2001 and applied for asylum in at least 77 countries.\textsuperscript{15} Since the invasion in 2001 the number of Afghan refugees plummeted by 80 per cent between 2001 and 2004, a decrease which was accompanied by the biggest return movement in UNHCR history.\textsuperscript{16} However, Afghans remain the largest refugee group in the world, with the exception of the Palestinians.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
Rapid inflows from Afghanistan have been accompanied by a sharp rise in citizenship acquisition by Afghans, with a peak four years after the asylum application peak in 2001 (see Chart 2). Since 2002, 14,915 Afghans have acquired British Citizenship.
6 Community demographics and key locations

Census 2001: Muslim Population born in Afghanistan in England: 10,829

As with other populations, there are significant variations in the estimates of the Afghan population in England. The 2001 census estimated the total number of Afghans in England, by country of birth, as being 14,481, with 73 per cent (10,832) of these residing in London. The only other region with a population in excess of 500 in 2001 was Birmingham. The majority of Afghans living in England recorded their religion as Muslim (10,829 or 71%).

However, the current figure of Afghans in England is likely to be considerably higher for a number of reasons:

- The large number of asylum seekers and refugees that have entered the country since 2001
- Some dependants may have been born in refugee camps in Pakistan or in other countries and therefore may not record Afghanistan as their country of birth
- The ‘country of birth’ figure does not include dependants born in England
- Experience of persecution or torture at the hands of government may have led to a particular mistrust and fear of interviewers and other information gatherers.

There have been a number of estimates in recent years, however in the absence of any robust methodology, these are all considered to be ‘best guesses’. A mapping exercise by the International Organisation for Migration in 2006 estimated the Afghan population in London at around 20,000. This included those who either had a permanent status, or whose asylum applications were being processed. Another study from 2005 suggests that the Afghan population in London ranges between 40,000 to 60,000. There are also indications of Afghans staying in the UK illegally once their asylum case has been refused. When asked to estimate the size of the Afghan community, respondents were not confident in their estimates, which varied between 50,000-80,000 people.

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18 DMAG (2006), London Borough Residents, Country by Country of Birth and Analysis of the 2001 Census, DMAG Briefing, GLA.
20 International Organisation of Migration (IOM) (2007), Afghanistan, IOM.
21 Angela Schlenkhoff (2005), The Imagining and Enacting of Identity; The Discursive Production of Afghan-ness in London, Canterbury: University of Kent.
22 Brad Blitz, Rosemary Sales and Lisa Marzano, ‘Non-Voluntary Return, The Politics of Return to Afghanistan’, Political Studies, Volume 53, Number 1, March 2005, pp. 182-200(19): Asylum laws and regulations define the type of life that Afghans are able to adopt in London, and divide the Afghan population into two main categories of ‘established’ and ‘non-established’. The long-established residents generally have secure status (Refugee Status or Indefinite Leave to Remain), often taking out British citizenship. The more recent arrivals have insecure or temporary status (Exceptional Leave to Remain, asylum seeker, or refused). The most recent arrivals feel volatile and unsafe.
However, these figures should all be treated with caution. While it is difficult to reach a confident estimate, many of the higher estimates from reports and community members are unlikely. Even if all asylum applications had been granted since 2001, this would only give a figure of just over 32,000.

Figures from the 2001 census indicate that 71.6 per cent of the Muslim population born in Afghanistan lived in London—see Table 2. All respondents in this study also agreed that London is the population hub. Outside of London, other smaller communities were identified in Birmingham (550), Bradford (150), Coventry (230), Derby, Kent, Leicester, Manchester (150), Northampton, Slough, Walsall, and Wolverhampton (120). Local council stakeholders from Blackburn and Oldham also reported a small number of recent Afghan asylum seekers.

Table 2: Distribution of Muslim population born in Afghanistan in Government Office Regions in England (Source: 2001 Census, commissioned table CO644)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GO Region</th>
<th>Percentage of population born in Afghanistan who are Muslim</th>
<th>Muslims born in Afghanistan</th>
<th>Percentage of total Muslim population born in Afghanistan</th>
<th>Afghanistan born Muslims as a percentage of regional total Muslim population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>7,358</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and the Humber</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>&lt;100</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>71</strong></td>
<td><strong>10,279</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.7</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the 2001 Census, the local authorities with the largest populations of Muslims born in Afghanistan were in the west London boroughs of Brent, Ealing, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Harrow, and Barnet, with the largest community resident in the London Borough of Ealing, particularly in Southall, Ealing, Acton, and Greenford—see Table 3. The distribution of the Muslim population in London born in Afghanistan reflects the general distribution of the total Afghanistan-born population in London—see Figure 2.

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23 Figures in brackets are of the total population born in Afghanistan as recorded in the 2001 census. Figures are given only for populations above 100.
This aligns with community consultees’ responses as to where the key communities are located, although there is reported to be an emerging community of people in South East London, particularly in Lewisham.24

Although the majority of the Muslim Afghan population in England resides in London, Table 3 (next page) shows that the percentage of the population born in Afghanistan who are Muslim varies significantly between boroughs. For example even though Ealing has the largest population of Muslims born in Afghanistan in England, this represents only 58 per cent of the total population born in Afghanistan in the borough, mainly due to the large Afghan Sikh community in the area. By contrast, 95 per cent of the Afghanistan-born population in Ealing’s neighbouring borough of Brent is Muslim. Other boroughs with predominantly Muslim populations according to the 2001 census are: Barnet (93%), Newham (94%), Hammersmith and Fulham (94%) and Camden (97%). More religiously diverse Afghanistan-born populations include those in Hounslow (52%), Hillingdon (45%) and Richmond upon Thames (57%).

24 Focus group respondent, male.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borough</th>
<th>Percentage of population born in Afghanistan who are Muslim</th>
<th>Number of Muslims born in Afghanistan</th>
<th>Afghanistan-born Muslims as a percentage of total borough population</th>
<th>Afghanistan-born Muslims as a percentage of total borough Muslim population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ealing</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1,356</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brent</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>1,010</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrow</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hounslow</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>646</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnet</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newham</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hammersmith and Fulham</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillingdon</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond upon Thames</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7 Socio-economic Situation

There are no existing socio-economic analyses of the Afghan-born or Afghan population in England, mainly because the Labour Force Survey does not include this information on the Afghan-born population. However, during our interviews and focus groups, many socio-economic related issues were mentioned when asked what challenges the community faced. While this information is based on a small number of interviews, the similarity of respondents’ concerns suggests that many of these patterns are widespread.

As highlighted in the previous section, the lack of English language skills is thought to have a critical impact on the employment prospects and pattern of many Afghans, many of whom are in low-paid jobs which often involve unsociable hours, eg mini-cab driving or employment in catering/restaurant trades. Some respondents raised the issue of foreign qualification recognition and expressed frustration that their own, or their friends’/family members’ qualifications had not been recognised by British institutions:

One problem in terms of employment is that people's qualifications are not recognised. For example, I had a friend [who was a high-level medical professional in Afghanistan] who once came to the UK as a key note speaker at a medical conference. Two years later she came back as a refugee and they wouldn’t recognise her qualifications and she ended up working as a fabric worker in a factory in Southall for £2.80 an hour.

Most Afghan respondents felt that many in the community had experienced an extreme loss of social, economic and professional status in exile. Afghan academic and professional qualifications are said to be rarely recognised and the employment these people are able to find in exile is generally much lower in status than the roles most of them had occupied in Afghanistan. This dynamic is particularly acute for men who have to engage in what is perceived as ‘lower-class’ employment. This loss of status has led to the placing of a high degree of importance on the education of their children.

There is no data on the prevalence of this kind of downward mobility but anecdotal evidence suggests that it is widespread. However, regaining qualifications at the expense of supporting family, whether in the UK or Afghanistan, is impossible for most. Respondents highlighted that jobs such as mini-cab driving, pizza delivery and restaurant work that are commonly being taken by newer Afghan arrivals are not just due to the lack of qualification recognition, but due to a lack of training opportunities, which are often linked to English-language difficulties. Some talked about the problem of people working in the ‘informal’ employment sector, and linked this to a lack of knowledge about the formal sector, as well as to a fear of leaving the safety net of welfare benefits entirely. Many respondents noted

25 Sarah Kyambi (2005), Beyond Black and White, IPPR, p. 117.
26 Afghan community interviewee: Female, London, 30s.
the need for training, whether in practical skills or business set-up and management, as a key need for Afghans in the UK.

Although young people were generally seen as being better off in relation to education and language skills, there were concerns that the responsibilities of supporting family in Afghanistan, or a lack of confidence in their ability to find a job after graduating were a disincentive to pursuing education beyond 16 or 18 years old. A younger respondent noted that the lack of visible role models for young Afghans meant that it is difficult to convince them of the value of education:

_They always come back saying “why should I waste four years when I could be earning money, I know ten people who graduated and now they’re mini-cab drivers. Why not just start earning now”. If we had good role models people would be able to say “I know ten people who graduated and now they have good jobs and they’re living a happy life, so I’d like an education”. A lot of problems are created because of this._

8 Key Characteristics

8.1 Identity

Afghan identity in the UK needs to be viewed in the context of the historical legacy of the social and political culture of Afghanistan. This includes the long-simmering internal divisions within Afghan society underpinned by ethnicity, kin-based and person-centred tribal politics that pre-existed the 1979 Soviet invasion, the Taliban regime, and the war and internal conflicts that have marked the country’s recent history. Successive regimes since the 1880s, including the pre-communist Pashtun-dominated Afghan state, and later the Taliban, have adopted a policy of extreme discrimination and violence against minority groups, particularly the Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen and Tajik populations. In recent times these internal divisions have posed considerable challenges to the creation of a representative government of unity under the leadership of President Hamid Karzai.

According to previous research by Braakman, the consequence of this legacy for Afghans living in the UK is that nationhood, history, culture and religion are potent informers of identity, with many in the diaspora masking ‘their identity in order to disguise difficult issues and real problems’. According to her, some Afghans seek anonymity in order to establish themselves within the diaspora, and for others the appeal of anonymity reflects the increased hostility many Afghans have faced in the UK since 2001, when attention focused on the threat posed by Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. It has led to a community which feels alienated within wider UK society and has influenced the way in which some Afghans feel compelled to distinguish Afghan culture and heritage from any association with recent Afghan history. It may also influence how many Afghans interact with the wider UK society, with a strong desire on their part to try and overcome some of the negative perceptions people may hold about Afghanistan’s history and culture. As one young respondent noted:

*Afghan youth have a role to change negative opinions. We have tried to highlight the good things about the culture and religion. The British know about the negative side but we want to show them that there’s a balance between negative and positive.*

There are also internal pressures that dictate the ways in which many Afghans perceive or promote their identity. In her study on Afghans in London, Schlenkhoff asserts that “it seems that the dominant discourse of Afghan-ness in London is guided by those who arrived at later stages during the conflict in Afghanistan and have brought with them stricter interpretations of Islam as well as Afghan culture”. This puts pressure on those

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29 Braakman, 2005, p. 43.


31 Schlenkhoff, 2006, p. 10.
who are not accustomed to this to essentially lead a ‘double life’, for example according to Schlenkoff: “In order to be considered a ‘proper’ Afghan they have to be seen to be adhering to certain norms and values which are considered to be ‘purely’ Afghan. Otherwise, they are perceived of as endangering the borders that separate the Afghan population from the imagined mainstream culture of Britain.”

Some respondents felt that this view mainly reflects the first generation, whereas the second generation is creating new identities that incorporate both Afghan and British cultures. However, the ways in which UK-born Afghans are choosing to differentiate themselves is proving problematic for the first generation for a number of reasons. For some, the tensions are linked to the view held by first-generation Afghans that changing one’s identity is closely related to adopting perceived negative British ‘traits’. Another common concern amongst first-generation Afghans is that the distinctiveness of being Afghan will be lost, and that family will become less important as Afghans become more individualistic and less family-orientated. However, many UK-born Afghan Muslims reject the fears and concerns of the older generation and profess to be quite comfortable about renegotiating their Afghan and British identities to create a newly emerging Afghan-Britishness.

Within the UK, the subsuming of many Afghans under the refugee category or as ‘Other’ in official statistics was felt by many respondents to detract from their specific issues and distinctiveness, and given the widespread perception of refugees as ‘economic migrants’ or poorly educated, they felt that being seen in this light means that the entrepreneurial or professional background of many gets ignored:

> I think it’s really important that Afghans be registered as a distinct minority. You asked how many Afghans are here. We would know if they were registered, as Somalis are, Pakistanis are, Bangladeshis are, why not Afghans? We always get registered as ‘Asians’. The related problems are lack of quotas [for ethnic minorities or Afghans specifically] in jobs, there is no real opportunity for them to get anywhere. You have to be exceptional to break out of that and get a good job.

The widely-held view about the relative invisibility of the Afghan community, and the tendency for it to be subsumed within the broader Asian or ‘Other’ categories, is exemplified in this comment by a respondent highlighting the lack of presence of the community in wider society and the media:

> If you think about say Eastenders, if they talk about Asians, they mean Indians, or if they’re talking about Islamic issues for example headscarves, they’re only talking about Pakistanis or Bangladeshis. Afghans are not even registered as a minority group, and there are quite a lot of them.

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32 Schlenkoff, 2006, p. 10
33 Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 40s.
34 Afghan community interviewee: Female, London, 30s.
Our research found that Afghan identities in the UK are in the process of being established, and that there are a number of factors that inform the processes and the outcomes. For the first generation, the fear of loss of a distinct Afghan culture and way of being is causing anxiety. For some, a key factor informing identity is the search for relative anonymity given their flight from Afghanistan, migration issues, and negative perceptions of Afghans in the host country. These factors make it less likely that individuals and groups will take steps to speak publicly about Afghans with public authorities and the media, and in the absence of positive encouragement, there is a risk that the community will remain invisible in the public sphere and stigmatised in the wider society.

8.2 Ethnicity

Approximately 42 per cent of the population in Afghanistan are Pashto-speaking Pashtun, who form the largest ethnic group and who are perceived as having a higher socio-economic status than other ethnic groups. There are tribal divisions within the Pashtun: 11 per cent are from the Durrani group and 14 per cent of the Ghilzai group.35 Other tribes within the Pashtun include the Wardak, Jaji, Tani, Jadran, Mangal, Khugiani, Safi, Mohmand and Shinwari. However, there are some 11 or more other ethnic groups (the number is fluid depending on who is considered ‘native’, and because of changes/blurring of geographic boundaries within Afghanistan and the porous nature of its border) including Tajik (27% of the population in Afghanistan), Hazara (9%), Uzbek (9%), Aimak (4%), Turkmen (3%), Baloch (2%).36 It should be noted that the statistical breakdown of the population by ethnicity has never been comprehensively undertaken, and it was suggested that historically this has been a largely political exercise. As one respondent explained:

Unfortunately in Afghanistan in the last 30-40 years there has not been honest or extensive data collection. Whenever there was data collection it was done for political reasons and the government played a major role in controlling the data. They wanted their own favourite groups at the top of the list.37

According to respondents in this study, in London the majority of Afghans are Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara reflecting the main ethnic groupings in Afghanistan. It is likely that other smaller groups are also represented in the UK, but only Turkmen were mentioned during this research by one respondent. While largely based on anecdotal evidence, James Fergusson’s book Kandahar Cockney (2005) highlights the significant ethnic diversity that can be found in London’s Afghan community38 – see Table 4.

36 Central Intelligence Agency (2008), World Factbook.
37 Community consultee: Male, London, 30s.
Table 4: Afghan ethnicities and locations in London (Source: Fergusson, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borough</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashford (Kent)</td>
<td>Uzbek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnet</td>
<td>Azarbuz Pashtun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brent</td>
<td>Jalabad Arab, Wardaki Pashtun, Jalabad Pashtun, Hazara, Turkmen, Qizilbash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catford/Brixton</td>
<td>Azarbuz, Dostokhil Pastun; Mazari &amp; Kabuli Tajik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ealing</td>
<td>Mazari &amp; Tashqrgan Tajik; Safi, Khandahar Pashtun (Popalzai, Barakzai)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenwich</td>
<td>Charikar Tajik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hammersmith</td>
<td>Logari Pastun, Dostokhil Pashtun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampstead</td>
<td>Jawzjan Pashtun, Dauladzai &amp; Mazari Pashtun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrow</td>
<td>Azarbuz Pashtun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillingdon</td>
<td>Wardaki Pashtun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newham</td>
<td>Khostwal, Zadran &amp; Wardaki Pashtun, Paghmani Pashtun</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northolt</td>
<td>Mazari Uzbek</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redbridge</td>
<td>Tajik</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>Wardaki Pashtun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southall</td>
<td>Afghan Sikh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tottenham</td>
<td>Herati Tajik; Jalalabad, Wardaki &amp; Kunduz Pashtun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wandsworth</td>
<td>Kunduz Tajik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willesden</td>
<td>Dauladzai Pashtun; Kabuli Tajik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodford</td>
<td>Hazara, Aimaq, Istalef Tajik</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evidence from the majority of the respondents suggests that ethnic divisions are replicated in London, though a few were keen to suggest otherwise:

*I don’t think there is a spatial division because when people arrive they can’t necessarily choose where they live, they are put somewhere.*

However, some community-based organisations do make distinctions, as one respondent noted:

*Some of the community organisations cater more to some ethnic groups than others, and people may travel across London to go to an organisation that they hear is run by people of a similar ethnic background.*

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39 Afghan community interviewee: Male London 40s.
40 Afghan community interviewee: Female London 20s.
The relationship between different ethnic groups is a complex one, and while ethnic divisions are deep, there is also a great deal of mixing and friendly exchange between groups. This is partly the result of a shared experience of migration/exile from a common homeland. An older female respondent described how being away from this homeland makes people happy to see and interact with another Afghan, and that in the face of this, ethnic or other differences are forgotten:

*Mostly, people are happy to see other Afghans so they don’t emphasise [their ethnic] differences.*

However, these relationships can appear quite contradictory and confusing for young people born and brought up in the UK. On the one hand they pick up very negative views about other ethnic groups from their parents, whilst at the same time they witness a reasonably high level of friendliness across the ethnic divides. This is illustrated by the comments of a young respondent, who blamed the older generation for not putting ethnic differences into context for younger generations:

*Whilst they [the older generation] have their political ethnic differences, at the important times – the happy times, the sad times – they are there for each other. The younger generation, when they hear their parents going on about ethnic differences, they don’t know the details or the reality, so they jump to conclusions about other ethnic groups.*

It is useful to note that language and ethnicity concerns were often intertwined in respondents’ discussions of ethnicity. Language appears to be a proxy for ethnicity for some, who referred to Pashto-speakers and Farsi-speakers in response to questions about ethnicity rather than purely ethnic categories. A respondent explained how she came to recognise the significance of language and ethnic differences:

*I think the ethnic problems came over from Afghanistan, particularly those between the two main language groups, the Pashto speakers and the Dari speakers who are mainly Tajiks. Although the Hazaras speak Dari too, they often come under the same grouping. I wasn’t really aware of these ethnic or language differences and conflicts until recently when they built the mosque in Neasden. It’s for funerals mainly and for kids to go for Islamic lessons. The community [both Dari and Pashto speakers] raised the money and now the Pashtuns, they want the imam to be a Pashtun speaker and the others say why does he have to be a Pashtun speaker? Anyway, it became a really big argument.*

41 Afghan community interviewee: Male London 30s.
42 Afghan community interviewee: Male London 20s.
43 The two official languages of Afghanistan are Pashto and Dari. Pashto is mainly spoken by people of the Pashtun ethnicity in Afghanistan and the neighbouring north-west of Pakistan (sometimes referred to as Pathans in Pakistan). Dari is a type of Farsi or Persian spoken in Afghanistan and is similar to the Farsi/Persian spoken in neighbouring Iran and Tajikistan. It should be noted that although its official name is Dari, Afghans often refer to it as Farsi or Persian.
44 Afghan community interviewee: Male London 40s.
Both language and ethnicity are sensitive topics for Afghans, as a Refugee Community Organisation (RCO) manager explained in relation to working with clients from different Afghan backgrounds:

*About ethnicity I never ask them [the clients], it is sensitive information. I speak both languages [Pashto and Dari] and they [the clients] feel happy that I can switch between both when there is a need. Although the issue of ethnicity and language is mainly a result of conflicts brought over from Afghanistan, and consequently more of a problem for Afghans who had grown up in Afghanistan, it has also affected children born here, who have absorbed what their parents have said about different ethnic groups.*

He reported that clients sometimes told him about their children being bullied in school by other Afghan children on the basis of their ethnicity, or because of the language they spoke at home.

### 8.3 Religion

According to official sources 99 per cent of the population in Afghanistan are Muslim; 80 per cent are Sunni Muslim and 19 per cent Shia Muslim. The other one per cent consists of Baha’i, Christians, Hindus, Jews and Sikhs; however, many of these non-Muslims are thought to have fled during the years of Taliban rule. In Afghanistan the dominant religion has traditionally been the sect of Sunni Islam following the Hanafi School of Jurisprudence. A large proportion of the Sunni population in Afghanistan also adheres to the Deobandi tradition, which is believed to have had a strong influence on the Taliban.

The religious mix in the Afghan-born population resident in England is notably different from Afghanistan. While according to the 2001 census, the population is still predominantly Muslim (71%), there are significant Sikh (15%) and Hindu (4%) populations, in line with evidence that religious minorities have fled Afghanistan. The majority of Afghan Muslims in the UK are reported to be Sunni Muslims, but there is thought to be a significant minority of Shi’a, particularly those of the Hazara ethnic group. One respondent noted that there are also some ‘important Sufi families’ in London.

In Southall, respondents referred to the presence of a large Afghan Sikh community.

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45 Afghan community interviewee: Male London 30s.
46 CIA World Factbook, (2007). The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office states that 84% of the Afghanistan is Sunni Muslim (FCO, 2008).
49 In the 2001 Census, Christian, Jewish and ‘no religion’ each represent less than 1% of the religions practised by Afghan-born residents in England.
50 Although Islam is the majority religion in Afghanistan, there are also Afghan Sikhs in the UK who, according to respondents, mostly live in the Southall area of London. They have established their own Gurudvara (Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar) in Southall and have a community association called the Afghan Ekta Society.
None of the respondents brought up issues of different subgroups or schools of thought within Sunni or Shi’a Islam. Those who were prompted said they were unaware of divisions amongst Afghans on religious lines.

There were mixed responses from respondents about the level of religiosity amongst Afghans in the UK. The picture they provide is one of a complex interplay between denominations, levels of religious practice, secularism and cultural factors. According to them, religiosity can range between people who attend mosque regularly, to those who are of Muslim heritage and who may go to the mosque only for significant occasions (such as *Eid* or for a funeral), but who consider themselves as largely ‘secular’ Muslims. Additionally there are also those people who adhere to communist ideology who do not consider themselves religious at all. One of the respondents described the different religious leanings of Afghan Muslims in the UK as follows:

> When I say ‘Sunni Muslims’, it doesn’t mean they are all practicing. They are Muslim-born but they are secular Muslims, like me for example. But when it comes to what sort of leanings within Islam, there are of course people who are more traditional, there are some who are a little Islamist who believe in political Islam. Then there are people who fought in the mujahideen… Then you’ve got the left-wing people, people who are with the leftist organisations who do not consider themselves Muslim at all – pro-communist or former communists themselves. When it comes to the Shi’a there are people who support the Iranian regime but then you have Shi’a secularists as well.51

The majority of respondents in our sample did not describe themselves as devout Muslims, though it should be noted that these respondents are not necessarily representative of all Afghans in the UK. Some in the younger age group said that they had never been to a mosque and did not intend to. Their views appear to contradict a suggestion made by some of the older respondents that more young people are becoming overtly religious. However, because of the small number of young people interviewed, it is possible that both views are valid. But it was not only the younger Afghans who questioned the saliency of religion for Afghans. Older Afghans also suggested that only a small minority of Afghans in London go to the mosque on a regular basis:

> It depends on the generation how devout Afghans are about going to the mosque. I could say maybe three per cent of the Afghan community goes regularly to mosque, especially on Fridays. Maybe five per cent pray at home and don’t go to mosque. The rest, the majority, they are Muslim but they don’t go to the mosque regularly. It’s the older ones and the younger ones who seem to go. Some of the younger ones are very strict with their practices.52

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51 Afghan community interviewee: Male London 30s.
52 Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 30s.
As stressed earlier, it is not possible to come to any firm conclusions about the levels of religiosity within the broader Afghan community on the basis of the personal experiences and preferences of this small group of respondents. Nevertheless, the majority appear to be strongly tied to Afghan culture and traditions, and elements of the Islamic faith and Afghan culture are believed to be strongly interlinked. A number of respondents, both young and old mentioned the interaction between cultural practices and religion, suggesting that many people are culturally Muslim as opposed to being devout believers. In the words of one younger Afghan:

*Afghans portray themselves as very religious but they’re not really. Culture is more important to them.*\(^{53}\)

An older Afghan also suggested that the reasons for going to mosques may be as much social as religious. She suggested:

*It is because they are looking for their own people, understandably. By going to the mosque they are looking for an escape from the outside world and closeness with their own people… The reason they go to the mosque, especially those who come here and can’t speak the language, is to feel at home.*\(^{54}\)

Afghans in this study primarily attend the North London Central Mosque in Finsbury Park. Due to population dispersal, Afghans also use a mosque in Neasden and an Islamic cultural centre in Deptford. Other religious spaces mentioned include local mosques throughout London. In the past Afghans attended mosques established by other communities, including contributing to the building of mosques in collaboration with other Muslim groups\(^{55}\). However Afghan cultural practices, particularly funereal rites, differ significantly from those of other Muslim communities, and this factor is thought to have contributed significantly to the development of separate mosques for the community. It certainly seems to have been a strong influential factor in the decision to build the Afghan mosque in Neasden. However, perceived problems do not just centre on differing rituals and practices. A respondent described how Afghans faced pressure and discrimination from other Muslims:

*[Afghans] were going to [mosque x]. Unfortunately there was a type of discrimination by the imam. First they were saying that Afghans were mainly Communists and therefore weren’t allowed to go to that mosque. Then they were saying if you are coming for a funeral, you have to stay for prayers and some people don’t want to do that, to pray five times a day. So they [the imams] started stopping people from coming. So one of the reasons to build this mosque in Neasden was to provide a place for funerals.*\(^{56}\)

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\(^{53}\) Afghan community interviewee: Male London 20s.

\(^{54}\) Afghan community interviewee: female London 30s.

\(^{55}\) Mosques by their nature are not open only to one group of Muslims and the ‘Afghan mosque’ in Neasden is also used by Somalis living nearby but it was built by Afghans using money obtained through Afghan fundraising.

\(^{56}\) Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 40s.
The mosque in Neasden was also described as a place for Afghans to go for celebratory events such as Eid, Now Ruz (Afghan and Iranian New Year) and marriage rites, though some respondents felt it is too small, and that at Eid there is not enough room to fit everyone inside. The Neasden mosque is seen as important for collective Afghan community events, but for daily or Friday prayers, attending a local mosque is regarded as more convenient and acceptable.

8.4 Language

Lack of English language skills amongst the first generation, and women in particular, was identified by respondents as one of the key challenges for the Afghan community. The effects of not speaking the host language are thought to be wide ranging. The majority of respondents spoke about the problems encountered without adequate English skills, such as a lack of employment opportunities and the difficulties in becoming more fully involved with wider UK society. This was also an issue that was raised in focus groups when asked about community challenges in relation to access to public services. For women who are at least nominally the carers of children, a lack of English language skills can also have negative impacts on communication within the family. With the children learning English as their primary tongue, their mothers are often ‘left behind’.

A younger respondent highlighted the communication problems caused due to the poor English language skills amongst the older generation on the one hand, and the younger generation’s poor skills in their parents’ language. A few respondents also suggested that the inability of parents to speak English can lead to some children becoming alienated from and, in some cases, ashamed of their families as they strive towards being more integrated with the wider UK society.

Some translation services are available to the community but the majority of respondents expressed the need to be independent of translators by learning English. Many felt that until there were more English classes for adults, teenagers and women, levels of integration will remain relatively low for many Afghans. Many also expressed concerns about language education provision, and what they perceived as the government’s position on language and citizenship:

On the one hand the government is demanding that people take tests in English and learn English properly, but at the same time they are also cutting funding for ESOL [English as a second language] classes. This is a ridiculous situation. I think there is a need to make the community learn English but they have to provide the resources and classes, and at times that are suitable, for example for parents or people who have to go to work. I am in favour of the citizenship tests but not at the same time as cutting classes.\(^57\)

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\(^57\) Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 30s.
In response to the need for English classes, some organisations offer language programmes. However many of these are aimed at children rather than teenagers and adults. The difficulties caused by a lack of programmes for women, some of whom are illiterate in their own language, may be compounded by their family and spousal attitudes (see 9.2).

Whilst most respondents were aware that English language ability has positive consequences for employment and integration, some respondents were concerned that UK-born Afghan Muslims will be unlikely to continue the linguistic traditions from Afghanistan, which are felt to be important both for the preservation of culture, as well as for the level of communication between generations. As it is, young UK-born Afghans are more likely to listen to or watch British programmes than those born in Afghanistan. Some who are bilingual still prefer to communicate mainly in English.

Many respondents believe that the teaching of both Afghan and English is necessary in assisting the integration of young children. As one respondent explained:

*Teaching them their language, keeping them in touch with their history, culture and tradition [through supplementary language schools] can make the transition to a new culture more smooth and can ease the concerns of their parents.*

Such teaching is also seen to be of assistance to the older generation. A few respondents who work in educational and community settings suggested that English and Afghan language classes, poetry classes and homework support clubs are all a means of bringing people together, which helps with integration as well as in keeping the traditional cultures alive.
9 Intra-community dynamics

9.1 Intergenerational issues

In common with most new migrant communities, intergenerational differences are a key issue and concern for Afghans in the UK, and according to some respondents, the biggest problem the Afghan community faces internally. Respondents stressed that intergenerational differences are not unique to Afghans, but common to people of all backgrounds, including the host population. However, they felt that for the Afghan community these differences have been exacerbated by the migration process. Most respondents pointed to the speed with which Afghan children and young people had learnt English, and how they had integrated more fully into British society and culture than their parents. Some made reference to the idea of children ‘getting ahead’ of their parents, either because their parents stayed at home and did not interact with British people, or because they were on benefits, or were working so many hours in low-skilled jobs such as mini-cab driving or pizza delivery that they did not have time to go to English classes.

This idea of children ‘getting ahead’ has a number of important implications for intergenerational communication and the wellbeing of both generations. Older Afghans felt that as parents they did not get the respect that they should get from their children. They also worried about their children becoming too ‘westernised’ in their concerns and not thinking enough about family or group priorities. For their part, younger Afghans felt that their parents and other older Afghan migrants did not understand what it is like to grow up in Britain. Many of the issues raised by young respondents centre on tensions relating to the extent to which both young people and older Afghan migrants should adopt British culture or seek to preserve their existing practices:

_I think that it is difficult for the older generation to understand the youth. In London people are allowed to live the way they are, so the older generation don’t necessarily change their culture very much. So it’s hard for them when they see the younger generation changing, as they think that because they haven’t changed the youth shouldn’t either; whereas it’s hard for the youth not to change because they’ve grown up here._

Whilst a majority of the older generation fear that young people are losing their Afghan culture and identity, a few respondents suggested that for some people and parents with a more ‘relaxed’ attitude towards Islamic practice, the perceptible trend towards greater religiosity amongst UK-born Afghan Muslims is also causing tensions within families. One respondent described how many children are forced into adopting dual identities due to the demands of their families and the outside world:

59 As described in the previous chapter, many respondents noted the problem of downward mobility, where Afghans with academic or professional qualifications were unable to find suitable work in the UK. At the same time, some Afghans in the UK, particularly those who grew up in Afghanistan during the war may have few or no educational qualifications, having missed out on the opportunity to go to school because of conflict.

60 Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 20s.
Some families are very strict and their children have to play two roles. Inside the house they are Afghan and outside they are European. I think this is bad for them as it brings in dishonesty and lies. This is the biggest problem. And I understand it from the parents’ side too because they grew up in a completely different culture. It is painful if a girl comes home and says this is my boyfriend. Some families may be lucky, but most families have problems with their children and the children have problems with their parents.61

Younger respondents claimed that by using Afghan identity as a form of control, and by telling them what not to do because they are Afghan, older people are contributing to younger people resenting their Afghan background. They also criticised them for giving young people a distorted picture of what it means to be Afghan. They suggested that by focussing on political and ethnic divisions instead of the positive aspects of Afghan culture, the older generation has given younger Afghans a very negative perception about their culture. As the following respondent explained:

Everyone wants to be part of something that’s fantastic! But the older generation don’t transfer the good bits of Afghan culture. When they tell their children about what it means to be Afghan it’s always negative: it’s “Afghans do not have a girlfriend/boyfriend before marriage”, or “Afghans do not hang out with black people”. This is nothing to do with Afghan culture. And then at the same time young people see all these negative pictures of Afghanistan on the news, Afghanistan as a dirty, muddy, dangerous place. How can they feel positive about it? 62

Contrary to young people’s views about the older generation not understanding what it is like for them, older respondents showed a high level of understanding about the pressures that young people are expected to negotiate as a result of cultural conflict. Most of the older respondents were aware of these problems but unsure about how to address them. Some Afghan Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) have tried to reach out to younger Afghans through hosting sports tournaments, supplementary schools, mother-tongue classes and cultural events aimed at children and youth, but from what younger respondents said, it appears that misunderstandings and tensions between generations are likely to continue.

9.2 Women

When asked an open question about the position of women in the Afghan community, respondents raised a number of issues that are detailed in this section. Respondents of all ages in the women’s focus group expressed the view that Afghan women face particular difficulties in negotiating a place for themselves in the UK. Language difficulties and multiple pressures on women and girls to behave in a certain way limit their ability to

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61 Afghan community interviewee: Female, London, 30s.
engage in many Afghan and wider community activities. Isolation for women without childcare support who stay at home with the children is compounded by not being able to go to language classes or participate in other activities. Some women are said to be forbidden from learning English by their husbands, and many who are free to attend find English classes too difficult because of not being literate in their mother tongue.

A number of respondents highlighted the issue of the control exerted by husbands over their wives, either indirectly by making them stay at home in order to look after children, or by directly forbidding them from going out. A view expressed by one of the focus group respondents, and endorsed by other participants, was that the exposure of single males to ‘British’ culture when they first arrived without their wives and families may be a factor contributing to the reluctance many men feel about allowing their wives and daughters to mix in a society which they perceive as ‘free and loose’.

The issue of ‘transnational’ marriages, where a young single man in the UK arranges to have a spouse brought over from Afghanistan also causes difficulties for some women, although this is not a problem that just affects women coming over for marriage purposes from Afghanistan. Respondents pointed out that these women are living in the UK on a spouse’s visa and are often completely dependent on their husbands, which results in them feeling that they have little option but to acquiesce to their husband’s demands.

A small number of respondents thought that public authorities are partly to blame in perpetuating the powerless and dependent position of women. They argued that the authorities should be ‘stricter’ about women attending English classes, perhaps even making English classes compulsory so that attendance is not left to the discretion of fathers and/or husbands. As the following respondent suggests:

*I would say 50% of the wives here aren’t allowed by their husbands to go to English classes. That is why sometimes it happens that a husband can get citizenship and a wife cannot. The system doesn’t work. If it was compulsory for all adults to attend then the husband would have to allow his wife to go.*

63 Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 30s.

There were mixed responses to the issue of women going outside the home. Most interviewees and focus group respondents thought that it was wrong for women to be isolated from the outside world, but as illustrated by the following quote by a male interviewee, there are some people who are not sure that it is such a bad thing as it reflects cultural norms in Afghanistan:

*There are definitely some cases where they may be forced to stay at home. I’m not sure how widespread this is. But the tradition and the family culture requires that they should stay at home. I’m not sure if this is a problem for them, because it is also what they would do if they were back in Afghanistan too. So the fact that they’re in the UK doesn’t make any difference for them.*

64 Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 30s.
Given all these pressures and constraints, it is difficult for most women to play an active role in the public life of the community. Although there are some women who are active in the RCOs, it is rare for them to be in positions of leadership. Respondents also suggested that the male dominance of many RCOs stops women from going to them for assistance concerning anything that might be considered private or ‘dishonourable’, such as domestic violence or separation/divorce:

*If women face problems in their marriage they don’t go to the Afghan community organisations, they go to British organisations for help. All the organisations are run by men so it’s difficult for women to get their help.*

However, even this is not felt to be an easy option. The problem is that interpreters are usually male, and also from the same community as them, which even makes it difficult for women to talk about their problems to English-speaking professionals outside their community. Only one Afghan RCO in London emerged in our work as being managed by a woman and catering specifically for female clients. It is also difficult to get young women involved in youth organisations. Apart from the traditional taboos about women being involved in life outside the home, the issue of mixed environments such as youth clubs pose particular problems for the participation of young women. A male community worker described his experience of trying to get girls involved in a youth organisation as follows:

*To be honest, getting girls involved in our organisation was really difficult at the beginning. I really struggled to encourage them. One issue is whether their family trusts them. The other thing is that the attitude of the Afghan boys may not always be good and right. It’s not always an appropriate place for them to be and the boys always outnumber the girls at events. But I have to say the girls in our organisation make it difficult too, I can’t spend all my time trying to persuade them to take a more active part. But they have their own problems too. Their families worry about the problem of them being talked about. It even happens about me, and I’m a guy, but it doesn’t affect me as much as the girls. When they get married, it will be a problem for them in the future with their husbands, and with their husband’s family.*

Domestic violence remains a taboo subject in many communities, and Afghans are no exception. However, the impact of domestic violence on women was raised by a number of respondents, although one RCO manager pointed out that domestic violence is not just directed towards women, and highlighted the fact that he also had experience of male clients coming for help. However, due to dependency, isolation and other societal/cultural pressures, respondents suggest that women are less likely to be able to escape from a violent relationship. It is clear that whilst domestic violence affects the Afghan community as much as it does most ethnic minority and mainstream British communities, there is a great reluctance to acknowledge and address the issue within the Afghan community.

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65 Afghan community interviewee: Female, London, 30s.

One respondent described the situation of a client who wanted to separate from her husband because of violent abuse, but was persuaded not to by other members of her community:

_That was getting support because we referred her to the appropriate services. She was going to separate from the husband but the community made it too difficult for her. It happens a lot that women drop the case against abusive husbands half way because they have been told by people in the community that it's not the right way for an Afghan woman to deal with these problems._67

Another respondent described a friend’s attempts to educate people about domestic violence and the situation of female victims as follows:

_An Afghan friend of mine ran a workshop for women and she started talking about domestic violence and everyone just walked out. They just wouldn’t talk about it. It’s hushed up. For most women here I think it’s that situation, like that dream where you try to run and you can’t move; it’s like that. There’s all the opportunity around and they’re just so isolated, so cut off from it, and the only ones who can help them are the ones that are hurting them, the ones in the community._68

Some respondents questioned the attitudes of public service providers and claimed that due to misplaced political correctness or cultural relativism, many make bad judgements with regards to Afghan women that are harmful to their interests. Two examples of this were given by a younger respondent to illustrate this point:

_I know this girl who didn’t go to school from 15 to 17 and every time the truancy people came to her house the parents said that she couldn’t go to school because she was on a waiting list for an all-girls school because they were strict Muslims. In reality it doesn’t matter if you’re strict Muslim or not, what matters is that the local authority just assumed that being Muslim or being Afghan makes it OK for this child to be out of school for that long._69

_Another example… doctors let in-laws or husbands accompany women to their appointment, so there are women who can’t access contraceptives for example. Their in-laws are controlling their fertility and their reproductive health and this happens because doctors in London make assumptions about the Afghan culture. They wouldn’t do that if a white woman came in and her husband did all the talking._70

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67 Afghan community interviewee: Female, London, 30s.
68 Afghan community interviewee: Female, London, 20s.
69 Afghan community interviewee: Female, London, 20s.
70 Afghan community interviewee: Female, London, 20s.
Clearly, Afghan women in the UK face significant challenges, with very little support available to them outside their homes and immediate families. The lack of English language skills, marital and parental control, and social taboos relating to the perceived role and expected behaviours of women, leave many vulnerable and isolated from public life and interaction with the wider UK society. On a more positive note, some respondents felt that the situation is improving slowly, and believe that as younger Afghans who have been to school in the UK growing up, the situation for women and girls will get better.

9.3 Cohesion and integration issues

Issues relating to integration came up repeatedly in connection with a number of themes addressed during the interviews, particularly with regards to intergenerational relations, the isolation of women, and wider problems faced by the community. All respondents were in favour of improving integration of Afghans into UK society and believed that only a small minority of hardliners are against integration. Three key themes concerning integration emerged in interviews and focus groups. Firstly, integration processes were not seen as having been very successful to date. Secondly, respondents did not feel that all Afghans in the UK understand the meaning of integration. Thirdly, many felt that for integration to be successful efforts have to be made on both sides.

A lot of factors are believed to stand in the way of social interaction between Afghans and the wider UK society. For most respondents, language learning and integration were inextricably linked, and strong views were expressed about the role of interpreters and English classes. Views were mixed about the degree to which they should be used as this can lead to dependence. Some thought that a distinction should be made between those who are in real need of interpreters (new arrivals and the elderly), and those who should not have access to interpreters (young people and those who have been in the UK for some time) in order to encourage them to become more fluent and comfortable using English. Some of the latter group suggested that if the Government were to save money on interpreters, it could put more resources into English classes.

According to some respondents, differences in lifestyles and work patterns, and different social/cultural norms mean that the opportunities for mixing and exchange are very limited, especially for older Afghans. They suggested that for all these reasons, older Afghans in particular do not feel part of the British community, and are consequently always thinking of ‘home’, which in turn reinforces the feeling of not being British. One male respondent illustrated how these differences in lifestyles and cultural norms can impact on integration:

Most [older] people feel that they are rejected from mainstream British activities. They are scared. It is a bit different for young people; they can join a sports team or meet people at school. But a person in his 40s cannot go to a social club or integrate in that way. It is mainly because of cultural differences, because the majority of Afghans don’t drink alcohol. If you go to a social club you have to have at least an
orange juice and the Afghan people don’t really have a culture of spending money in that way. Instead they spend a lot of money entertaining people in their homes. They go to their friends’ homes. Also they work hard, they get home late, and they have not got a lot of money. Whilst the mainstream community relaxes on Friday and Saturday night, this community works for them by driving mini cabs, working in restaurants/takeaways etc. So there is little chance for them to socialise.  

Whilst there is a common perception that British society is quite closed to newcomers and ‘foreigners’, some respondents suggested that people in the Afghan community should make the first advance and not wait to be invited in. Younger respondents in particular stressed that some degree of cultural change is necessary, and that Afghans need to be more proactive in building relationships with the wider UK community. According to one respondent, just because it is not part of British culture to invite neighbours to dinner, it does not mean that Afghans should not. He suggested that developing and maintaining close relations with one’s neighbours is a normal part of Afghan culture that should be utilised to aid the process of integration.

Many respondents talked about a lack of understanding within the Afghan community of what integration means. Views expressed by different respondents indicate a wide range of perspectives that exist within the community on the subject. Although respondents all thought it was a positive process, they felt that there are many people in the community who see integration in a negative light because they think it means giving up their culture, language and values completely. This is a commonly held perception, which one respondent felt had led to integration being thought of as ‘a controversial term’. However, a few respondents challenged the perception that British society requires everyone to assimilate into the majority culture by highlighting the openness and acceptance of cultural difference in British society, which allows everyone the opportunity to express their cultural identity in the wider society without much judgement:

I think the UK community is quite multicultural. There aren’t too many problems because you can live your life the way you want to. It’s quite relaxed, for example, I could go out in Afghan clothes and no-one would probably notice. That’s quite good, especially for the older people.

Some respondents stressed that alongside sharing aspects of their own culture with mainstream society, Afghans also need to adapt to the cultural mores of the new society and culture they find themselves in. However, most believed that integration needs to be a two-way process, and some of the respondents were highly critical about the understanding of wider British society about what integration entails. An RCO manager highlighted the expectations and demands regarding integration that the ‘host’ community makes on migrant and minority communities as follows:

71 Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 30s.
72 Afghan community interviewee: Female, London, 20s.
73 Focus group participant, male.
For different people ‘integration’ means different things. I think more needs to be done to make integration clearer. For the host community it means that foreigners or refugees have to learn English. Or they have to do this, or they have to do that. However, for us it also means equal opportunities for employment, housing and education. There are lots of definitions floating around but in my opinion it has to come from both sides, it’s not just the Afghan community that has to learn English, that has to do all the work, that has to learn everything about the British community. I understand that as foreigners we have to do more to prove ourselves but it shouldn’t all be down to us. The host community also needs to open the doors and welcome people. If you try to integrate but other people don’t welcome your efforts, it’s easy to get discouraged.⁷⁴

Some respondents felt that British people have negative perceptions about Afghans based on media coverage of the Taliban, and that integration would be easier if there was greater awareness in wider society about Afghanistan and Afghans living in the UK. They felt that alongside the efforts of Afghans themselves, British institutions such as schools, the media and government should work to address such negative images and raise awareness about Afghans living in the UK. One respondent made a strong plea for multiculturalism and for a move away from narrowly defined nationalisms, and stressed the need for all cultures and nationalities to feel accepted and part of British society:

If Afghans feel an active part of this country they will be patriots. I know that the government spends a huge amount on cohesion and integration, it’s a long-term project...people need to overcome their English, Welsh or Scottish nationalism, they need to accept Britishness and multiculturalism. It is a global world and if we want London to be a capital of the world we have to accept multiculturalism. There is no place for nationalism. If the Afghans find this as their own country they will work hard and make this their country, not just work to make money to send back.⁷⁵

9.4 Politics

Afghans associated with different political groups from across the spectrum of Afghan politics have been forced into exile over the last 30 years, and many have settled in the UK. As a community with a high proportion of refugees fleeing extended conflict, political ideology is a particularly sensitive topic for Afghans in the UK. Someone who fled the Communists and supported the mujahedeen may be living next to someone else who supported the Communists and fled the civil war. This often leads to divisions and distrust between people in the community:

The Afghans have brought their own political and ideological divisions to London. The 30 years of war has made everyone suspicious. During the cold war everyone had to be working for someone, or be behind someone else. Nobody trusts anyone,

⁷⁴ Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 30s.
⁷⁵ Afghan community interviewee: Female, London, 30s.
and this further increases suspicion, because everyone knows they can never get the support from the whole community so they gather their own people around them. So those people who were part of one regime in Afghanistan have their own circle, and those who opposed that regime have their own separate circle. This is what is preventing people becoming closer or stronger as one community.\footnote{Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 30s.}

It also appears from the interviews that ethnicity and political ideology are often intertwined. Many respondents noted the exploitation of ethnic differences by political elites in Afghanistan, and were of the view that those in power had used ethnicity as a tool to gain the support of their ethnic constituency against other groups.

### 9.5 Mental health issues

An important issue highlighted by respondents working in community organisations was the reporting of high levels of depression within the community, particularly among the first generation and older people. Many are perceived as having become isolated from wider society, and their depression remaining undiagnosed. Consequences of conflicts in Afghanistan and post-traumatic stress, coupled with cultural differences and a lack of language skills were some of the reasons suggested for the scale of the problem. Members of the first generation are thought by some respondents to be in danger of becoming part of a lost generation of Afghan refugees who exist in a state of limbo, unable to live in the present, and constantly looking to the past. At the same time such individuals are also seen as being quite resilient, possessing strengths and skills, which if tapped could be of great benefit to the community and to wider UK society. Due to the lack of existing research, it is impossible to indicate how widespread the problem is, and this is an area that could benefit from focussed research by health and social welfare agencies.

### 9.6 Young People

In addition to some of the intergenerational issues highlighted above, anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a growing concern relating to the increasing number of very young people and children arriving as unaccompanied asylum seekers in the UK. Respondents were reluctant to speak about how these children have arrived in the UK. Likewise, a children’s guardian who has worked with some of these children confirmed that he has found it difficult to get the children to talk about this issue. Respondents suggested that many receive inadequate care by social services, and that most are being housed by relatives who themselves are suffering from overcrowding and a lack of resources. According to respondents, children may find themselves having to move from home to home as families try to accommodate them. According to anecdotal evidence, those who have been dispersed to foster homes in different parts of the country are often completely isolated from any regular contact with the community or other Afghan children. It is not possible for us to make an assessment of the scale of the problem, and we believe that this is an area that could benefit from further research.
10 Media

10.1 Perceptions of the UK media

Many respondents thought that the coverage of Afghanistan and Afghans by the UK media is disproportionately negative, and that it serves to reinforce stereotyped images of men with beards and turbans and women in *burkhas*.

However, beyond the coverage relating to Afghanistan, respondents were quite positive about the quality of the British media on the whole, particularly the BBC World Service and website.

Almost every respondent mentioned the importance of the BBC World Service in Persian/ Farsi and Pashto to the Afghan Muslim population in the UK. It was seen as the first port of call for Afghan news and current affairs for Afghans in the UK (and in other places), however respondents suggested that its importance has lessened since the post-Taliban media boom in Afghanistan, which has led to a massive increase in the availability of Afghan and other media. However, the BBC is still popular, although one younger Afghan stated he had stopped using the website because recently he had spotted a number of mistakes on it – something that others also noted and discussed via online social networking cites:

> The BBC has been making a lot of faults recently, I’ve stopped reading it. First of all they have no respect...British people should know better...They have such a long history with the Afghans – over 100 years of history. Then the BBC comes in and calls Afghans ‘Afghanis’. How can they do that? They are supposed to be the experts. In English it is Afghan, only the currency is the Afghani. People are discussing this on Facebook, so it’s not just me; everyone else feels the same way.

10.2 Media consumption

As highlighted above, the BBC World Service (in Pashto and Persian/Farsi) and website continue to be important media sources for Afghans in the UK. The radio is thought to be more important for the older generation, many of whom cannot read Persian/Pashto script, whereas the website is more popular with younger people. For many older Afghans, language difficulties mean that Afghan or Indian media are more appealing than the British media.

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77 *Burkhas* or *chadoris* are all-enveloping cloak-like garments that cover most of the face and body. The image of an Afghan woman in a sky-blue burkha has become an iconic image of Afghanistan; an image that many Afghans in the diaspora find highly problematic.

78 This was also the case amongst many Afghans living in California (researcher’s previous fieldwork observation) and even in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries (according to respondents).

Afghans utilise a number of mass media forms, the most popular in London being an Afghan satellite channel from Los Angeles called Ariana Afghanistan TV, which is popular for music and films. RTV, an Afghan government channel launched in early 2006 from Kabul, broadcasts 24 hours a day and provides educational news, and entertainment programmes in English, Dari and Pashto languages. Its production studio and broadcast station are located in Kabul and provide digital terrestrial and satellite transmission to both urban and rural areas of Afghanistan. As well as dramas, the channel broadcasts classical music videos, political discussions, and a vox box live on the streets of Kabul, which has proved very popular with Afghans tuning in to see images of their homeland. The channel has also been picked up in Britain and was said to be popular among Afghans living in Britain. According to one respondent there is potentially a new channel start up, which is due to be broadcasting from London soon.

In addition to Afghan satellite channels, large numbers of Afghans in the UK also watch other Asian satellite channels, in particular Indian entertainment channels.

A few older respondents expressed concerns about the way in which some Afghan channels can promote ethnic differences. Despite its evident popularity, the Ariana channel was seen as particularly ‘political’ in this way by some people. One respondent described it as:

> Horrible TV… they put oil on the flame, and they try to raise all these issues that belong to the past, they have nothing to offer the present.  

Some younger respondents were also concerned about the negative impact that Afghan channels might have. These concerns do not focus on the promotion of internal ethnic differences, but on the way that they can impact the integration of Afghans into British society. They felt that these channels and media always encourage older Afghans to think of Afghanistan as ‘home’ rather than about establishing themselves in the UK.

The younger generation mostly views or listens to the UK media and widely uses internet services such as Facebook. Young Afghans are seen to be keen social networkers, and Facebook is a popular source of networking. For those older Afghans who are able to access web based media, email lists allow them to sign up on-line to news digest and news stories.

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81 Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 30s.
11 Links with country of origin

11.1 Travel

There are still strong transnational ties between Afghans in the UK and Afghanistan, and kinship relations shaped by family obligations and financial responsibilities are integral to these links. Most respondents talked about the increased ease of travelling to and from Afghanistan since 2001 for those who have the appropriate immigration paperwork. They reported that there are more affordable flights from a greater range of countries, and that most of them had been back to Afghanistan to visit family or to look for jobs.

Unlike countries with more established diasporas and greater governmental capacity, the Afghan government has been unable to engage in a significant way with Afghans living in the UK, although it has made some effort to reach out to Afghan-Americans through the Afghan embassy in Washington, which organises investment ‘roadshows’ and other events designed to encourage diaspora involvement in Afghanistan. However, new staff at the Afghan Embassy in London have started to try to increase communication between the Embassy and Afghans in the UK through attendance at community events with some positive results, as described by this young respondent:

> Now that people know they can go to the embassy too they have more of a connected feeling. The community organisations are split in some ways but the Embassy is like the country, so anyone can feel connected to it.82

11.2 Remittances

It is evident from interviews that a high level of remittances are sent to Afghanistan, despite the fact that for many Afghans in the UK sending money to relatives is extremely difficult as they themselves struggle with unemployment and benefits. Whilst there is a lot of anecdotal evidence, there is little information about how much is sent and how. In a 2005 report, *UK Remittance Market*, funded by the Department for International Development (DFID), with data and analysis provided by the UK Remittances Working Group, no information was provided on Afghans in the UK.

Those sending money back from Europe and North America are likely to use the **hawala** system (an informal method of money transfer involving a third party in the destination country) which is well developed in Afghanistan.83 Although there is scant evidence in commissioned reports, the vast majority of respondents emphasised the importance of sending money home.

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82 Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 20s.

What is evident from the interviews is that money raised and sent back plays a significant role in the local development of the country and remittances are said to provide an important lifeline for many people in Afghanistan. For some there was no perceived boundary between family in the UK and the wider family in Afghanistan, while for others who are unable to bring their family into the UK, sending money to them is seen as essential.

Some respondents suggested that there may be differences in remittance levels between young men who are in the UK on their own, who usually have significant financial responsibilities for family back home, and Afghans living in the UK with families who they have to support on a day-to-day basis here.

It was also noted that financial support is considered very important because of the instability and insecurity for people left in Afghanistan. As well as assisting their own families, some respondents talked of fundraising for charities working in Afghanistan, whether through small-scale private organisations, or for large international organisations such as Red Crescent societies. A respondent described the different ways community members contribute in cash or in kind for charitable purposes, such as this fundraising concert held for widows in Afghanistan:

A couple of weeks ago there was a big fundraising concert for widows in Afghanistan, which raised £6,000. People also gave in-kind donations too, for example, the venue owner was Afghan so he only charged cost price, no profit, and the person who brought the sound system did the same thing. And any costs for staging the event the community leaders, you know, the people who are established here, they paid for the expenses so all the money raised went direct to Afghanistan.84

11.3 Political links

Respondents spoke of very strong bonds and links, both social and economic, with Afghanistan through kinship networks, but political transnational links were less apparent. Some respondents mentioned that those Afghans in the UK who had previously worked in Afghan politics are still involved, and that some had returned to Afghanistan to try and get jobs in the post-2001 government. Although few reported having direct or strong political links themselves, many are, perhaps unsurprisingly, avid consumers of political news and current affairs from Afghanistan, especially older Afghans.

84 Afghan community interviewee: Female, London, 30s.
11.4 Business and commerce

Some respondents reported that Afghans in the UK are involved in transnational business and commerce. It is possible to buy Afghan products such as dried fruit and nuts, carpets and semi-precious stones (such as lapis lazuli) in Afghan shops in London. However it is largely unknown how widespread this kind of business is. Afghanistan has traditionally been an important trading country and prior to the 2001 conflict many Afghans worked as traders, importing and exporting goods between Afghanistan, neighbouring countries and further afield. A respondent suggested that the post-2001 reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan have provided an enhanced opportunity for Afghans to get involved in importing goods from the West and the Middle-East to Afghanistan.

11.5 Return home

Given the poor socio-economic situation of some parts of the community, coupled with integration issues faced by sections of the community in the face of perceived hostility from wider society, the thought of returning home to Afghanistan is an attractive one for many in the community, if not one that is immediately feasible. Combined with a perception that the country may at some point become stable and safe enough to return to, there was evidence from some respondents of an emerging interest in returning and assisting in the rebuilding of the country should circumstances allow this.
12 Civil Society

12.1 Overview

Two different types of Afghan civil society can be identified in the UK. Firstly, there are private ‘informal’ networks of individuals from similar backgrounds and/or with similar interests, who meet and hold social events such as poetry readings or political discussions at each other’s homes or in cafés or other public spaces. They are funded by the participants themselves and sometimes these informal groups and networks may get involved in larger scale projects, for example fundraising for Afghanistan or the building of the Afghan mosque in Neasden. Secondly, there are the more formal Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) which often have an office and charitable status, and which apply for funding from charitable foundations, local government and other grant-giving organisations. In reality there is some overlap between these two types of civil society organisations. For example, respondents working/volunteering in RCOs complained that although the funding for RCOs is officially from grants, it is never adequate, and that their operations often involve committee members and volunteers using their own money and providing substantial in-kind donations, a practice that was felt to be unsustainable in the long term.

The fact of conflict in Afghanistan has led to many internal divisions along ideological, regional, ethnic and linguistic lines, and Afghan community organisations in the UK tend to mirror these divisions to a considerable extent. A mapping study of Afghan community organisations in 2007 funded by the Society of Afghan Residents found that:

> Most of the existing organisations were formed by victims of conflict but during one of its less destructive phases. The older organisations are more likely to be based around political divisions and to have a core of members who came at a particular period for a particular political reason. Newer ones are more likely to be based around personalities and geography.85

These divisions were mentioned by some of the respondents in this study as well.

With numerous Afghan associations and clubs catering for specific groupings, many Afghan RCOs tend to duplicate each other’s programmes and compete for funding from the same sources. Respondents involved in civil society organisations highlighted this lack of coordination between different groups and RCOs as being detrimental to developing an effective level of service to the community. Attempts to build a representative umbrella organisation have so far not been very successful.86 The following comment by one community worker illustrates the problem highlighted by most respondents active in the voluntary sector:

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86 Afghan community respondent: Male, London, 40s.
There are different groups, some of them are just on paper, some meet once a month, once every 6 months, once every year. That is the problem with the Afghan community I think. It doesn’t have a proper structure, and there is no group that can invite the whole community on special occasions for example.\(^87\)

Following a meeting at the Afghan embassy, a new group called the Afghan Jirga was formed with the intention of establishing one group that could work with the embassy and communicate with all the associations in London. However, given the diversity of the Afghan population in London and England it is not surprising that its success as a representative body was questioned by some community groups and organisations in the study.

12.2 Types of organisations and services they offer

Afghan civil society infrastructure in the UK is dominated by community-based organisations or RCOs, without any dominant religiously informed organisations. As indicated above, the Afghan community in the UK is quite divided by political, ethnic and linguistic differences and consequently there are a large number of RCOs catering for different groups. Individuals can often travel across London to get to an RCO run by people they consider to be of a similar background to themselves. There are exceptions however, and some RCOs are seen as making a real effort to reach out to Afghans from a range of backgrounds. Respondents suggested that some of the older organisations are less open to young people, who therefore have more of a tendency to use mainstream services. However, some organisations are seen to be making visible efforts to be more welcoming and supportive towards younger Afghans.

RCOs programmes appear to be dictated by a combination of perceived community needs and funder priorities. The primary functions of these organisations are to serve as information/advice/referral points, organise cultural events, and to offer supplementary schooling. Community organisations also act as a bridge between the community and wider society, especially in helping to integrate newcomers to Britain who do not speak English, or who are unfamiliar with mainstream British systems and services. As a RCO manager explained:

*If we want [Afghans] to integrate into the mainstream society [community organisations] have to be a stepping stone. There is mainstream support available but it’s not suitable for the smaller newer minorities. They are not confident to use those services and they don’t know about them. [Community organisations] are like a step or a bridge for them to get involved in mainstream society. They can’t jump, they need these steps.*\(^88\)

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87 Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 30s.

88 Afghan community interviewee: Female London 30s.
Specific activities and services provided by RCOs include: advice about benefits, immigration, housing, education and employment, mother-tongue classes for children, English classes for adults, cultural events such as poetry readings and concerts, celebrations for Afghan New Year, *Eid*, and other events, group trips, sports activities, citizenship classes and health education.

Because of funding difficulties and the changing priorities of committee members, RCOs tend to come and go quite quickly. Many are established, operate for a while, and then disappear, sometimes reappearing as new funding becomes available. Others continue to operate an advice service with volunteer staff but do not run specific programmes due to lack of funding. Hence different RCOs are more or less visible to outsiders at different times, depending on funding availability and the networking capacity of committee members.

### 12.3 Key organisations

There are around 25 Afghan organisations in the UK. The following RCOs were identified as active and significant by community consultees and focus group participants in addressing community needs by respondents. The interviews and focus groups were held in London so the organisations mentioned serve those communities. Given these limitations and the instability of the sector described earlier it is important that public authorities and groups working with the population should understand the organisations that serve the community to enable effective engagement and service delivery.

- **Paiwand**
  Paiwand was set up in 2002 and provides a range of support services to Afghans in the UK. The organisation receives funding from the Big Lottery Fund, Paul Hamlyn Trust, Lloyds TSB, as well as Brent and Barnet Councils. Paiwand works in partnership with local schools, Citizens Advice Bureaus, refugee centres and legal aid services. Services include a women’s club, a youth programme, and workshops and seminars for the Afghan community on life in the UK. The organisation is supported by a large number of volunteers.

- **Eagle Eyes NGO**
  Eagle Eyes NGO (EENGO) provides help and support to Afghan and other disadvantaged groups from the Middle East, Africa and the former Soviet Union. Services include an information service, sports activities, translation and interpretation services, legal support, and community and arts events.

- **Society of Afghan Residents**
  SAR provides support and assistance to Afghan Refugees in the UK, particularly West London. It runs a youth club, supplementary school, elderly club and a women’s group.

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90 http://www.eagleeyesngo.org
91 http://www.sarinuk.com/
• **Afghan Association of London, Harrow**
  Based in Harrow, the Association serves people from across London. Its key activities include advice, information and support for the Afghan community, particularly refugees, asylum seekers and older people. It also caters for some Iranian people. It organises cultural/social events, health seminars, women’s group, youth/family work as well as offering cultural advice to statutory bodies. It also has a resource room for elderly people with bilingual books and chess.

• **British Afghan Women’s Society**
  The British Afghan Women’s Society is a charity organisation established to provide support and encouragement to Afghan and other refugee women and children in order to help them to integrate into British Society. The organisation offers sessions on food safety and catering, childcare for business and personal development. It also provides opportunities for networking, youth activities and drop-in services.

Other local organisations identified in London:

• Afghanistan and Asian Community Organisation, Peckham
• All Afghan Association, Hanwell
• Afghan Academy, Ealing
• Afghan Ekta Society (Afghan Sikh organisation), Southall.

Non-RCO civil society organisations identified by respondents as significant to the day-to-day lives of the Afghan community include:

• **Afghan Students Association UK (ASAUK)**
  Established in 2006, ASAUK has membership of Afghan students from around the UK. It promotes the importance of education within the Afghan community, as well as trying to foster unity within the Afghan diaspora. The group also runs a popular social networking page on Facebook with 200 members.

• The ‘Afghan Mosque’, Neasden
• Islamic Cultural Centre, Deptford
• The Refugee Council, Brixton
• Citizens’ Advice Bureau, multiple locations
• Age Concern, multiple locations.

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92 http://www.asa4uk.com/
93 http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2226897475
Regional groups identified through desktop review included:

- Afghan Youth and Family Association, Birmingham
- Society of Afghan Residents in Birmingham, Birmingham
- Afghan Community Association, Sheffield.

### 12.4 Key influencers

Given the profile of the Afghan population, there are real practical difficulties in identifying significant influencers and widely accepted leaders in the community. In light of the ethnic, linguistic and political differences within the Afghan diaspora, it is not surprising that respondents could not identify any one key influencer nationally or globally who would be considered influential by all Afghans in the UK, or even in any one area of London. Most respondents shared the views of this young respondent:

> Even if someone had all the qualities and skills to be a leader you’d never get everyone to follow them. It would always only be a particular section[^94].

Additionally, most were reluctant to provide names, though some of the younger respondents mentioned Afghans who are known internationally such as Khaled Hosseini (author of *The Kite Runner*), or some musicians and singers popular across the diaspora. Afghan embassy officials were also identified by some respondents as having improved engagement between the embassy and the UK Afghan community through attendance at community events.

At a local level, respondents felt that the types of people who would be influential in Afghanistan would also have influence in the UK, including elders, intellectuals, religious leaders, people with financial means, interpreters, RCO coordinators, or other people who know and have experience of the British system. Some people may be in more than one category.

### 12.5 Civic engagement and participation

The majority of respondents, without being prompted, were keen to stress at the outset the respect Afghans have for Britain, and their gratitude to the British government for providing them with asylum and supporting them while they establish themselves in the UK. Perhaps this was to ensure that any criticisms they expressed would be viewed within this wider context of overall appreciation of the support provided. However, most mentioned that there is also a high level of distrust among Afghans concerning British involvement in Afghanistan, an issue which was brought up consistently in discussion.

[^94]: Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 40s.
particularly when there were news reports of civilian casualties in Afghanistan. One respondent described how perceptions about UK foreign policy have a significant impact on the attitudes of Afghan people in Britain:

Following 9/11 the northern areas of Afghanistan made a huge contribution by supporting American troops to drive out the Taliban. However, the majority of aid doesn’t reach there and they don’t have key influencers or places in the government, which is dominated by those from the South. When money is not spent fairly it creates aggravation and people won’t support the British government. People criticise the British government and slowly lose trust in it.95

Another respondent stressed that this distrust is not necessarily linked to the British Government directly, but stems from the past history and experiences of Afghanistan in relation to ‘outsiders’:

In Afghanistan they don’t have a good experience. Outsiders have been to Afghanistan in the past and very few went as friends of the Afghan people. They went to control the country and destroy the country. There are many examples in the history of the country. Even if now they say they want to reconstruct the country people are suspicious.96

The respondent went on to suggest that given such suspicion, any aid or reconstruction initiatives supported by the government should be Afghan led so that people do not think there is some conspiracy or ulterior motive for intervention.

Perceptions about the Government’s attempts to return people to Afghanistan, not just failed asylum seekers but also unaccompanied young people when they reach 18 years old, is also believed to be having a negative impact on how the Afghan community views the British Government. Schemes such as the International Organisation for Migration’s (IOM’s) voluntary repatriation scheme were particularly criticised by some of the respondents. One interviewee said that the government’s focus on returning people to Afghanistan represented indirect discrimination when Afghanistan is in such a bad situation97.

Outside of criticisms of British involvement in Afghanistan and its broader foreign and immigration policies, views and perceptions about the government are changing. Some respondents suggested that over a period of time the community has developed a greater understanding and awareness of British political processes and the Government’s intentions, which has helped to overcome the initial fears and mistrust many people had. The experience of this respondent is illustrative of a theme touched upon by a number of interviewees:

95 Focus group participant, male.
96 Focus group participant, male.
97 Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 30s.
Five years ago I wanted nothing to do with politics, I was very suspicious of the British Government but now I know the government system here is very different to Afghanistan and I want to work with the government to help build this organisation [the organisation the individual works for], and finally I want to go back to Afghanistan to help re-build my country.98

The widely shared view amongst Afghans that their community is on the margins of UK society is thought to impact on levels of community engagement, with many believing that they and their organisations are largely invisible to government. At the level of engagement with local and public authorities, there is a considerable amount of contact between some RCOs and local authorities, mainly through refugee forums. Some RCOs mentioned that they had received support from local Members of Parliament and stressed the need to maintain good relationships with a range of public authorities in order to maintain support and funding. The older and established RCOs are in a better position to do this, and many have developed good relations with borough councils compared to newer organisations. Building relationships is also easier for those that operate in specific boroughs than for organisations that provide London-wide services. The latter organisations find it difficult to target their partnership and fund raising efforts as their activities range across a number of boroughs.

Much of the interaction with public authorities is shaped by personal contacts and relationships, and through ad hoc events rather than through structured channels for engagement and participation. People working/volunteering in RCOs mentioned attending occasional events organised by the Home Office or the Foreign Office aimed at minority communities in general rather than specific to the Afghan community. A number also reported attending community outreach events organised by the police immediately after 11 September 2001.

The need for stronger partnerships between institutions such as schools, social services and RCOs in order to promote integration processes was consistently highlighted by respondents from community organisations. One respondent spoke about the successful collaboration between his organisation and the police after a young Afghan man was murdered, and suggested that other public institutions should also work more with RCOs in this way. However, others representing organisations that have tried partnership working described some of the difficulties that can arise for small voluntary organisations stemming from the differing priorities of the partner organisations.

In relation to developing more formal and structured channels for communication and engagement with the Government and public authorities, the overwhelming view from all the respondents consulted was that the RCOs would be the most appropriate channel because of their understanding of and contacts within the community. However there was also a strong suggestion that they need more development, support and supervision to...
enables them to fulfil this role. However a small number of respondents disagreed with the majority view and felt that RCOs could actually reinforce segregation. They suggested that in order to avoid this, engagement should be through mainstream voluntary and public authorities:

*There is this political correctness that makes people think Afghans want to be segregated, and that’s not true. We don’t always have to go through the RCOs to work with Afghans. I always wonder why can’t English people work with Afghans? Why do the RCOs always have to be the gatekeepers?*

Similarly, another respondent noted that:

*There should be a distinction between services that are more appropriate to be organised by community organisations, and services that more appropriate to be provided by mainstream organisations. For example, I would like to see an Afghan go to a CAB [Citizens’ Advice Bureau] for advice rather than to a community-based organisation. If they go there they can meet a British person and have more familiarity with British culture.*

Some respondents also mentioned the role of the media, particularly the Afghan satellite channels or the BBC, as a route through which public authorities could engage with Afghan communities. They also suggested leaving leaflets or posters in Afghan shops or restaurants in order to reach a wider audience.

### 12.6 Community issues and capacity building needs

The view that the government and local authorities do not understand or acknowledge the distinct needs of the community, and hence continue to focus on the more established ethnic minority communities such as those from South Asia and the Caribbean is widespread. There was a suggestion that in order to recognise the distinctness of the Afghan community separate from other Asian communities, *Now Ruz* (Afghan New Year) celebrations would be an ideal event for local authorities to consider celebrating in order to support Afghan residents in the UK, particularly as it is celebrated by the vast majority of Afghans regardless of ethno-linguistic group. For example this respondent noted:

*You see the Indians they have Mela or Diwali, or there’s Carnival. It educates people about other cultures. If the Government did something for Now Ruz for example, that would be good. It does need an approach from a bigger organisation such as the Mayor’s office, and for it to be organised by an outside source to get people to cooperate. If it was in a central public space, organised by an outside organisation it would encourage non-Afghans to come and then they would be less scared of us.*

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100 Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 30s.
Although not directly asked about this, some respondents spontaneously raised the issue of extremists. They expressed the view that, whilst extremists are a small minority, there is a danger that disaffected people who feel rejected or unable to integrate into British society are getting drawn in by fringe elements at some mosques that are critical of the policies of the United Kingdom. They stressed that authorities should recognise the differences between communities on this issue, and work with each in ways that are appropriate to that particular community rather than using broad general approaches across the whole Muslim community. One respondent said:

*I think it’s important to work with the Afghan community on preventing violent extremism and to understand Afghan community needs. The Afghan community is completely different from Pakistani and Somali, they cannot treat us in the same way.*

Reference was made by some respondents to problems within the community that prevent it from establishing a significant political voice. These centre on the lack of co-operation between different political, ethnic and/or linguistic groupings, and on the issue of leadership. Most respondents felt that even if a strong umbrella organisation was to exist, it would be impossible to find one leader who could represent so many competing interests. Some respondents suggested that outside involvement in developing a community wide forum would be beneficial, but equally others felt that external involvement would be viewed with suspicion.

In common with most other ethnic minority communities, one of the main barriers to effective engagement and service provision highlighted by respondents was the lack of funding, or funding restrictions that make it harder for small voluntary sector organisations to compete with well-established local, national or regional organisations. In the words of one RCO manager:

*We have been operating for 4-5 years, running events, drop-in centre, a magazine, a supplementary school. We have a limited budget per year to do this and a small space. There is another ethnic minority organisation which has been around for many years – we have just arrived and need much more support. They don’t have language problems and know how to play the funding game. They steal our ideas and hire in consultants to get them more money. They have ten times the size of our budget each year, and the community is not that much bigger.*

Many small organisations were reported to be struggling to survive, and according to some respondents, many have started to disappear as a result. Respondents stressed that whilst larger organisations are more successful in raising funds, they are not able to address the local needs of small minority communities. Representatives of community organisations described the increasing difficulties they have in meeting the tighter funding criteria and restrictions of funding programmes. In the words of one RCO manager:

102 Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 30s.
103 Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 40s.
The terms and conditions are so strict that it makes it very difficult for a small organisation to achieve their funding. For example, you have to have this monitoring system, this evaluation process, this procedure, all these requires us to pay professionals to come and do this monitoring. It means that despite the needs of the community we can only apply for ‘small grants’, which really limits what we can do, and especially limits the continuity of what we do and makes it really difficult to have any long-term planning. It’s impossible to have a good strategy.\(^\text{104}\)

Respondents highlighted the potential for enhanced cooperation between funders and grantees, with more technical support provided by grant-givers. They felt that funders, including local authority funders, should have a greater responsibility for promoting engagement and for being more involved in the projects they fund.

Training to develop the education and organisation/project management skills of RCO staff and volunteers was identified as another key area of importance in enhancing the capacity of community organisations to respond to identified needs. Respondents who were associated with RCOs stressed that their biggest training need is in relation to developing skills in applying for funding, and in managing and monitoring any funding received. Others felt that training in providing services to the standards expected by local authorities could improve both the RCOs’ services to clients, as well as help enhance local authorities’ support for minority communities. For example one focus group respondent noted:

*I think the local authority should support them and train them to provide the services, and then buy those services from the organisation rather than giving them to another bigger organisation that doesn’t have the local or community knowledge. Probably they would save some money if they did this.*\(^\text{105}\)

Another area that is considered important is the provision of employment and entrepreneurial skills training for Afghans. It was pointed out that Afghans are traditionally an entrepreneurial people, but that in the UK they had become caught in a ‘benefits trap’ and become reliant on benefits, something that would not be acceptable in Afghanistan. Respondents noted the fear that some Afghans have about leaving the security of benefits to set up their own businesses, or to train in a new skill. This is partly because of language difficulties and a lack of awareness about business regulations, but also because of the lack of availability of appropriate skills training. Many of the respondents felt that training provided in partnership between RCOs and local training providers would help alleviate some of the fears people have about accessing such provision. Finally, some respondents indicated that imams may need support and training as many have poor English language skills and are not familiar with British policies and laws:

\(^{104}\) Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 30s.  
\(^{105}\) Focus group participant, male.
The government also needs to talk to the mosque as well, that is very important. The mosque leaders have no information about child protection issues. I’m sure there are imams in my community, who are not even CRB [Criminal Records Bureau] checked but they work with children. The government can come to us [RCOs] and we can help them work with the mosques.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{106} Afghan community interviewee: Male, London, 40s.
13 Conclusions and Recommendations

The majority of the Afghan-born population in the UK is Muslim and lives in London. Afghan migration to the UK has been largely fuelled by war and conflicts in Afghanistan and as a consequence, a large proportion of the first generation of Afghans in Britain arrived as refugees. Many families have been separated by war and the welfare of relatives left behind is of utmost importance. Most families in the UK financially support relatives in Afghanistan through remittances.

The community is diverse and fragmented along many ethnic, regional, political and linguistic lines. In addition to political and ethnic divisions, there are significant language differences. Afghanistan is also a country with strong regional identities, which makes its émigrés less likely to group together. There is often considerable mistrust and suspicion of Afghans outside of specific social networks, which consist mainly of kinship and friendship ties that already existed back in Afghanistan.

The experience of fractious, ethnically divided and violent politics, as well as a highly stratified society within Afghanistan has resulted in these same dynamics being re-enacted in the UK. Although numerous Afghan associations and clubs exist, attempts to build up a representative umbrella organisation have so far been unsuccessful. In addition to the divisions and mistrust within the community engendered by these internal divisions, the experience is also thought to have instilled great suspicion towards public authorities.

Views about religion are contradictory. Some sources suggest that there is a ‘stricter’ form of Islamic practice driven by people who have arrived during the later stages of the recent conflicts in Afghanistan, as well as a visible tendency towards greater religiosity among young people. Others however suggest that most Afghans in the UK are more culturally Muslim than devout in their religious practice, and that there is a sizeable part of the community linked to communist sympathies that does not subscribe to any form of religion at all. Culture and ethnicity appear to play a more significant role in the way Afghans identify themselves than religion. Most respondents expressed their relationship with Islam as something personal and in the background, something that informs their values and attitudes to life, but which does not play an outwardly visible role. Whilst many people, both practicing Muslim as well as relatively ‘secular’ Afghans, attend mosques, for many this is for social and cultural reasons – in order to meet other Afghans or for significant life events.

The community is thought to be facing considerable economic, social, health and welfare problems. Some of these are internal to the community, but some are related to a lack of awareness and inadequate or inappropriate support from public authorities. Many Afghans have experienced a loss of social, economic and professional status in exile. Afghan academic and professional qualifications are rarely acknowledged, and the employment that highly qualified people are able to find is generally much lower in status
than the role most of them occupied in Afghanistan. This dynamic is particularly acute for men who have to engage in what is perceived as ‘lower-class’ employment, and is thought to have led to high levels of undiagnosed depression in the community.

For the first generation, a high rate of unemployment coupled with language barriers has made it difficult for people to interact effectively with the wider society and adapt to life in Britain. Amongst UK-born Afghan Muslims there is a greater adaption to mainstream culture and changing views about issues such as the role of women in Afghan society. However, this is creating tensions within many families, with older people fearing the loss of Afghan identity, and young people looking to their parents to be more “English”. The role and status of women in the community is beginning to improve but there is still a long way to go for women to achieve an equal status with men or to become more engaged in community and public life. Support for the establishment of women’s organisations is key to the further empowerment and development of Afghan women.

In relation to civil society infrastructure, there are several patterns in the formation of community organisations, including socio-political, religious and refugee orientated organisations. Community organisations are spread across London and other parts of the country in areas with a high concentration of Afghans. Given the ethnic, language and political differences in the Afghan population, there are real practical difficulties in identifying key influencers and leaders that are widely accepted as such across the community. One of the main factors inhibiting concerted engagement by and with the community is the lack of formal political representation and representative community forums that can advocate on behalf of the community to central government and local public bodies.

Factionalism, lack of trust and a lack of community leadership contributes a great deal towards the failure in establishing such bodies. The community and its civil society organisations are also particularly disadvantaged in areas where there are older and well established ethnic minority communities, and by the tendency of public bodies to subsume the community within the broader Asian category rather than responding to its specific needs and concerns.

13.1 Recommendations

This is the first report of its kind on the Muslim Afghan community in England and, along with many of the other reports in this study, should be seen as a starting point in the process of understanding England’s diverse Muslim and ethnic minority communities in greater detail rather than the final word. The research has provided many insights into the Afghan Muslim community in England, particularly the vast majority who live in London. Many areas were highlighted as community concerns but require further enquiry in order to draw firm conclusions.
The Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities Summary report provides detailed recommendations for engagement with and development of Muslim civil society organisations.\textsuperscript{107} The following specific recommendations for public authorities are in relation to responding to the Afghan Muslim community.

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

- Targeted funding and capacity building support, especially for the development of women’s associations and the provision of services for young people
- Training for skills development within civil society organisations, particularly in fundraising, financial management, service delivery and project management
- Employment training and support for all adult members of the community
- Improving engagement by identifying and working with those RCOs that can bridge the gap between local authorities and Afghan communities
- Support for the development of a collective representative forum for the Afghan community in the UK – perhaps through independent external mediation to bring together the various factions that exist in the community
- Direct recognition and representation of Afghans in local consultations and decision making forums.

**Other recommendations:**

- Research into mental health problems and trauma arising from war and refugee status
- Development work with professionals to enable them to more effectively support children and adults at risk from trauma and related health problems
- Further research into the experiences and situation of women with regards to: migration status, domestic violence, education and training needs
- Research into the situation and experiences of unaccompanied children and young people.

\textsuperscript{107} Available from Communities and Local Government.
14 Glossary

CI: The Change Institute

CLG: Communities and Local Government

Deobandi: Associated with the Indo-Pakistani reformist movement centered in the Dār al’Ulum of Deoband are known by the name Deobandis. The school at Deoband, a country town some 90 miles northeast of Delhi, was founded in 1867. The goal of the school was to preserve the teachings of the faith in a period of non-Muslim rule and considerable social change by holding Muslims to a standard of correct practice; central to that goal was the creation of a class of formally trained and popularly supported ulama.

ESOL: English as a second language.

Hanafi: Major Sunni Islamic school of law which emphasises analogous reasoning of jurists over literal interpretation of hadīth. Predominate in the Arab world and South Asia.

RCO: Refugee Community Organisation

Shi’a: Muslims who believe that succession to the political and religious leadership of the Muslim community should be hereditary through Muhammad’s daughter Fatimah and her husband, Muhammad’s cousin Ali. Although Shi’as do not believe that these successors (imams) are prophets, they do believe that they are divinely inspired and infallible. Approximately 15 per cent of all Muslims are Shi’as.

Sunni: Muslims who emphasise the importance of the actions and customs of Muhammad and the first generations of Muslims, viewing as legitimate the establishment of the caliphate, in contrast to Shi’a beliefs. About 85 per cent of all Muslims are Sunnis.

(Source: Esposito, 2008)
15 Bibliography


