Communities
and Local Government

The Iraqi Muslim Community in England
Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities

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The findings of this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Contents

1 Executive Summary

1.1 Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities: The Iraqi Community in the UK

This report is one of thirteen reports on England's Muslim ethnic communities resulting from a six-month research project commissioned by the Cohesion Directorate of Communities and Local Government (CLG) in order to understand the diversity of England's Muslim population and 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 existing research specific to the community, for this reason we felt it beneficial to look at other areas such as identity, language use, socio economic situations, and intra-community and intra-generational dynamics. Since the country and migration contexts are important we have briefly detailed the relevant parts of these.

While the research and analysis was approached in a rigorous manner, the scope is broad and the population in question is sizeable. Hence, the findings from these studies sometimes offer first insights rather than firm conclusions about the respective communities. What is evident is that the diversity of these communities warrants further research and particularly a greater need for understanding of England's diverse Muslim communities at both local and central government levels. We recommend that this research is understood as a starting point rather than an end-point.

This report details the research findings for the Iraqi Muslim community. Individual reports for the other twelve communities covered by the study as well as a separate report synthesizing the overall research findings are available from Communities and Local Government.

This report focuses on the Iraqi 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 Iraqi Muslim population

Iraqis have been present in the UK in significant numbers since the 1940s and historically London has been a home to vibrant communities of Iraqi migrants, academics, doctors, writers, poets, artists, journalists, teachers, business entrepreneurs, political activists of different political orientations, and other professionals. More recently, Iraqis have arrived as refugees and asylum seekers as a result of two decades of war and sanctions.

The Iraqi Muslim population in England is estimated to be around 70-80,000. However there are significant variations in the estimates of the Iraqi population and official statistics do not provide information on the entire Iraqi community in England. The 2001 census counted 20,351 Muslims in England born in Iraq of which 11,693 were based in London. However, the actual size of the Iraq-born population in the UK is estimated to be at least double the census figure due to high numbers of asylum applications following the Iraq war in 2003.

1.3 Socio economic situation

There are considerable differences in the Iraqi population between new and settled immigrants. The employment rate of new migrants (38 per cent) is less than half that of settled Iraqi migrants (78 per cent). Differences in levels of higher education are also marked. Respondents suggest that despite coming to the UK with high level qualifications, employment opportunities and experiences are difficult for many migrants who are unable to secure comparable employment on arrival.

Mental health problems and depression due to the stresses of war and migration, coupled with a loss of economic and social status are identified as a common problem in the community, and language barriers are said to make it difficult for many people to access appropriate help and support.

The situation of British born Iraqis is said to be much better, particularly of those from middle class backgrounds. The majority are believed to go on to higher education and professional jobs. However low educational achievement and unemployment are a growing cause for concern in relation to young people from less well off backgrounds, many of whom are reported to be getting involved in drugs, crime and gang culture as a consequence.

1.4 Identity, religion and language

First generation Iraqis have tended to maintain close alliances with their immediate family and friendship groups, with very little interaction outside of these. However British-born young Iraqis have created wider social networks outside of their families. Such relationships can create tensions within families as the first generation fear that their children have become more British than Iraqi, and that a cultural gap has formed between them which is difficult for either group to bridge due to a lack of understanding of each other's experiences.

Sixty-eight per cent of the Iraq-born population in England are Muslim and there are significant geographical variations in religious diversity. Religious orientation is often kept private and there are a vast number of secular Iraqis in the London community. Respondents suggested that the majority of Iraqi Muslims in the UK are Shi'as, but there is a significant minority of Sunni Muslims. Claims that sectarianism in Iraq is reflected in the diaspora[1] were only partially corroborated by the study. Whilst many deny that any such divisions exist, others suggest that there is considerable polarisation within the community in London on religious and ethnic grounds and that Islam has been used by some Imams to divide the community by religious denomination.

Research conducted in 2007 by the International organisation of Migration (IOM), suggests that the majority of Iraqis in the UK speak English, Kurdish or Arabic.[2] Language is important in the transmission of cultural values and practices and there are concerns within the community that the loss of home languages will lead to young people losing their Iraqi culture and heritage.

1.5 Intergenerational dynamics, young people and the role of women

There is thought to be a wide gap between the generations, primarily determined by the process of migration, which has had a number of differing impacts upon familial and wider community relations. According to some, the interests and concerns of the different generations are so far apart that harmony can only be brokered by mediators from outside families who understand the concerns and needs of both the first and second generations.

In additional to intergenerational differences, young Iraqis in the UK are facing a number of challenges related to education, employment, under-achievement. Whilst middle-class British-born young people, both male and female, are said to be excelling in university education, there is a growing gap between the Iraqi middle and working class. Belonging or semi-belonging to two cultures is also perceived to cause difficulties for many young British-Iraqis, leaving many young people suspended between two cultures that do not understand them. As a result many are felt not to have any strong identity or any clarity as to what the future holds for them.

Many women who came to the UK during the 60s, 70s and 80s, were professional women but unable to work once they arrived in Britain. The lack of English language skills was reported to be a key barrier in preventing them from transferring their skills to the UK labour market. Today there is still a high level of unemployment amongst women, especially as the new migrant women are not as qualified as the women who preceded them. However, large numbers of second generation British-born middle-class women are said to be doing well in education and employment.

[1] Nadje Sadiq Al-Ali (2007), *Iraq Women, Untold Stories from 1948 to the present*, London: Zed Books.
[2] International Organisation for Migration (2008), *Mapping Report on Iraq*, London: IOM.

However, despite the improving socio economic position of growing numbers of Iraqi women, most women continue to face specific gender related difficulties in the UK. Regardless of religious denominations and levels of education and employment, women's lives are deemed to be curtailed by Iraqi cultural values and expectations, and many are reported to be isolated from the wider community as they try to perform what is required of them as Iraqi women. Segregation at a social level is also evident in the structure and operation of most civil society organisations and it is still very rare to see a woman in a leadership role in mixed-gender organisations.

1.6 Integration and cohesion

The more recently arrived community is still relatively new to the country and is still in the process of finding its way in the UK. New migrants do not yet feel part of a British community, and unemployment and resulting problems also make it difficult for many to view themselves as an integral and valuable part of society.

Other issues highlighted that impact on integration and cohesion included: hostility from the host society, being perceived as outsiders, lack of reciprocity between the host country and the new migrants, language difficulties and lack of education and differing religious and cultural backgrounds. Most people see integration as a positive thing but feel that their cultural and linguistic traditions need to be preserved in the process.

1.7 Media and links with country of origin

Media reporting of the war in Iraq is seen by many people as limited to official government viewpoints that do not take into account the realities on the ground for ordinary Iraqi people. The focus on violence and sectarianism is also seen as very negative as it does not cover the many positive initiatives and movements that are active in rebuilding Iraqi communities. There is a strong feeling in the community that the British media needs to be more responsible in the way it portrays Iraq and the Iraqi community in the UK.

Access to Iraq remains restricted and the numbers of those travelling in recent years have significantly dropped. The majority of Iraqis interviewed had not travelled to Iraq for several years and were not planning to do so in the foreseeable future. Many Iraqis, of both the first and second generation, appear to have disconnected themselves from Iraq, both due to a feeling of hopelessness about the situation there, as well as from a growing sense of Britishness that leaves them feeling like outsiders when they do visit. Many people however retain links with families and friends via the internet and continue to send money to relatives on Iraq.

1.8 Civil society and civic engagement

There is a huge diversity of Iraq organisations that range from political and pressure groups, supplementary schools, youth groups, student bodies, sports groups, on-line dating and chat forums, religious groups, women's organisations, trade-union affiliations, cultural associations and refugee support organisations. Most of these organisations are run voluntarily and with limited funding. Existing organisations provide a range of functions and services that can be accessed by all the diverse groups that make up the communities, however organisations for the welfare and support of women and girls remain limited.

Engagement with public authorities at local, regional and national levels is reported to be minimal. Relationships with the government and other authorities remain problematic due to a general fear of governments engendered by experiences in Iraq, coupled with criticisms of the UK government's role in the war in Iraq and foreign policy decisions in relation to the country. In addition many feel that the government is not interested in the community as it had not made any attempts to visit and speak with ordinary Iraqis.

Respondents highlighted a wide range of issues affecting the community and civil society organisations but noted that community organisations have pressing capacity building needs that need to be met in order for them to provide effective solutions for these issues. Whilst some are well established most community organisations are struggling through lack of funding, reliance on volunteers and a shortage of skills and experience needed to develop their organisations further.

1.9 Recommendations

- Community capacity building through a package of support measure including targeted funding and training support

- Specific support for the development and management of community organisations providing venues and services to meet women's needs

- Recognition and funding of organisations working with young people to address issues impacting on young people's behaviour and life chances

- English language and employment skills training for new migrants

- Development of an outreach and consultation strategy by government departments and local public authorities to engage and communicate with different groupings within the Iraqi community

- Research into the experiences and expectations of young Iraqi women

- Research into the mental health issues and service needs of the community

- Research into the demographics, issues and experiences of the Iraqi Kurd and broader Kurdish community in the UK.

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, Communities and Local Government commissioned The Change Institute (CI) to deliver the research project 'Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities' (UMEC). The 13 ethnic Muslim communities that the Cohesion Directorate was seeking more information about were those originating from:

- Afghanistan

- Algeria

- Bangladesh

- Egypt

- India

- Iran

- Iraq

- Morocco

- Nigeria

- Pakistan

- Saudi Arabia

- Somalia

- Turkey.

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

2.1 Objectives of the research

There were four objectives for the research:

- *Mapping*: Develop population maps for each ethnic community outlining the spread of the population and identification of high density clusters

- *Identification of denominations and pathways*: Collect information on the grassroots institutions/key individuals working with ethnic communities and the breakdown of these ethnic communities by denomination/sect/clan

- *Identifying strength of links and capacity of ethnic communities*: Collect information on the strength of links between each ethnic community and country of origin (including influential institutions/individuals/media channels/religious influences). Also to collect information on the relative strengths and weaknesses of civil society infrastructure for each ethnic community, highlighting where capacities need to be developed

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

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

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

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

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

4. How can Communities and Local Government best engage with them?

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

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

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

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 8 to 12 draw primarily on the qualitative research corroborated by secondary sources where these are available. Finally, section 13 draws together specific recommendations arising from the research.

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 Communities and Local Government to 'know' these communities in depth.

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

PHASE	ACTIVITY	METHOD
1	Population mapping	Review of: • 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 Iraqi community). Focus groups (30 total including two with Iraqi community and four with Muslim youth from all ethnic backgrounds).

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

3.1 Project phases

Phase 1: Population mapping
The first phase consisted of collecting mainly secondary quantitative data but also some primary 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 Iraqis specifically, there is minimal existing research on the community in the UK. The last comprehensive research was carried out by the Iraqi Community Association in 1995-96 which resulted in the report *Now We Are Here – A Survey of the Profile, Structure, Needs, Hopes and Aspiration of the Iraqi Community in Britain 1995-1996*[3]. 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 invasion.

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 Iraqi community. This phase of the research was carried out between April and July 2008.

3.1.1 In-depth interviews
The interviews assisted in developing an overview of national and local contexts: the make-up of diaspora communities 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.

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[3] Suzanne Muna (1996), *Now We Are Here – A Survey of the Profile, Structure, Needs, Hopes and Aspiration of the Iraqi Community in Britain 1995-1996*, Iraqi Community Association.

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.

Interviews for the Iraqi community research were conducted by two researchers. One researcher was from the Iraqi community and the other was from outside of the community but with a good understanding of the key challenges facing the community. This added legitimacy to the process of enquiry that was critical in opening up discussion and enabled us to gather rich data.

The profile of the twelve respondents was as follows:

- Four females and eight males.

- Three were in the 18-24 age range; three were 25-34; four were 35-44 and two were 45-55.

- Six were involved in community or religious focused roles, one was in an educational role, one was from the arts sector, two were professionals and two were students.

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

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

3.1.2 Discussion groups

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

Focus groups were designed to include a mix of participants from different community networks and different occupational backgrounds 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.

		Location	Born in the UK	Born outside of the UK	Age range
Group (Female)	1	London	0	7	35+
Group (Male)	2	London	1	5	35+

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 Iraqi 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.[4] Hence the research tended to generate data on problem areas and challenges, particularly in focus group discussions when respondents felt they had limited time to ensure that their voices got heard. This may not reflect many of the positive and optimistic views of respondents. However, respondents were often aware that the discussions may come across as negative in tone, and were quick to try and balance this by highlighting perceived positive aspects of both their communities and their lives in the UK. We have endeavored 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.

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

- 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.[5] They were informed that this research would potentially be used to inform a publication that would enter the public domain and would cover aspects such as religion, intra-community dynamics and links with country of origin. A climate of some scepticism within Muslim communities, discrimination, both real and perceived, and awareness of government interest in 'what is happening' on the ground, meant that respondents were often sceptical about the use of the information that they were providing. Many will have had agendas (for positive as well as negative reasons) when asked about issues for their communities, which may have influenced their responses (eg representing their community as having few or no problems, or conversely, as having many or major needs and/or issues with public authorities).

- 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.

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[5] The showcard is included in the Technical Report, available from Communities and Local Government.

4 Country Profile and History

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Iraq has a rich and diverse history during which it has been part of various empires. The world's first known civilisation developed in Sumer, which is now southeastern Iraq, about 3500BC. Iraq came under the rule of the Umayyad Caliphate in the 7th century, and the Abbasid Caliphate built the city of Baghdad in the 8th century as the capital of an empire extending from Iraq to the Indian subcontinent. By 800AD Baghdad had grown into a city of nearly a million people and had become a world centre of trade and culture. It became the leading metropolis of the Arab and Muslim world for five centuries and the key centre of learning during the Islamic Golden Age. This period, also known as the Islamic Renaissance, led to significant advancements in the arts, agriculture, economics, law, industry, literature, science, mathematics and philosophy unparalleled in history that influenced societies on every continent.[6]
The decline of Iraq's influence began in the 13th century following Mongol invasions and Ottoman Rule from 1516. It remained part of the Ottoman Empire until the First World War.

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[6] Ziauddin Sardar (2004), *Desparately Seeking Paradise – Journeys of a sceptical Muslim*, London: Granta.

In 1914, British and Indian troops landed in Fao, south of Iraq, to secure the UK's oil interest in the region. In 1920, the League of Nations, a forerunner to the United Nations, gave the United Kingdom a *mandate* over the area. Under pressure from Iraq's independence movement, the United Kingdom signed a treaty with Iraq in 1930 promising military protection and eventual independence for Iraq. In return, Iraq promised the United Kingdom continued use of British air bases in Iraq. It also agreed to use foreign advisers from the United Kingdom only. The British mandate over Iraq ended in 1932, when Iraq became an independent nation.[7]

Following a second period of British rule between 1941 and 1947, the Hashemite monarchy was reinstated, which ruled until it was overthrown in a coup in 1958 by Brigadier General Abdul Karim Qassim. Opposition to the monarchy had grown steadily during the 1950s particularly due to the government's perceived ties to the West. In particular, there was widespread resentment of the Baghdad Pact, a British-supported mutual defence agreement Iraq signed with Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey in 1955, as well as widespread feeling that these countries opposed the Pan-Arabism movement.

In early 1963 the Ba'ath Party took power but was itself subject to a coup before retaking power in 1968. The Kurds who had begun a rebellion in 1961 were still active in 1969 and the secretary-general of the Baa'th party, Saddam Hussein, was given the responsibility for finding a solution. It appeared impossible to defeat the Kurds by military means and in 1970 a political agreement was reached between the rebels and the Iraqi government. The country became one of the leaders of the pan-Arab nationalist movement and Saddam Hussein assumed office as head of the regime in 1979.

During its rule, the Ba'athist regime committed widespread human rights abuses, including the use of torture, cruel and unusual punishments, political violence, mass murder and genocide. In the 1980s and the early 1990s, President Saddam Hussein and other leaders of the ruling Ba'ath Party involved Iraq in two wars that had devastating effects on the country. In September 1980, Iraq invaded Iran, and war broke out between the two countries. The war resulted in part from boundary disputes, from Iran's support for the rebellious Kurds, and from the efforts of Shiite leaders in Iran to incite rebellion in Iraq's Shiite population. Iraqi leaders believed that Iran had become unstable as a result of its 1979 revolution, and that Iran's weakened position offered Iraq an opportunity to increase its power in the region. The war lasted eight years, an estimated 150,000 Iraqi soldiers died, and Iranian air attacks on major cities wounded and killed many of Iraq's civilians. Estimates of civilian dead vary widely, with some as high as one and a half million people. The war also severely damaged Iraq's economy, bombs damaged oil facilities in southern Iraq, and trade through the Persian Gulf was disrupted. Iraq and Iran finally agreed on a cease-fire in August 1988.

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[7] Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett (2003), *Iraq since 1958: From revolution to dictatorship*, London: I.B. Tauris.

Iraq's relationship with the neighbouring state of Kuwait has also featured prominently in the country's post-war history. Kuwait gained independence from Britain in 1961, but Iraq continued to claim sovereignty over the country. In 1990, Iraq invaded and occupied Kuwait. The capture of the emirate was immediately proclaimed by the Iraqi government as 'The Revolution of 2 August' and as Kuwait's rightful return to Iraqi sovereignty.[8] The United Nations (UN) condemned the invasion and imposed a trade embargo on Iraq. A coalition of 39 nations, organised mainly by the UN and the United States, opposed the invasion and sent forces to the region. In early 1991, they defeated Iraq in the Persian Gulf War of 1991. The UN trade embargo continued after the war. During the subsequent military intervention by a US-led coalition, many civilian lives were lost and the air campaign destroyed much of the country's infrastructure, water supplies, electricity grids and factories. Military intervention was followed by economic sanctions that also had an impact on the population as a whole.[9]

The regime also faced successive revolts, in particular from the Kurds in a struggle for self-rule in the North, and an uprising in the Shi'a South following defeat in the Gulf War. Another Kurdish rebellion failed in 1991, sparking the flight of 1.5 million Kurdish refugees to Turkey and Iran, resulting in a major humanitarian crisis.[10] While Saddam Hussein's regime stimulated and reinforced differentiation between Shi'a and Sunnis, as well as between Arabs and Kurds in order to enhance its political capital, the ethnic and religious divisions that are now part of the country's fabric do not have a deep history.[11]

Following allegations about Iraq amassing weapons of mass destruction, a military coalition made up mainly of United States and UK forces overthrew Saddam Hussein's government in the Persian Gulf War of 2003. Soon afterwards, the UN lifted its trade embargo. Officials from the US-led coalition stated that they intended to oversee the creation of a more democratic government in Iraq. Since the forceful removal from power of the Saddam Hussein regime following military intervention in 2003, sectarian violence and the continued foreign military presence has delayed and thwarted post-Saddam reconstruction. Despite a promising turnout in elections based on Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) system of ethnic and sectarian allocations, security, due process and the rule of law are still fragile.

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8 Charles Recknagel, 'Iraq: Invasion Of Kuwait 12 Years Ago Ignited Continuing Crisis', Global Security. www.globalsecurity.org

9 In 1997, the United Nations Human Rights Committee noted that: "the effect of sanctions and blockades has been to cause suffering and death in Iraq, especially to children".

10 United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2007), *Country Profile Iraq – Humanitarian Profile*, online. ochaonline.un.org/iraq/Resources/CountryProfile/tabid/2382/Default.aspx

11 Al-Khalidi & Tanner (2007), 'Iraq's displacement crisis: the search for solutions' *Forced Migration Review*, p.6.

The current situation in Iraq is bleak according to many commentators, despite continued US and UK efforts to stabilise hotspots and transfer authority to the Iraqi government and security forces. There has been a resurgence of radical cultural and religious groups and militias, as well as increased terrorist activity by groups such as al-Qaeda in Iraq, originally led by the late Jordanian dissident Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, although this violence is thought to be on the decrease. In 2008 a US-led surge is believed to have increased security and there are signs that the intended transfer of authority to Iraqi security forces is progressing.[12]

The cumulative impact of war and sanctions on the civilian population are substantial. According to a recent UN report, the condition of Iraqi women has continued to deteriorate with the erosion of their basic rights and freedoms.[13] Oxfam's recent report on Iraq states that eight million Iraqis are in need of emergency aid, 43 per cent of Iraqis are suffering from absolute poverty and 800,000 children are not in school.[14] It also noted that due to the ever worsening conditions, 40 per cent of the best educated and experienced Iraqis have left the country and 70 per cent of displaced Iraqis are women.[15]

The recent history of Iraq has had a direct impact on the community in the UK in a number of ways. Many are refugees and asylum seekers who escaped tyranny under Saddam and the Ba'athist regime. Others have been affected by the upsurge in sectarian violence in more recent times, and most remain acutely concerned about daily conditions being faced by family and friends in their country of origin. These experiences and the ongoing trauma in Iraq have been highly formative in shaping the nature of the community in the UK, its needs, and the issues it faces. They have also stimulated the development of the large number of Iraqi led civil society organisations that are focused on attempting to improve the situation for groups and communities back in Iraq.

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[12] At the time of writing the situation in Iraq is still unstable. While the 'surge' is reported to have been effective, there is no guarantee that the situation will not regress into further violence.
[13] United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2007.
[14] Oxfam (2007), *Rising to the humanitarian challenge in Iraq,* online. www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/policy/conflict_disasters/downloads/bp105_iraq.pdf
[15] Ibid.

5 Migration History and Trends

Iraqis have been present in significant numbers since the 1940s and historically London has been a home to vibrant communities of Iraqi migrants, academics, doctors, writers, poets, artists, journalists, teachers, business entrepreneurs, political activists of different political orientations and other professionals. This migration started during the 1940s and 1950s, with a small influx of Iraqi political refugees, including liberal and radical intellectuals who had become dissatisfied with the monarchist regime entered the UK.[16] After the monarchy was overthrown, many of its associates and supporters also migrated to the UK. Most had already established good connections with Britain through the British control of Iraq after the First World War and having transferred their capital to Britain, were able to settle into relative comfort.[17] At this time the influx of exiles was mainly 'upper class Sunnis' many of whom were professionals unable to tolerate restrictions on their freedom to hold and express dissenting views. Their choice of settlement was in part due to the good connections developed between Iraq and Britain through business and student visits.[18]

A distinct Iraqi middle-class presence took shape in the 1960s as political freedoms were further curtailed by the new Iraqi authorities. In the 1970s and 1980s, an intensification of political and religious repression led to a bigger inflow of refugees, in particular Kurds, whose cultural and ethnic identity was being suppressed. When the Iran – Iraq war broke out in the 1980s, thousands of Shi'a Muslims were deported to Iran and some sought asylum in Britain. During this period refugees who sought asylum included merchants, professionals who had lost their jobs for allegedly siding with the enemy, and displaced skilled and semi-skilled workers.[19]

By the 1990s, London was home to a number of oppositional parties and groups including Iraqi communist exiles, Arab nationalists, non-Saddamist Ba'thists, democrats, Shi'a Islamists and diverse women's organisations.[20] Various ethnic and religious divisions existed among these groups in Britain. However, the large presence of secular political parties in Britain, such as the Iraqi Communist Party and Iraqi National Accord, contributed to the building of non-sectarian alliances and organisations.[21]

[16] Humayun Ansari (2004), *The Infidel Within: Muslims in Britain Since 1800*, London: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Al-Ali, 2007.
[21] Nadje Sadig Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt (2006), *Women in Iraq: Beyond the Rhetoric*, Middle East Research and Information Project. www.acttogether.org/MERIP06.htm

5.1.1 Asylum

Since the turn of the century asylum applications from Iraq to the UK have increased dramatically although they have dropped more recently as illustrated by Chart 1.

Chart 1: Asylum applications by Iraqis to the UK 1980-2006 (Source: Home Office)
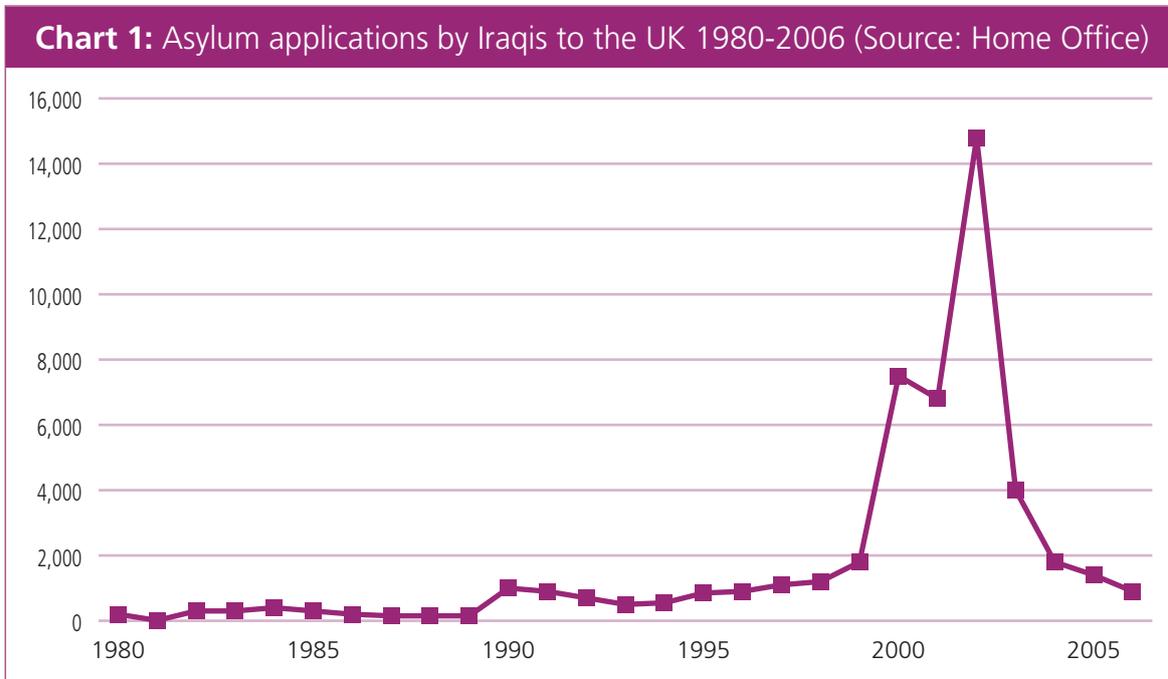
Since 1991, the Home Office has offered 31,000 grants of settlement to Iraqis, 19,600 (63 per cent) of these have been issued since 2000 (see Chart 2). Grants of settlement are still on the rise, a likely consequence of the large peak in asylum applications in 2000-02 that have since been processed. Additionally, since 1980, 32,000 Iraqis have been granted UK citizenship (see Chart 3).

Chart 2: Iraqi grants of settlement 1991-2006 (Source: Home Office)
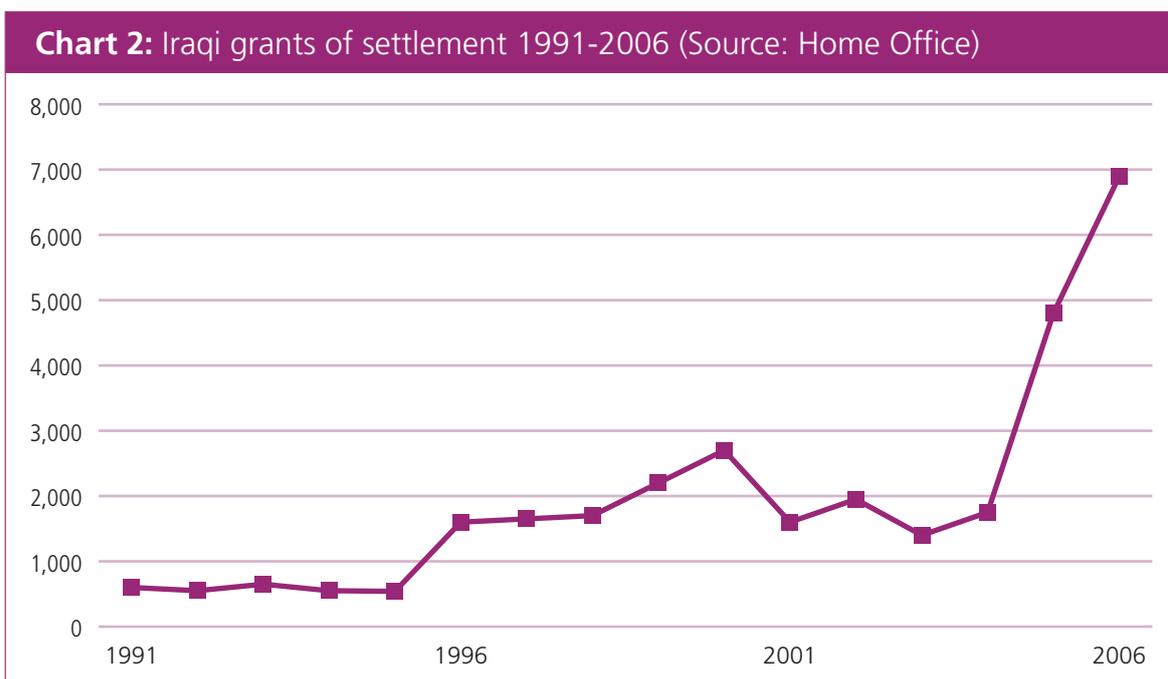
Chart 3: Acquisition of citizenship by Iraqis 1980-2005 (Source: Home Office)
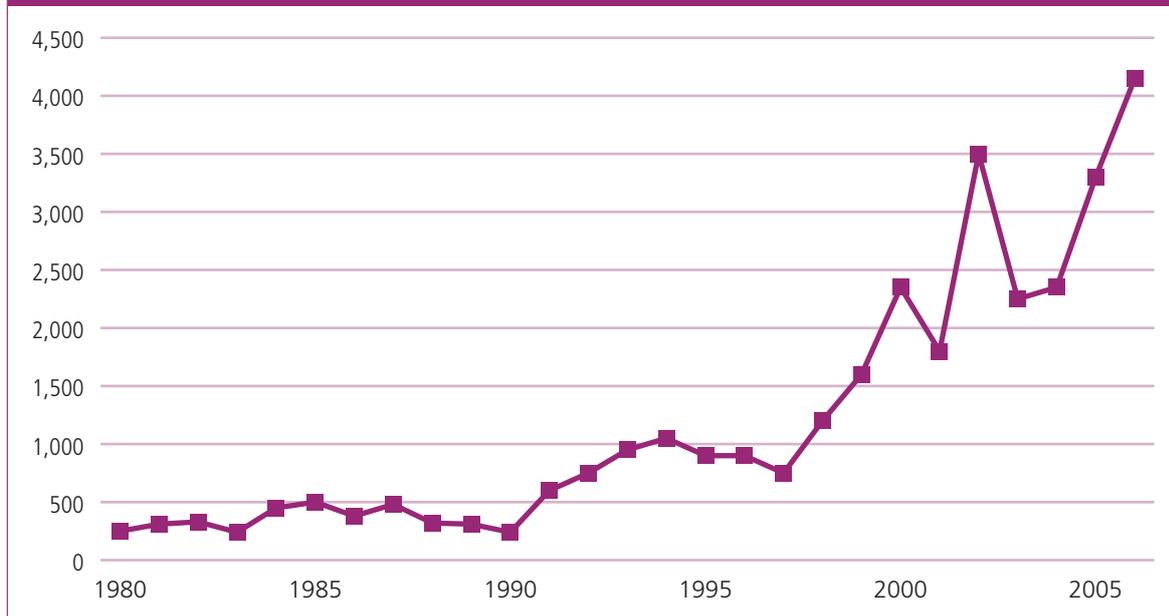
Despite the recommendations of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), many Iraqis have been unsuccessful in claiming asylum in the UK. For example in 2005, 91 per cent of Iraqis claiming asylum were refused at the initial decision stage.[22] Iraqis were still the largest single group of asylum seekers arriving in industrialised countries in 2006, although the total of 22,000 was less than half the average number arriving during the six years prior to the 2003 war.

In the UK, Iraqi asylum seekers whose cases are rejected are initially offered a voluntary return package under the International Organisation for Migration's (IOM) Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP).[23] Due to the fact that many have seen the withdrawal of their minimum support level that was previously given to them, a significant number of Iraqis have opted to return with the help of the IOM.[24]

Amongst European states, the United Kingdom has sent back the highest number of Iraqis.[25] All of them came from and were returned to the Kurdistani Regional Government (KRG) controlled area of northern Iraq, which it regards as sufficiently stable.[26] For the time being, it is not enforcing the return of women or children nor will it separate families.[27]

[22] www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/hosb1406.pdf The UK Refugee Council's Gary Bell has pointed out, the UK's policy towards failed Iraqi asylum-seekers has been consistent with recent practice of setting targets for returns, and is further evidence of 'a greater readiness of the UK government to use the language of return within days of a cessation of military action'.

[23] www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/howwehelp/directly/voluntary_returns/programmes.htm

[24] European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2007), *Guidelines on the treatment of Iraqi asylum seekers and refugees in Europe*, London and Brussels: ECRE.

[25] IOM London: www.iomlondon.org

[26] National Public Radio, *'Europe struggles with influx of Iraqi refugees'*, 6.3.2007.

[27] European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2007.

In 2007, ECRE and the Scottish Refugee Council found that there was growing evidence that Iraqis, who have been refused asylum in the United Kingdom, are forced into homelessness and destitution[28]. Anecdotal evidence from respondents suggests that many Iraqis in London are to be found either living on the streets or are sharing rooms with others and living on handouts, while some female Iraqis have turned to prostitution to survive in London.

Other challenges and obstacles include a down-grading of status, language difficulties, complex and confusing asylum policies and widespread Islamophobia. The difficulties that many Iraqi asylum seekers face on arrival has a detrimental impact on health, and many Iraq entrants have suffered mental health problems in the two to three years after entry into Britain.[29]

[28] The Scottish Refugee Council (2007), *The Treatment of Iraqi Refugees and Asylum Seekers*, Scottish Refugee Council.
[29] Shatha Jafar (1999), *Health Needs Assessment Study of the Iraqi Community in London: Refugee Mental Health Forum Report,* London: Iraqi Community Association.

6 Community Demographics and Key Locations

Census 2001: Iraqi-born Muslim population in England: 20,351

Like the majority of communities covered in this research, exact figures for the Iraqi community are difficult to calculate since the country of birth category does not account for those born to Iraqi parents in the UK. This is compounded by a significant influx of refugees and asylums seekers entering the country since the turn of the century. It has also been reported that many Iraqis have changed their names and nationality when they came to the UK and registered as Iranian, Turkish or Syrian.[30]

There are significant variations in the estimates of the total Iraqi population in the UK and official statistics do not provide information on the entire Iraqi community in England. The 2001 census was the first British census to report data on those born in Iraq. The census counted 20,351 Muslims in England born in Iraq of which 11,693 were based in London. The size of the total Iraqi population in England is likely to be significantly higher than the census figure for reasons outlined above and due to high numbers of asylum applications following the Iraq war in 2003. In 2005, 30,961 Iraqis in the UK registered to vote in the 2005 Iraqi elections.[31]

Figure 1: Distribution of Iraqi born population in England (Source: Census 2001)
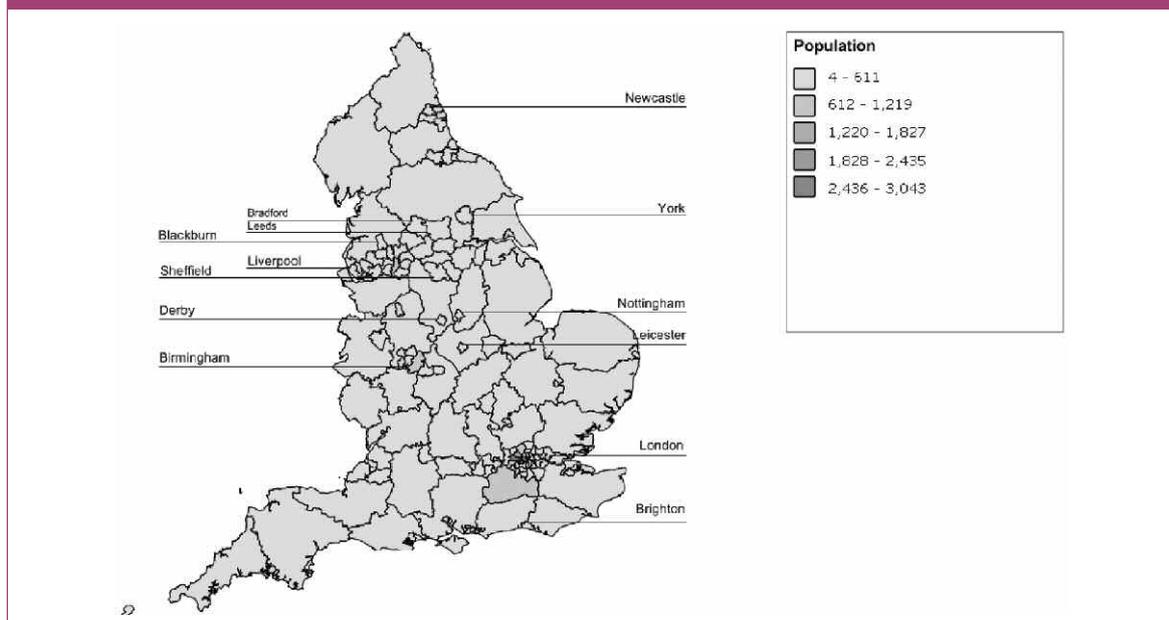
30 IOM, 2008.
31 news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4216465.stm

As Figure 1 illustrates, there were few significant Iraqi populations outside of London in 2001 except for in Birmingham and in Surrey. Respondents in this study also reported small communities in Coventry, Derby, Dewsbury, Hull, Leeds, Manchester and Plymouth.[32]

Table 1 lists the regional distribution of the Iraq-born Muslim population in England in 2001. 58 per cent of the Iraq-born population resides in London, no other region has more than 10 per cent of the Iraq-born population. While the percentage of Iraqi born migrants who are Muslim in London is equivalent to the national average of 68 per cent, in the northern regions the percentage is higher than the average while in the South it is lower. For example, the Iraq-born population in Yorkshire and Humber has the highest percentage of Muslims (81 per cent) while the South East has the lowest (56 per cent).

Table 1: Distribution of Iraqi born Muslim population in Government Office Regions in England (Source: 2001 Census, commissioned table C0644)					
GO Region	**Iraq-born population**	**Iraq-born Muslims**	**% of Iraq-born population that is Muslim**	**% of total Iraq-born Muslim population in England**	**Iraq-born Muslims as % of regional Muslim population**
London	17,302	11,693	68%	57.5%	1.9%
North West	2,438	1,779	73%	8.7%	0.9%
West Midlands	2,151	1,648	77%	8.1%	0.8%
Yorkshire and Humber	1,945	1,583	81%	7.8%	0.8%
South East	2,670	1,486	56%	7.3%	1.4%
East	1,292	827	64%	4.1%	1.0%
North East	776	552	71%	2.7%	2.1%
South West	766	428	56%	2.1%	1.8%
East Midlands	604	355	59%	1.7%	0.5%
Total	29,944	20,351	68%	100%	0.5%

32 The Iraqi population in Dewsbury is predominantly Kurdish.

The Iraqi population in London is mainly spread throughout west London, with notable clusters in Ealing, Kingston, Acton, Hammersmith and Fulham, as well as in North London, particularly Brent, Barnet and Camden.[33] Respondents also noted growing communities in Tottenham, Enfield and Edgware. Table 2 lists figures for the London boroughs with the largest Iraq-born Muslim. Figure 2 illustrates the geographical distribution of Iraqis by country of birth in London.

Figure 2: Distribution of Iraqi born Muslim population in London (Source: Census 2001, CO644)
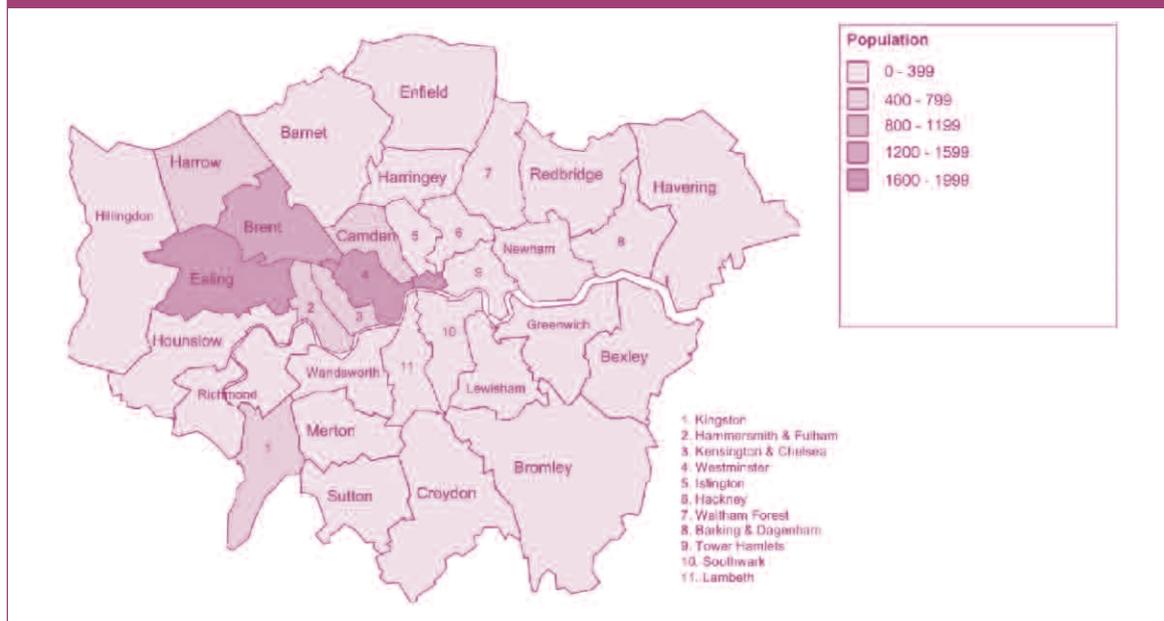
33 Al-Ali, 2007.

Table 2: London Boroughs with the largest number of Muslims born in Iraq (Source: Census 2001, commissioned table C0644).				
Borough	**Iraqi born population**	**Iraqi born Muslims**	**% of Iraqi-born population that is Muslim**	**Iraqi-born Muslims as a % of borough population**
City of London & Westminster	2,040	1,623	80%	7.6%
Ealing	3,047	1,611	53%	5.2%
Brent	1,741	1,493	86%	4.6%
Kensington & Chelsea	1,005	699	70%	5.2%
Kingston upon Thames	841	675	80%	11.7%
Hammersmith & Fulham	784	584	74%	5.2%
Camden	623	426	68%	1.9%
Harrow	556	412	74%	2.8%
Hounslow	646	381	59%	2.0%
Barnet	932	342	37%	1.8%

Census statistics on country-of-birth and religion provide an interesting picture of the Iraqi population in London and England. Although the Iraqi Muslim population is still heavily concentrated, the percentage of the Iraq-born population that is Muslim can vary considerably according to different boroughs. For example, only 53 per cent of Iraq-born migrants in the most populous, Ealing, described themselves as Muslim in the 2001 census, compared to 86 per cent of those in the neighbouring borough of Brent. Crossing the border from Brent to Barnet, Muslims are in the minority in the Iraqi population (37 per cent).

Respondents were asked whether ethnic, religious or political differences influenced people's decisions about where they lived in London or the UK as a whole. Some respondents were acutely aware of where various communities were based relating to religious, economic, political and professional standing:

> *In North West London, particularly Brent, there is a high density of Shi'a Muslim Iraqis and also two of Sistani offices are there to serve the community. The Shi'a Muslims here are more religious and traditional. In West London, Ealing and Park Row there are moderate Shi'a communities. Here you will also find the Al-Khoei Foundation and D'arlslam, while Al Husalla is found in Cricklewood. In West London the financial situation for Iraqis differs and here people are not as affluent. In the South West of London you find Christian, Sunni, secular and liberal Iraqis, they are more affluent and less religious than in Ealing.[34]*

[34] Iraqi community respondent: Female, London, 40s.

For the Shi'a communities it seems as though settlement patterns in London are determined by where the religious centres exist. For other respondents the importance of family networks for support and assistance especially for British-born Iraqis growing up in London played a significant role in determining where they live in the capital. Those who had knowledge of where Iraqis have settled outside London suggested that often employment reasons or the Home Office's dispersal scheme determines where people end up living.

It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions about whether certain areas of London are more or less important for specific groups of Iraqis. Generally speaking, the first generations who defined themselves as secular, largely felt that Iraqis are now spread across London and hence mixed spatially if not socially. The second generation of British-born Iraqi Muslim respondents however were more likely to suggest that Iraqis reside in specific areas due to religious, ethnic, political and professional factors.

7 Socio economic situation

Due to the differing conditions by which Iraqis have immigrated into the UK, there are considerable differences in the population between new and settled Iraqi immigrants as outlined in Table 3. While the population is still predominantly male, the employment rate of new migrants (38 per cent) is less than half that of settled Iraqi migrants (78 per cent). Differences in levels of higher education are also marked.

Table 3: Characteristics of new and settled Iraqi immigrants (Source: LFS data 2000-04).		
	New immigrants	**Settled immigrants**
Sex	68% male	65% male
Employed	38%	78%
Unemployed	12%	5%
In Education	6%	3%
Higher level education	19%	49%

A survey conducted by the Iraqi Community Association in 1995-1996 found that there were major differences between the types of employment undertaken by Iraqi women and men in the UK with women more likely to be in casual labour (12 per cent compared to 9 per cent of males), unpaid voluntary work (10 per cent compared to 5 per cent of males) and part-time employment (20 per cent compared to 11 per cent of males). Men in employment were more likely to be in full-time employment (56 per cent compared to 47 per cent of females), be self-employed (11 per cent compared to 6 per cent of females) or own their own business (8 per cent compared to 4 per cent of females).[35] 32 per cent of the study sample were unemployed in the sample which was five times higher than the national average for Britain at the time. Most of the unemployed respondents had been unemployed for over two years. Despite high levels of unemployment, levels of education among respondents from the community was high with 42 per cent of females and 60 per cent of males holding degree-level or higher qualifications.

[35] Survey based on 911 respondents. Iraqi Community Association (1996), *Now We Are Here: A Survey of the Profile, Structure, Needs, Hopes and Aspiration of the Iraqi Community in Britain 1995 – 1996*, London: Iraqi Community Association.

The findings of the Iraqi Community Association survey align with responses from respondents in this Communities and Local Government study, which suggest that despite coming to the UK with high level qualifications, employment opportunities and experiences were difficult for many of the first generation middle-class professional migrants, and that they had been unable to secure comparable employment on arrival. For the majority, retraining at the expense of supporting family, whether in the UK or Iraq, was impossible and many ended up in lower skilled jobs such as catering, or being unemployed. Respondents reported that as a consequence of being unable to transfer their skills and degrees in the UK, many suffered depression. As one respondent explained:

> *A lot of the first generation who were doctors and lawyers could not get work and had to live on social benefits. Many went into a cycle of depression. For those who could not get work they survived on social security and housing benefits.*[36]

There is no data on the prevalence of this kind of downward mobility but anecdotal evidence suggests that it was widespread. Respondents also suggested that the same problem of non-recognition is now lowering the employment chances of new Iraqi immigrants, and that the loss of status and financial stability has led to a considerable degree of substance abuse and mental health problems. Young Kurdish men are reported to be finding employment and social conditions in London especially difficult.

The situation of British born Iraqis is said to be much better, particularly of those from middle class backgrounds. The majority are believed to go on to higher education, but respondents suggested that they are making limited career choices as yet. A few entrepreneurs were cited by respondents, but due to pressure from families, most young people are believed to be following more traditional educational routes approved by their parents. Most are said to be studying and working in what are perceived as the more traditional disciplines of dentistry, pharmacy, and law, though an increasing number of young people, primarily men, are seen to be breaking into new employment areas such as banking, business and commerce.

[36] Iraqi community respondent: Male, London, 50s.

8 Key characteristics

8.1 Identity

As with many diaspora communities that have second and third generation communities, identity formation is complex and informed by a range of interlinking factors such as ethnicity, religion, gender and the experiences of living as an ethnic minority. For the first generation, identity in the UK is also influenced by the experiences of war, displacement and memories of conflict. This section addresses some of the key identity related issues in the community as well as describing some of the key facets of Iraqi identity such as religion and ethnicity in further detail.

The impact of living under a dictatorship and experiencing sectarian violence has had an indelible impact on the community in the UK. Respondents suggest that fear instilled by the Saddam regime has helped create rigid boundaries amongst the first generation, and that as a result many people of this generation will not mix outside of their immediate religious, gender, or ethnic group. Also because of the role that religion and ethnicity have played in creating and maintaining conflict in their home country, some respondents noted that first generation Iraqis tend to keep these aspects of their identity private. Many of the first generation Iraqi community in London are reported to be either secular or reluctant to openly profess their religious beliefs. Some respondents suggested that fear and distrust within the community caused by the Saddam regime has led many people to seek invisibility as they adjust to life in the UK, and that many first generation Iraqis refuse to define their identity, for example in surveys and questionnaires.

For British-born Iraqi Muslims, identity is informed by both Iraqi and British cultures, and most are thought to be comfortably renegotiating their Iraqi and British identities to create an emerging Iraqi-Britishness. However, the loss of aspects of their Iraqi identity is not an easy process for many people and respondents offered a range of views about how individuals respond to their changing identities and lifestyles. To some the process of change is understandable, and once individuals have abandoned any thoughts of returning to Iraq, the adoption, adaptation and incorporation of aspects of British culture is accepted as inevitable:

> *The first generation accepts the fact that most people do not want to move back to Iraq. Most of the second generation gets on well with society. People are brought up here and they are integrated.*[37]

For others the issue is more complex and accompanied by considerable internal conflict on a personal and community level. These tensions are rooted in the belief that adopting a British identity is dependant on abandoning Iraqi culture, history, and language:

[37] Iraqi community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

You can learn their language [UK], history and culture but many see this as abandoning Iraqi/Arabic culture. Ultimately it is seen as a failure and as people denying their own self identity when they choose to become English. You become a coconut – brown on the outside and white on the inside.[38]

According to British-born Iraqi respondents interesting debates are taking place within their generation about their British identity and future. Many are said to wonder how they will relate to their own children who they fear will have very little understanding or contact with their Iraqi culture. Some believe that over a period of time the diversity of Iraqi identities will no longer exist in the UK as children become increasingly British.

8.2 Ethnicity

The dynamics of Iraqi ethnicity in England appear to be influenced by recent and current events in Iraq. In Iraq the two main ethnic groups are Arab and Kurds, alongside a number of smaller ethnic minority communities. During the period under Saddam Hussein's rule, ethnic and religious minorities were targeted for oppressive actions, with the Kurdish and Christian populations specifically targeted by the Saddam regime for eradication.[39] Since the end of Saddam's regime, ethnic and religious minorities have continued to be targeted by militias and street gangs.[40] Iraq is also home to a number of migrant or refugee communities. The largest are the Palestinians, who number 15,000 (down from 35,000 in 2003). Some of them settled in Iraq in 1948 and the rest having been born there.[41]

There are many different ways in which Iraqis choose to define themselves ethnically depending upon their religious, secular, political or class-based positioning. Respondents identified Iraqi ethnic groups in the UK as including Arabs, Shabak, Kurds, Turkomans, Mandeans, Sabians, Jews, and Assyrians. 81 per cent of respondents to an Iraqi Community Association survey in 1995-96 stated their ethnicity as Arab, 13 per cent Kurdish, 2 per cent Assyrian, 1 per cent Turkoman and 2 per cent 'other'.[42] Below is a brief description of the main groups in London:

• **Assyrian Iraqis**: During the Second World War, 40,000 Assyrians fought in the RAF Levies in Habbaniyah. The community, numbering 4,000-8,000[43], is concentrated in Ealing and is said to not mix with Iraqis of other religious and ethnic backgrounds. Based in London since the 1950s it is one of the earliest communities originating from Habbaniya, west of Baghdad.

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[38] Iraqi community respondent: Female, London, 20s.
[39] Preti Taneja (2007) *Assimilation, Exodus, Eradication: Iraq's Minority Communities Since 2003*, London: Minority Rights Group International.
[40] Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon, Baroness Jay of Paddington and Lord King of Bridgwater (2007) *The Iraq Commission Report*, London: Foreign Policy Centre.
[41] Taneja, 2007.
[42] Data collected from the main householder only. Iraqi Community Association, 1996.
[43] Ibid.

In July 2004, Stephen Pound, MP for North Ealing, requested in the House of Commons that the government take the "specific pressures and security situation of the Christians in Iraq into consideration" when making asylum decisions. Speaking for the Assyrian community in the UK, he listed accounts of murders, attacks, assaults, land confiscation and denial of human rights in Iraq.[44]

- **Iraqi Arabs (Sunni and Shi'a)**: Iraqi Arabs are not a homogenous group and are divided by socio economic, political orientation, profession, religious denomination and time of arrival in the UK. Those who arrived in the late fifties were mainly upper-class Sunni professionals, politicians and landowners. In the sixties, when the Baa'th came to power, those fleeing to London were predominantly Iraqi communist exiles, Arab nationalists, non-Saddamist Baa'this, democrats and Shi'a Islamists.[45] Since 1991, many Iraqi Shi'a and Kurds have also arrived in the UK. Sabis, mainly from Baghdad are also Arab and number around a thousand in London.[46]

- **Iraqi Jews:** There are understood to be a small number of Iraqi Jews in London, though exact figures are unavailable. Part of the emigration that occurred was a consequence of persecution experienced by Iraqi Jews during the Saddam regime. Their history in the UK remains undocumented.

- **Shabaks**: The Shabaks who are predominantly Shi'a Muslim are present in small numbers in London. None of the respondents who mentioned them were able to give any further information so it is unclear as to whether religion or secularism informs the group or whether Shabaks identify themselves by this given ethnic marking.

Other respondents mentioned that there are also some Turkomans, Mandaens and a few Iraqi Palestinians residing in London.

8.2.1 Kurds
There is unfortunately no reliable data on the number of Iraqi Kurds in England. The Kurdish community in the UK is estimated to be about 50,000, among which Iraqi Kurds make up the largest group, exceeding the numbers from Turkey and Iran.[47] Iraqi Kurds in the UK are a diverse group religiously – predominantly Sunni, but also Shi'a and secular. They are reported by respondents to be the most highly marginalised group within the Iraqi diaspora. Respondents also suggested that there are some ethnic divisions in London between Arabs and Kurds and that the Iraqi Kurdish community remains relatively separated from the other Iraqi communities, though on an individual basis Iraqi Kurds may mix with Iraqis of Arab origin. For Iraqi Muslim Kurds in London the tendency to be marginalised by the Iraqi community is still a major problem and is reported to reflect its experience in Iraq.

[44] Stephen Pound, MP for North Ealing, recorded in *Hansard*, July 2004. Online at www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmhansrd/vo040706/halltext/40706h02.htm
[45] Al-Ali, 2007.
[46] Iraqi community respondent: Male, London, 40s.
[47] BBC, 2002.

8.3 Religion

According to the 2001 Census, 68 per cent of migrants in England born in Iraq are Muslim, 17 per cent are Christian, 3 per cent Jewish and 3 per cent 'no religion'.[48] As noted earlier, religious orientation is often kept private and there are a vast number of secular Iraqis in the community. Respondents suggested that the majority of Iraqi Muslims in the UK are Shi'as, but there is a significant minority of Sunni Muslims of whom the majority are said to be Kurdish. A number of respondents spoke about significant numbers of mainly Assyrian Christians, as well as the existence of small Mandaen, Sabean, Yazidi and Jewish communities in London.

8.3.1 Shi'a

Iraq has traditionally been the physical and spiritual centre of Shi'ism in the Islamic world and is home to two of its most important holy cities, Al-Najaf and Karbala. Many of the Iraqi Shi'as in the UK are Twelvers,[49] who are said to socialise freely with their counterparts from Iran and Afghanistan and live mainly in northwest London. Respondents noted that the Muslims from these communities are well educated and active in their practice of Islam.

For Shi'as of both first and second generations, religious teachings are said to inform most day to day interactions. Imams discuss topics such as health, marriage, divorce and finance on the mobile phone and also via the internet. However, while the words of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani[50], the Shi'a *marja* (religious reference), are easily available on the internet, the distance from Iraqi Shi'a religious authority is reported to be creating some shifts in the practices and understanding of Islam:

> *The Iraqi situation has made everyone reassess how Islam is interpreted and it has also made people reassess religious leaders.*[51]

In London, Shi'a Iraqis attend a number of differing mosques and organisations. There are two 'Sistani' organisations in west London where Shi'as can seek advice on matrimonial issues and laws. Respondents reported that Iraqi Shi'as also attend the Al-Khoei Mosque in Queen's Park and the 'Islamic Centre' in Maida Vale. It was reported that Iraqis have no burial facilities and so many use the centers run by the Indian Shi'a/Khoja community including the Husseni Islamic Centre in Stanmore.

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[48] Census 2001, CO644.
[49] Twelver is a branch of Shi'a Islam that refers to Muslims who adhere to the twelve succeeding imams ending with the Prophet Muhammad al Mahdi in the 10th Century. The majority of Shi'as are twelvers. It is estimated that 60 per cent of Iraqi Shi'as are twelvers (wilmetteinstitute.org/).
[50] Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani is a prominent Shi'a *majra* and significant political figure based in Iraq.
[51] Iraqi community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

8.3.2 Sunni

Since 1920, the ruling classes of Iraq have consisted mainly of minority Sunni Arabs. The majority of Sunni Arabs follow the Hanafi School of jurisprudence, and most Kurds the Shafi School. Respondents suggested that Iraqi Sunnis in the UK mainly follow the Hanafi and Maliki judicial schools. None of the respondents brought up issues of differing sub-groups or movements. The only mosque that was named to be used by the Iraqi Sunni population in London was the North London Mosque in Finsbury Park.

8.3.3 Youth

The majority of the respondents felt that there is social segregation within the community on the basis of class and religion. There were mixed responses from respondents about the level of religiosity amongst British-born Iraqis in the UK. While some regularly attend mosque, talks and seminars by religious leaders, others are said to be increasingly involved in street gangs within a growing gang culture. Respondents stressed that is not only secular young people who are caught up in violence, giving the example of the son of an Imam who was recently imprisoned for stabbing another youth.

For the more religiously inclined Iraqi Shi'a youth, the most important religious event is *Muharram* (first month of the Islamic calendar). Muharram is seen to create a dynamic hub of learning, reflection, and dialogue in which Iraqi Shi'a youth can discuss and debate religious issues of significance to them. A young respondent described the activities as follows:

> *It is for ten days of the year and there are many speakers from around the world. Youth and people in their 30s and 40s will fill up the place. There are half a dozen talks a night. There are differing teachings from differing schools of thought and people will speak about how they should interact with families, they will speak about young people and social issues such as the rise in crime, pre-marital sex and the use of drugs.*[52]

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[52] Iraqi community respondent: Male, London, 20s.

8.4 Language

Arabic is the official language in Iraq and spoken by more than three-quarters of the population. Kurdish is the official language in the Kurdish Autonomous Region (Kurdistan) in the north. About one-fifth of the total Iraqi population speaks Kurdish in one or the other of its two main dialects. A number of other languages are spoken by smaller ethnic groups, including Turkish, Turkmen, Azerbaijanian, and Syriac. English is widely used in commerce.

Research conducted in 2007 by the IOM, suggests that the majority of Iraqis in the UK speak English, Kurdish or Arabic.[53] Language is important in the transmission of cultural values and practices in most migrant communities, however within the Kurdish diaspora, Arabic is reportedly often associated with memories of brutality, displacement and loss. As a consequence, it was suggested that people from Kurdistan tended to steer away from Arabic and to prefer English instead.

There are also tensions and concerns within the community about the loss of home languages, which is equated by some with a rejection of the culture and links with Iraq. This concern is usually directed at the British-born Iraqis who are perceived to be losing their Iraqi culture and identity, and there are some attempts being made within the community to teach Arabic and Iraqi history and culture to young people. As one respondent explained:

> *Many of the second generation have lost their language, their culture and their religion and so their children will have even less attachment, so the question now is how do we keep the religion and the language alive.*[54]

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[53] IOM, 2008.
[54] Iraqi community respondent: Female, London, 40s.

9 Intra/Inter-community Dynamics

9.1 Internal community dynamics

Claims that sectarianism in Iraq is reflected in the diaspora[55] were only partially corroborated in interviews. Many respondents greeted questions about sectarianism and tensions within mosques in the UK with puzzlement. The majority of respondents stressed that they had not experienced any sectarian sentiments in the UK, nor had any experienced or heard of any such issues being aired within the mosques.

Some respondents however did suggest that there are existing or growing tensions among some Iraqis. One respondent suggested that Islam has been used by Imams to divide the Iraqi community both in Iraq and in London, and that there is more polarisation within the community in London than there had been in Iraq before the sanctions and the occupation. According to her:

> Both Shi'a and Sunni blame the Imams for not teaching unity. If Islam was unifying I would wear my hijab tomorrow, but all it does is divide us.[56]

Another respondent mentioned a popular Shi'a speaker, Ammar Nakshawani[57], whose talks are attended by many young Iraqi Shi'as, in London and across the UK:

> His talks are very aggressive and he works on emotions rather than the mind. His teachings can be interpreted as sectarian and he is reflecting a reality in Iraq.[58]

The respondent felt that Nakshawani talks lack a theological underpinning and longevity but appeal to young Iraqis due to their disenfranchisement from both the wider Iraqi community and UK society. However, an alternative opinion is that Nakshawani has given them a voice by speaking to them and validating their existence. He is part of a broader trend emerging across many ethnic Muslim communities, namely the arrival of a new generation of persuasive and articulate Muslim intellectuals and personalities who are able to gain leverage amongst young Muslim audiences because they speak in a language that appeals to them.

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[55] Ali-Ali, 2007.
[56] Iraqi community respondent: Female, London, 20s.
[57] Ammar Nakshawani, is the grandson of the late Sayed Mortadha Nakshawani, former representative and secretary of the Grand Ayatollah Abul-Qassim Khoei, in Najaf. He was born in 1981 and migrated to England in 1987. According to some, his lineage can be traced back to the Prophet Mohammed through his grandson Imam Musa al-Kadhim. An increasingly significant figure amongst Shi'a youth both in the UK and internationally, Ammar has given religious lectures throughout the world. Ammar is categorised to be amongst the new upcoming generation of self taught lecturers who are preaching Islam without having studied at an Islamic seminary. He is often attributed with inspiring young Shi'a's.
[58] Iraqi community respondent: Male, London, 50s.

Other respondents pointed the finger at the media for heightening tensions and suggested that sectarian sentiment can inform and influence people in the UK via the media, although the extent to which this has impacted on the community is unclear:

Al-Falarat (Satellite channel) is mainly Shi'a and it is run by the Supreme Islamic Council. The content reinforces Shi'a identity via commemorative events, showing Shi'a culture, and their version of the news. The channel always has prayers and its programmes are pro its party and anti-everyone else. The programme reinforces sectarianism in the Shi'a community here. It is one way that sectarianism rises from Iraq and comes into the UK.[59]

The BBC was also criticised by some for tending to separate Iraqi identities in its reporting in ways that maintain and enhance differences. Interviews with respondents also suggested that the social and geographical separation of Iraqis in London has helped to perpetuate myths about differing groups, particularly amongst the first generation that came to the UK with set impressions of other religious groups that continue to inform their stereotypes. Consequently there were many views expressed about other groups which were based not in fact, but on impressions or second hand information. The lasting influence of the Baa'thist regime, coupled with the current instability in Iraq, means that religious and ethnic relations within the community remain sensitive and that there is an evident need for dialogue between different groups and factions.

9.2 Relations with the wider UK community/cohesion and integration

The more recently arrived community is still relatively new to the country and respondents suggested that it is still in the process of finding its way in the UK. According to them, new migrants do not yet feel part of a British community, and as described earlier, unemployment and resulting problems also make it difficult for many to view themselves as an integral and valuable part of the society. One respondent explained why, in his opinion, integration has not been successful to date:

As a newly emerging community the vast majority of people are concerned with settlement. We don't think that the new community has had room to integrate yet. Integration is about being part of the main society, not just adopting its culture and lifestyle. There is a need to empower organisations and also to create opportunities for organisations to reach the community and teach them not to be so intimidated by the host society.[60]

[59] Iraqi community respondent: Female, London, 40s.
[60] Iraqi community respondent: Male, London, 50s.

A number of common themes and barriers emerged from interviews with respect to integration and cohesion.

• Hostility from the host society.

• Being perceived as being an add-on or outside of traditional society.

• Lack of reciprocity between the host country and the new migrants so as to enable smoother integration.

• Language and lack of education.

• Differing religious and cultural backgrounds.

Some respondents suggested these barriers have been compounded for the first generation by the mistrust and fear instilled in them under the Iraqi regime, as a consequence of which, fear of the state, state actors and each other continues to play a role in how many people of first and second generations conduct themselves in the UK.

Islam was presented by some respondents as a positive force in promoting integration and cohesion. One respondent explained that religious leaders are encouraging and advising the Iraqi Shi'a Muslim community about their responsibilities to the UK:

> *All of the religious leaders have advised that Muslims in the UK have a contract with the UK which means they must respect the UK law, criminal and civil codes.*[61]

The experiences of British-born Iraqis, and also for some who fled from Iraq, are quite different to those of their parents and help to reinforce their 'Britishness'. As one respondent explained:

> *A lot of Iraqi youth aged 21-30 wanted to go back to help develop the country. The majority of those who went back were disillusioned. There is a saying, 'I looked to the west and I saw Islam being practiced but no Muslims. I looked to the East and I saw Muslims but no Islam'. Many young people feel like this. Most came back and saw themselves as English. Their alliances to the UK are based upon the fact that the UK has given them an education, a home, national health, social security and human rights. Many felt that a person here is a human being first.*[62]

Many of the respondents saw integration to be a positive thing since a return to Iraq offers no viable life chances. However, most felt that their cultural and linguistic traditions need to be preserved in the process.

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[61] Iraqi community respondent: Male, London, 40s.
[62] Iraqi community respondent: Female, London, 40s.

9.3 Intergenerational Issues

The majority of the respondents thought that there is a wide gap between the generations, primarily determined by the process of migration, which has had a number of differing impacts upon familial and wider community relations. Some of the first generation saw the gap in a much more benign way than British-born Iraqis, who suggested that a lack of intergenerational understanding has played a significant role in the rise of behavioural problems among young people.

According to them, there are two broad issues underpinning these problems. Firstly, the influence of other ethnic communities, namely black British young people, is believed to have a negative impact on young Iraqis. As one respondent noted:

The second generation is part of wider society and they are affected by their peers, especially the black youth. Some young people are successful but there are Iraqi youth in prison because of gang culture and knife culture. Perhaps this is the negative side of being scattered.[63]

The second problem was perceived to be intergenerational differences that lead to tensions and difficult relations between generations, and negative outcomes for young people. As one respondent noted:

There is a big difference between the 15-20 year olds and the 20-50 year olds. There is little interaction between the two groups. Problems have started to appear. There is now a decline in educational achievements, and there are drug related problems and violence.[64]

According to some of the respondents, the interests and concerns of both generations are so far apart that harmony can only be brokered by mediators from outside families who understand the concerns and needs of both the first and second generations. Others spoke of the need for constructive activities to engage young people in order to prevent them from becoming involved in criminal and antisocial behaviour. Some respondents provided examples of positive work that is being undertaken by a few individuals in the community:

There is Mustafa Field[65] *who is taking a lead. He is trying to engage young people and he is trying to keep them occupied. He organises events and activities. There are lines drawn by parents which have a negative impact on young people, so he set up a gym in a basement and wanted to set up a shisha place where young people could meet. He felt it was better that everyone knew where they were and what they were doing.*[66]

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[63] Iraqi community respondent: Female, London, 50s.
[64] Iraqi community respondent: Male, London, 20s.
[65] Mustafa Field was a community worker who ran the SAM youth club in north London for people from disadvantaged and refugee communities. He is now a Community Cohesion Officer for the London Borough of Brent.
[66] Iraqi community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

9.4 Young People

In addition to intergenerational differences, young Iraqis in the UK are facing a number of challenges related to education, employment, under-achievement. Whilst middle-class British-born young people, both male and female, are said to be excelling in university education, respondents noted that there is a growing gap between the Iraqi middle and working class, and that there a rising level of underachievement and unemployment among young people from working class backgrounds.

Belonging or semi-belonging to two cultures is also perceived to cause difficulties for many young British-Iraqis. This was said to be leaving young people, especially those from the working class in limbo, suspended between two cultures that do not understand them. As a result many do not have any strong identity, or any clarity as to what the future holds for them.

Some respondents suggested that these problems are compounded by a lack of Iraqi youth workers, and the fact that the few people that are trying to work with the young people receive little support from the wider community. Mosques are seen to be of little help, and here are no other obvious support or advice agencies to which young people can turn to for help and information on issues that affect them such as sexual health, drugs and suicide to name a few issues of concern raised by respondents.

Some young people are reported to be trying to take the matter into their own hands, and one enterprising group was highlighted that has set up an organisation for young people to meet for cultural and social events. However, the chair of the organisation feared that due to the cost of events, it is more likely to attract middle-class and affluent young people rather than those from working class backgrounds.

9.5 Women

Many women of the first generation became exiles due to their affiliation, either as wives or relatives of political activists. For those women who came to the UK during the 60s, 70s and 80s, many were professional women having held jobs in Iraq as doctors, pharmacists, and teachers to name but a few professions. However, even though in Iraq they may have been employed in professional roles, on arrival in the UK, many women of this generation found themselves in the traditional role of housewife. The lack of English language skills was reported to be a key barrier in preventing them from transferring their skills to the UK labour market. During the period of transition, it was suggested that many of these women became active in forming their communities, in charity work, and in organising demonstrations outside embassies to highlight the crisis in Iraq.[67]

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[67] Iraqi community respondent: Female, London, 40s.

Today there is still reported to be a high level of unemployment amongst women, especially as the new migrant women are not as qualified as the women who preceded them. However, large numbers of second generation British-born middle-class women are said to be doing well and finding employment as doctors, dentists, pharmacists or lawyers, as well as across other sectors.

Most respondents felt that despite the improving socio economic position of growing numbers of Iraqi women, most women continue to face specific gender related difficulties in the UK. Whilst respondents noted that in comparison to women of the older generation, British-born Iraqi women are more interested in creating lives in the UK outside the home, traditional cultural values still continue to inform many of their day-to-day routines and behaviours. It has also been suggested that Sunni women are more educated and bound by more liberal rules than Shi'a women, who are perceived as being less educated and confined more to their homes. However, regardless of denominations and levels of education and employment, all women's lives are deemed to be curtailed by Iraqi cultural values and expectations, and many are reported to be isolated from the wider community as they try to perform what is required of them as Iraqi women. The extent to which such traditional views impact on women was highlighted by a respondent who highlighted the pressures women face to prove their virginity for marriage purposes:

> *Many second generation women in the UK are having their vaginas reconstructed so they can claim to be virgins. It's really in response to cultural needs but men who are not virgins are becoming more religious in later life and that is when they want to marry a virgin or a young girl to redeem themselves in front of the family and the community.*[68]

Respondents also reported difficulties in communication between the sexes amongst British-born Iraqis. For example:

> *Iraqis want to marry other Iraqis but at the religious events everything in the UK is separated. It is fine for an Iraqi guy to speak to an English woman at University and it is also fine for an Iraqi girl, even in the hijab, to speak to an English guy at University, but when Iraqis meet they don't talk. In Iraq it is not a problem for people to meet. They go to universities and mix there, their families, friends and neighbours are Iraqi but here it is very difficult.*[69]

[68] Iraqi community respondent: Female, London, 40s.
[69] Iraqi community respondent: Female, London, 20s.

In addition to segregation at a social level, separation between the two sexes was also reported to be evident in the structure and operation of most civil society organisations. In the absence of appropriate public spaces, respondents suggested that it was usual for first generation women to hold gatherings in their homes. Such groups usually had a religious aspect to them, for example gatherings revolved around discussion and interpretation of the Qu'ran, after which a woman would generally give a talk. It was reported that prior to such women's discussion groups, if a woman had a religious question, she would have to ask her husband, and if he was unable to answer her question, he would then contact a religious leader on her behalf.

Things have changed a great deal since then but women still continue to face difficulties in achieving equal participation in Iraqi civil society. Respondents reported that although women are highly active in organisations, it is very rare to see a woman or a girl in a leadership role in mixed-gender organisations. Usually women are confined to leadership roles in women only organisation, and women and girls are generally not encouraged to be publicly engaged or to be the public face of an organisation. Opposition to women holding leadership roles was highlighted by a respondent working for a community organisation:

> One year the committee [of an Iraqi organisation] voted for a female chair. There was a huge backlash from the young people as many said, how can you have a woman lead you. Thankfully the committee stuck to their decision.[70]

As a result of the committee upholding its decision, over the course of a year there was a marked change of opinions from both men and women about young women's leadership ability and potential. The respondent stated:

> We encouraged girls to step forward, give lectures, give readings, and so women who were at first shy began to come forward and give talks. They have become more confident in public speaking.[71]

Emerging issues facing younger British born young women were highlighted by a number of respondents, including a growing problem of educational underachievement, unemployment and gang violence amongst girls. It was felt that the relationships young girls are forming inside schools are having a significantly negative impact upon them. Changes in girls behaviour is said to be causing considerable concern in the community, but respondents felt that there is little understanding within the community about how best to deal with the issue. Unlike problems with young men which are readily accepted, there is a lack of recognition that focused work is also needed with girls. As a result there appear to be more facilities and mediators for boys than for girls.

[70] Iraqi community respondent: Female, London, 50s.
[71] Iraqi community respondent: Female, London, 40s.

Domestic violence is also a sensitive issue that was raised by a number of respondents. It was suggested that due to societal pressures, there is a wall of silence surrounding the issue of domestic violence and that women who suffer do not want to isolate themselves from the community by speaking out against their husbands. Within the community there is said to be a general assumption that if a man is providing for the family, then he is obviously a 'good man' and so his wife should not complain. For those that do want to seek outside help, there are very few service providers they can turn to as most community organisations are male dominated. Respondents reported that despite these difficulties, there is a growing number of lone parent families as increasing numbers of women are divorcing their husbands because of domestic violence. They also suggested that transnational relationships have seen a rise in the number of men marrying second wives in Iraq.

9.6 Health

Given the experiences of many Iraqi migrants, health issues, particularly mental health issues were highlighted as an important concern. A 1999 report on health issues in the Iraqi community found that many of the health and social welfare problems prevalent within the community could be seen as stress-related and caused by a variety of factors including communication barriers, unresolved trauma and lack of appropriate help and support networks, particularly in the case of the newly arrived refugee.[72] The whole experience of flight, loss of friends, family, society, home, security and social status were found to be major factors in the mental health problems identified within this group. Lack of appropriate services is also a common experience which compounds these problems.[73]

Mental health problems and depression due to loss of status were identified by respondents as still being a common problem in the community. Due to language barriers, many people face difficulties in accessing any statutory services that are available. Jafar notes that issues such as limited interpreting services and a lack of written information in community languages, makes it very hard for the community to become aware of the NHS, what it is, how it works, and how to get the basic health assessments and interventions required.[74]

[72] Jafar, 1999.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

10 Media

10.1 Perceptions of the UK media

There were mixed thoughts from respondents concerning the mainstream media in the UK, often aligned to different religious beliefs and reflective of the diverse range of factors that have motivated their immigration to the UK. As referred to in section 8.1, there is a feeling amongst some that the media represents the relationships between Shi'as and Sunnis incorrectly, and through such reporting helps create further divisions between the two groups. A great deal of reporting on Iraq is also seen by others to be based not on any factual evidence or detailed understanding of the occupation and the country context, but focused on reflecting official government points of view regarding the conflict. A minority of respondents however felt that the media is too anti-war and anti-America, and that it tends to overlook the conditions the country and its people were facing under the Saddam regime. In the words of one respondent:

> *We fled the country from an occupation. America saved us and removed us from the situation. The media though is usually too interested in anti-war and anti-America views.*[75]

There was a sense amongst some of the respondents that continuous negative broadcasts of Iraqis and Muslims are having a detrimental effect on Iraqis in the UK and helping to create a sense of hopelessness about the situation in Iraq. Many people are said to believe that Iraq is beyond hope and that the human cost of the conflict has been too high for anyone to offer any meaningful help. A respondent suggested that this feeling that people can do nothing to help the situation is largely due to the lack of media reporting about efforts that are being made by individuals and groups in Iraq to rebuild lives and communities. The focus instead on violence and sectarianism serves to maintain a particular image of Iraq and fails to inform Iraqis and the wider global communities about the initiatives that are being undertaken. According to respondents, this includes the lack of media coverage about significant social movements such as women's activism in Iraq and their protests about issues such as Sharia law.

Most respondents wanted to see the media take more responsibility in managing programme content and creating more positive images of Iraqis and other UK minority communities. Respondents suggested that it is important for the media to help build bridges between Muslims and the wider UK communities by creating positive programmes about Islam and Arabic cultures. Some suggested that positive images of Iraqis can be promoted either through balanced news reporting or through popular media such as their inclusion as characters within soap operas.

[75] Iraqi community respondent: Female, London, 40s.

10.2 Media consumption

Iraqis enjoy a number of mass media forms, the most popular in the UK being Arabic satellite channels which are viewed by a mixture of first and second generations, and English terrestrial TV that is mostly viewed by British-born Iraqis. Channels cited as being popular with Iraqis include: Russia Today, BBC Arabic, Hurra Iraq (an Iraqi state channel), Deutche 24, France 24, Alshanqiy, Al Arabia, Al Sharqia, Al Iraqia, Al Jazeera, Kurdsat, Kurdistan TV, Shi'a TV and Zagros. In terms of radio, Radio Khak was the most cited, which broadcasts from Iraq 24/7 in both Kurdish and Arabic.

The channel Al-Falarat was frequently mentioned as the preeminent Iraqi Shi'a channel. It is run by the Supreme Islamic Council,[76] one of the major parties in the Iraqi government. The content, which is aimed at the Iraqi Shi'a community, includes commemorative events, Iraqi Shi'a culture, and news which has a Shi'a bias. As well as watching Arabic satellite channels, Iraqis of all generations are said to enjoy Turkish soap operas dubbed into Arabic. Amongst British-born Iraqi respondents the BBC and Channel 4 are reported to be the most popular channels. Programmes such as *Have I Got News for You* are said to be popular amongst those that are young and politically minded.

There are a number of popular newspapers serving the community. *Azzaman* is a daily Iraqi newspaper that focuses on issues in Iraq. *Al-Muntad* is a monthly newspaper published by the Iraqi Association, and *Al-Hayat*, *Al Sharq* and *Alawsat* are also well known daily Arabic newspapers that focus on political, social and financial issues. *Al-Quds* was also cited but is reported to be perceived with some suspicion as the paper was funded by the former Saddam regime. It was suggested that the newspaper does not have much of a readership amongst the Iraqi Shi'a community, though it is read amongst the Iraqi Sunni community. As well as Arabic newspapers, people fluent in English read most of the popular English papers. Those specifically mentioned as widely read include the *Metro*, the *Independent*, the *Guardian* and the *Sun's* sports section.

The internet is also an important medium for communication for many Iraqis. Popular sites referred to were: sotaliraq.com, Iraq4all.com, Iraqi.com, Alraqi.com (forum). The internet site predominantly used by young people was cited as Shi'achat.com, a forum for Iraqi people to come together. Facebook, alongside Youtube.com, is also proving to be popular among British-born Iraqis. Recently there has been a rise in Iraqi web-sites which originate from Iraq. One is called *the weekly*. It is headed by the deputy prime minster and it is seen to be a novelty amongst Iraqis. It has publications, magazines and a web-site. There is also elaph.com which is an Arabic web-site which is Saudi funded and was created by Iraqi journalists. Other sites mentioned as popular include Muxlim TV (www.tv.muxlim.com/), Echoes Newsletter (www.csdiraq.com), Al-Rafidayn (www.alrafidayn.com), Kurdish Media (www.kurdmedia.com), Ahewar (www.ahewar.org), and Iraq Daily (www.iraqdaily.com).

[76] The Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC, previously known as Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, SCIRI) is one of the most important Shi'a Political Parties in Iraq. Its political support comes from the country's Shi'a Muslim community. In light of its gains in both elections and government appointments, Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council is one of Iraq's most powerful political parties and the largest party in the Iraqi Council of Representatives. With the fall of Saddam Hussein after the invasion of Iraq, SIIC quickly rose to prominence in Iraq, working closely with the other Shi'a parties. It gained popularity among Shiite Iraqis by providing social services and humanitarian aid, following the pattern of Islamic organisations in other countries such as Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. SIIC is alleged to receive money and weapons from Iran, and is often accused of being a proxy for Iranian interests.

11 Links with countries of origin

11.1 Travel

Access to Iraq remains restricted and the numbers of those travelling in recent years have significantly dropped. The majority of Iraqis interviewed had not travelled to Iraq for several years and were not planning to do so in the foreseeable future. One respondent said that he travelled quite often to Iraq as there are flights available from Jordan and other Arab countries into Baghdad. However once there he stays within the green zone and does not venture into areas to where the majority of Iraqis live as it is too dangerous.

For Shi'as there is a strong religious link reflected in visits made to holy sites in Iraq. Although the number has now significantly dropped, there are those who are still willing to travel to Iraq against Foreign Office warnings not to travel. There are still a few informal travel agents who are reported to organise trips to the holy sites. One of the respondents suggested that Kurds are travelling in and out of Iraq much more than Arab Iraqis, via Turkey from where they are able to make their way to Kurdistan quite easily.

There was a general feeling amongst those interviewed that many Iraqis, both first and second generation, have disconnected themselves from Iraq. Those who have visited reported a sense of being an outsider or foreigner, often reinforcing either dislocation or a sense of belonging to the UK. For British-born Iraqis a lack of fluency in Arabic also limits their ability to return or interact as an Iraqi.

11.2 Financial links

Many respondents spoke about sending money home either to relatives in Iraq using the hawala system. Many suggested that the levels of remittances sent in recent years have been far lower and that currently money is more likely to be sent from families to refugees in Syria and Jordan.

There are no reliable estimates for the level of remittances sent to Iraq from the UK or from other countries.[77]

11.3 Politics/political links

In the 2005 election 30,000 participated in the Iraqi elections from the UK.[78] The elections were dominated by the religious groups but only 4,000 of the 30,000 voted for the religious parties. 18,000 Kurdish Iraqis voted for the Kurdish Alliance.

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[77] World Bank (2008), *Outlook for Remittance Flows 2008-2010: Growth expected to moderate significantly, but flows to remain resilient:* www.econ.worldbank.org
[78] www.iom-iraq.net/ocv.html

12 Civil Society

12.1 Overview

Iraqi civil society organisations have developed in line with the different interests, concerns and motivations for migration to Britain. Many early migrants were political activists who set up organisations in the UK representing a range of political and ideological orientations in response to ongoing political developments inside Iraq. In addition to setting up UK offices affiliated to opposition parties within Iraq such as the Iraqi National Congress (INC) and the Iraqi National Accord (INA), UK based Iraqis developed a range of autonomous organisations, including many by women such as the Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq, the Iraqi Women's League, Iraqi Women for Peace and Democracy, and Act Together: Women's Action on Iraq.

As numbers fleeing the Saddam regime increased, a growing number of organisations emerged to cater for the welfare of Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers, most notable the Iraqi Community Association, a secular organisation established in 1987. Religious, ethnic and cultural associations also increased in number to cater for the emerging needs of the growing Iraqi community, together with umbrella organisations such as the Forum for Iraqi Community Organisations.

Various organisations have also been established to represent the needs of different ethnic groups, eg Kurds, Mandeans and Assyrians within the Iraqi community, the best known of which is the Kurdish Cultural Centre. A key feature of some Iraqi religious and ethnicity based associations is their pan-national nature. For example, Shi'a organisations that are well used by Iraqis such as the Al Khoei Foundation may not necessarily be Iraqi, and many Kurdish associations cater for Kurds from a broad range of national backgrounds.

Recent years have seen a huge increase in community groups and associations involved in charitable fund raising and voluntary projects aimed at reconstruction in Iraq. Youth groups such as the Iraqi Youth Foundation have also begun to emerge with the twin purposes of stimulating young people's interests in assisting in the rebuilding of Iraq, alongside proving platforms for non-sectarian based dialogue and collective action amongst young British Iraqis.

12.2 Types of organisations and services offered

As the population of Iraqis in the UK has increased so has the number of community based organisations. There is a huge diversity of Iraq organisations, mostly based in London, that range from political and pressure groups, supplementary schools, youth groups, student bodies, sports groups, on-line dating and chat forums, religious groups, women's organisations, trade-union affiliations, cultural associations and refugee support organisations. Most of these organisations are run voluntarily and with limited funding. Existing organisations provide a range of functions and services that can be accessed by all the diverse groups that make up the communities, however organisations for the welfare and support of women and girls remain limited.

12.3 Key organisations

Below is a list of community organisations identified by respondents as well known and active. They are not listed in order of influence or reach and include:

- **Ahl-ul-Bayt Islamic Mission (AIM)**: is a Shi'a Islamic organisation with worldwide membership aiming to empower Muslims through education, identity building and political awareness. Founded in 2003 in the UK by a group of professionals and university students, it is an independent initiative whose long term aspirations centre on the preparation for the blessed return of the Saviour, Imam Al-Mahdi.

- **Imam Ali Foundation**: holds events and lectures and also offers advice and guidance on personal and religious matters. People can ask Grand Ayatollah Sistani questions via its web-site.

- **Imam Al-Khoei Foundation**: since the opening of the building in 1989 the Foundation has been providing religious and charitable services by way of congregational prayers, observance of joyous and sorrowful occasions associated with the Prophet and his *ahl al-bayt*[79], and guidance in matters of religious beliefs and actions.[80] The organisation serves the Shi'a community and it is one of the few organisations that does not rely on the support of volunteers. Al-Khoei offers translation services, marriage and divorce services and serves as a venue for funerals, seminars and discussions. It has also held seminars in collaboration with the Metropolitan Police and a government scheme called 'Builders of the Future', which is run by women.

[79] *Ahl al-bayt* literally means "people of the household" and in this context refers to the family of the prophet Muhammad and his descendants. Shi'a Muslims are particularly devoted to the family of the Prophet: his cousin and son-in-law, Al ibn Ab lib (d. 661), his daughter, Fimah (d. 632), and their sons, asan (d. 669/70) and usayn (d. 680) as well as the other imams, succeeding leaders of the community and descendants of the Prophet. The Shi'a believe that these figures embody special holiness and spiritual power and knowledge through their blood relationship with the Prophet and his attachment to them. (Source: Esposito, 2008).
[80] www.al-khoei.org

- **Iraqi Community Association**: is a non-profit organisation set up in 1987 to enable Iraqis to settle and integrate in this country whilst retaining the right to express their cultural identities. Its work includes providing opportunities for volunteerism, advice, public health support, counselling, training, employment guidance, information services, and organising cultural events. It also tries to raise awareness about relevant events in Iraq and integration processes in this country.[81] The organisation produces a community newsletter (Al-Muntada) which won the Mayor of London's 'Local Press Award' in 2005. It is one of the few organisations to have received statutory funding from the Local Authority and Education Department, as well as from the national lottery.

  The Iraqi Association is a secular organisation, which according to several respondents, has become an authority on issues that affect the community such as asylum laws, and health matters. It also organises cultural events at which poets, artists, writers speak on different issues of interest. The manager often gives talks to both the Arabic media and mainstream British press regarding Iraq.

- **Iraqi Welfare Organisation**: established in 1991 and based in London, the Iraqi Welfare Organisation provides advice for the Iraqi community on housing, benefits, immigration and asylum issues as well as translation and interpreting services. It also runs community events for the elderly and carries out youth work with 9-17 year olds. The Iraqi Welfare Association provided an inter-European gathering for the Iraqi community from different countries to meet each other. It also offered a range of accredited courses but is currently thought to be less active than in the past.

- **Forum for Iraqi Community Organisations**: has more than 16 organisations in its membership including the Iraqi Community Association, the Kurdish Cultural Centre, the Iraqi Women's League, the Committee For Support of Democracy in Iraq, Chaldo-Assyrian Community, Liberal Faylee Kurds Organisation, The Mandaean Association, the Kurdish Association, and individual academics, writers, journalists, youth, and students.

- **Iraqi Youth Foundation (IYF)**: is an organisation founded by young British Iraqis with the aim of uniting Iraqi youth within the UK by encouraging debate and attempting to combat apathy. It also seeks to increase awareness of the current situation in Iraq and strengthen ties between Iraqis in the UK and in Iraq.[82] Activities include fundraising events and seminars including a recent talk with Dr Ghassan Attiyah, director of the Iraqi Foundation for Development and Democracy. The Iraqi Youth Foundation has 12 people on its committee, half of whom are working and the other half in education. The organisation holds cultural events, academic talks and networking dinners where young men and women can meet. It is one of the few organistions that has successfully brought together Shi'a, Sunni, Christian and Jewish youth.

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81 www.iraqiassociation.org
82 www.iraqiyouth.com/

- **An Noor Youth**: in Wembley holds monthly seminars which are seen as religious, intellectual and social events. The organisation has also run English classes for women due to concerns about women's English language needs.

- **Sistani's Centres**: in London were initially set up to provide family counselling and advice on matrimonial issues and legal matters. One organisation was said to be more community orientated than the other, which is just staffed by a cleric to answer questions of concern.

- **The Iraqi Care Association**: in Neasden runs GCSE and A Level classes and holds quarterly festival celebrations that bring together Shi'a, Sunni and Christian youth. According to a respondent, *'they have been heavily criticised by some of the first generation but they are doing a good job of bringing young people together'*.

- **The Islamic Centre**: in Cricklewood was noted by a respondent as being, *more attractive to many than Al-Khoei as they involve more young people. It is voluntarily run, there is no hierarchy and they organise things like football tournaments*[83].

There are also numerous Iraqi charitable organisations in the UK, most of which focus on raising money and supporting development for projects and affected individuals in Iraq. These include:

- **The Iraqi Charities Forum**: an umbrella organisation which was established to link both national as well as international Iraqi charities in order to help them work together to help each other and meet through activities and events such as forums, discussions and workshops.[84]

- **Iraqi Orphan Care Organisation (IOCO)**: is a non-governmental organisation, dedicated to providing shelter, food, health and education to underprivileged children. IOCO helps the most vulnerable orphaned children of Iraq.[85]

- **Medical Aid for Iraqi Children (MAIC)**: was registered in February 1995 and donates medicines and medical equipment to pediatric hospitals in Iraq. MAIC has so far donated and delivered medicines and medical equipment valued at £2.9 million to 31 pediatric hospitals located in the North, South and Centre of Iraq.[86]

- **Labour Friends of Iraq**: is a parliamentary group chaired by Dave Anderson MP and directed by Gary Kent. Harry Barnes and Rt Hon Ann Clwyd MP are presidents of the group which supports a political process to establish a democratic government in Iraq. While its efforts are predominantly Iraq facing, it also publicises events and engages with the Iraqi community in the UK.[87]

[83] Iraqi community respondent:
[84] www.iraqicharities.org
[85] www.iraqiorphancare.org
[86] www.maic.org.uk/aboutus.htm
[87] www.labourfriendsofiraq.org.uk

There are also a number of Iraqi specific professional associations including:

- **Al-Kindi Society for Engineers**: is a professional engineering representative body based in the UK, established to foster the technical interests of engineers and associated qualified professionals, and to promote scientific interest within the community.

- **Iraqi Medical Association – including the Student Iraqi Medical Association (SIMA):**[88] SIMA recently raised £15,000 for the Iraqi Orphan Fund through a London tube and street collection.

- **Arabic Centre for Career Development**: In the last eight years the organisation has advised and trained more than 2,000 clients. It has an international project to help Iraqi academic refugees in cooperation with the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics in UK and the UNHCR offices in Amman and Damascus.

12.4 Key influencers

Most respondents were unable to name many local or national leaders with significant influence within the community but suggested that key influencers can be from either religious or secular backgrounds. Religious leaders are highly influential for both Shi'a and Sunni Iraqis, particularly international figures. Grand Ayatollah Sistani[89] is the key influencer for the Shi'a community generally and was cited by several respondents as someone who has a very large following amongst Iraqi Shi'as of all generations in the UK and across the international Iraqi diaspora. Other influencers mentioned included Muqtada al-Sadr[90], Saeed Musawi[91] and Saeed Fadhil-Al-Milany[92], who is said to advise mostly the second generation on issues such as fiscal matters, work and marriage. Ammar Nakshawnai was also cited by some respondents as being important for the Shi'a community. One respondent stated:

He is based at the Islamic Centre of England and he is one of the biggest mediators. He has a major following more and the religious elite will visit because he is based there.[93]

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88 www.iraqimedical.net/ima/

89 Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Husaini al-Sistani is the Iranian born Grand Ayatollah and Shi'a marja residing in Iraq. He is currently the preeminent Twelver Shi'a cleric in Iraq. Since the American invasion in 2003, Sistani has played an increasingly wider political role calling for the formation of a constitutional convention, and later demanding a direct vote for the purpose of forming a transitional government, as a path to Shi'a dominance over Iraq's government since most observers say that Shi'a make up about 60 per cent of Iraq's population. Subsequently, Sistani has criticised American plans for an Iraqi government as not being democratic enough. In September of 2006, it was reported that al-Sistani had decided to abandon politics. However in May 2008, Sistani's objections to the US-Iraqi security accord were made known, with rumours that Sistani had been quieting indicating that it was Islamically permissible to attack American troops. The Western mainstream media has called him the "most influential" figure in post-invasion Iraq.

90 Muqtada al-Sadr, is 43 years Sistani's junior and the head of an independent militia known as the Mahdi army. He rose to prominence in 2004 and his military activities have undermined Sistani's influence. Muqtada al-Sadr launched an attempt to fight what he perceives as the "oppressive foreign forces" in the holy city of Najaf while Sistani was out of the country. Sadr is one of the most influential religious and political figures in the country not holding any official title in the Iraqi government.

91 Deputy Foreign Minister and Iraq's former Ambassador to the UN.

92 The Dean of International Colleges for Islamic Studies in London. www.almilani.com/eng/

93 Iraqi community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

At local levels Mustafa Field was cited as being one of the few youth workers within the community in West London, and Sayyed Musawi, a councillor for Handsworth Council, was seen to be actively engaged with the community. Some respondents suggested that professional standing such as that of doctors, lawyers, politicians, journalists and media personalities has some sway over the communities. However several were unable to name any key figures either locally or globally.

Respondents who spoke about the secular community suggested that the political situation in Iraq created an environment in which leadership and politicisation was brutally opposed and that this has led to there being a lack of leaders in the UK. One respondent explained why for the secular community there is no leader who everyone would be willing to follow:

For the secular community there is no particular person or group. One reason is because the political situation back home; the dictatorship, persecution of the middle-classes and intellectuals, stops people from becoming political. There were personalities in the 60s but not now.[94]

12.5 Civic engagement and relationships with local authorities

The majority of respondents reported that engagement with public authorities at local, regional and national levels is minimal. Eleven out of twelve respondents had not attended any events organised by authorities although some had heard of a few events. Several respondents mentioned that the authorities had not made an effort to visit or speak with the communities and felt that this research was a step in the right direction.

Low levels of engagement from within the community were said to result from a combination of how community organisations operate, and the perception within the community of local authorities being government bodies. As one respondent explained:

Very few in the community know what is going on or have any opinion. Organisations keep to themselves and sometimes they don't want to say that they are working with the government. Some will see working with the government as a sign of success but the majority are negative. They will say that you are a Zionist.[95]

According to another respondent:

Contact from authorities is limited and isn't directly with the community itself. There is no real opposition against the government but organisations really won't speak out because people do not want any trouble.[96]

[94] Iraqi community respondent: Male, London, 50s.
[95] Iraqi community respondent: Male, London, 30s.
[96] Iraqi community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

Both respondents highlighted a certain tension concerning the conduct of organisations and their suitability as mediators and representatives of the Iraqi community. For both respondents, the lack of transparency and openness on the part of organisations has created a lack of knowledge within the community about issues concerning them and the wider UK communities.

While a general lack of understanding about the system and its rules and regulations was cited as preventing Iraqis from engaging with authorities, respondents were also very critical of the lack of interest from government and the authorities about the community. Most respondents suggested that the government needs to show more interest in what is happening to the Iraqi community in the UK. One respondent pointed to the fact that they hadn't had a senior politician or representative official appeal to Iraqis in the UK.

However despite such barriers on both sides it is evident that some direct engagement is taking place at local levels. One respondent who works in a voluntary organisation reported that: *We sit on strategic bodies such as PPI, and we have individual meetings with them and with Westminster too. We are also part of forums, consortiums and we lobby appropriate policy makers.*[97] This organisation however is not representative of the common experience of most community groups as it is well established and one of the very few that have been successful in accessing statutory and charitable funding.

Respondents had mixed views about the value of engagement with the community via community organisations. As highlighted earlier, in the views of some respondents, these organisations are either not transparent or representative of the community, or they are not able to speak freely due to a fear of being targeted by authorities as trouble makers, which would have consequences for their funding and support. However, according to others, *the only way to the community is through organisations*, and that existing organisations are an underutilised communication medium through which public authorities can engage with Iraqi communities. As one respondent stated: *The Iraqi community cannot be reached unless the government goes through an organisation as we are serving the people and they are many.*[98]

Respondents offered a range of ideas about how authorities can work more effectively with organisations to engage the community. These included the use of the newsletters of community organisation that have a focus on the Iraqi community in the UK, and community announcements followed up by face-to-face meetings with senior officials. One respondent stressed that:

> *The government could start working with NGOs and lay a foundation for the future by working together now; they could have workshops for future projects, work and future partnerships.*[99]

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[97] Iraqi community respondent: Male, 40s, London.
[98] Iraqi community respondent: Male, 40s, London.
[99] Iraqi community respondent: Male, 20s, London.

Education centres such as schools, colleges and sports events were cited as being good places to begin engaging with younger groups. One respondent mentioned the mosque as another place to access young people. Another respondent suggested that:

> *The best way is to have an Iraqi point of contact employed by the government but who has a real understanding of the Iraqi communities.*[100]

Most respondents also spoke of the need for a new neutral Iraqi organisation and venue that is accessible to all different groups, genders and ages so that communication and partnerships can be developed with police, local authorities and other stakeholders without vested interests and particular factions claiming to represent the community.

12.6 Community issues and capacity building needs

Respondents highlighted a wide range of issues affecting the community and civil society organisations. One that was repeatedly raised was the need to promote more positive images of Iraqis. Many respondents felt that both the Iraqi community and mainstream society see Iraq in a very negative light, and that there is no recognition of the work Iraqis are doing both in the UK and Iraq, or about the arts and culture of Iraq. They pointed to Iraqi artists, writers, actors and other professionals as well as religious leaders in the UK who are engaged in significant work, but about which little or nothing is known outside of the community.

Respondents also raised a number of issues specific to women, including domestic violence, a lack of English language skills and a lack of female role models in leadership positions. They highlighted that lack of culturally sensitive and/or women run services to cater for these specific needs.

An additional cause for concern highlighted was high levels of unemployment amongst the first generation of new migrants. Opinions differed about the types of support that can be offered to people caught up in a cycle of depression and the benefits trap. Some respondents felt that employment training programmes for migrants can help people find work, whilst other thought that it would be difficult to re-train people and that a more useful route would be official recognition of the qualifications that first generation migrants have come to the UK with.

Low levels of educational achievement leading to high levels of unemployment amongst some sections of younger British-born Iraqis were a major concern for some respondents. Additionally, respondents suggested that the rise in gang culture amongst boys and girls, knife crime, and an increase in number of those in prison, are issues that are not yet being tackled effectively by the community. Young respondents were especially concerned that not enough is being done, especially by religious organisations, to support the work of those who are engaging with young people in order to counteract such behaviour.

[100] Iraqi community respondent: Female, London, 20s.

Respondents noted that community organisations have pressing capacity building needs that need to be met in order for them to provide effective solutions for these issues. Some of the problems facing community organisations include:

- Power struggles in organisations based upon differences in political and religious opinion. Such dynamics create tensions that impact on how organisations operate with both the authorities and the community

- Male dominance is believed to hinder access and participation by women in civil society organisations, as well as the provision of appropriate services to cater for their needs

- Most respondents, even those involved in community organisations, report a lack of knowledge within organisations about how to work with local authorities or access funding

- Funding difficulties for smaller organisations that are not able to raise money through large Islamic events where Iraqis give generous donations, or to obtain funds from businesses that are more likely to support the larger religious focused organisations

- Reliance on volunteers who are not able to spend the time needed to conduct necessary administration and networking duties. Some do not have premises and most juggle voluntary work with other commitments

- Lack of training for staff and volunteers due to lack of funding.

One respondent summed up the dilemmas facing many small community organisations as follows:

> *Voluntary organisations don't have full-time paid staff. Political organisations get funding from the EU, charities get funding from the British Council. Everyone would like to do something for the community, but many people who want to set up organisations don't know how to get funding, and they don't know how to write application forms.*[101]

Suggestions from respondents about ways in which to address community capacity building needs include:

- Education and business skills training for volunteers

- Management skills training and mentoring for staff

- Financial skills training, including training on how to write successful bids

- Secure funding to enable organisations to appoint paid staff. Having paid staff is seen as essential for the process of enabling organisations to create meaningful and long-lasting relationships with authorities and also communities

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[101] Iraqi community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

- Recognition and support by government and local authorities of organisations that are already up and running and working hard to meet community needs

- Most respondents felt that a dedicated and neutral Iraqi community centre is needed to create a space in which people can gather and be together without having to worry about religious agendas, religious politics or politics *per se*. As one respondent explained:

The centre would be the place where members of the Iraqi community can meet instead of the mosque, and so there will not be any religious influence. The younger generation can meet and discuss their problems and also take part in social activities and cultural events. This will help to reduce the gap between the older and the younger generations by bringing them together. By arranging social lectures it will increase the awareness of the older generation about differences within the Iraqi community.[102]

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[102] Iraqi community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

13 Conclusions and recommendations

The exact size of the Iraqi Muslim community in England is difficult to establish accurately, both due to the limitations of the categories under which ethnicity data was collected for the 2001 census, and because of the large influx of refugee and other new migrants that have arrived during the years following the census. It is particularly difficult to present an accurate picture of the Kurdish Iraqi population which remains very under-researched. Unfortunately limitations on the sample size for this study do not allow solid insights or conclusions to be made about the community and a separate study focusing specifically on this population would go a long way in addressing some of the gaps in knowledge that currently exist.

Iraqi Muslims in the UK form part of complex and diverse community comprising of well established and new migrants, with considerable class variations between the two. There is also a great deal of religious, linguistic and ethnic differentiation within the community and whilst the majority of Iraqis in England are Shi'a Muslims, levels of religiosity vary widely and there are significant numbers of secular Iraqis who do not practice any religion at all.

Like other refugee and asylum seeker groups in the UK today, Iraqis have had to cope with high levels of trauma resulting from war and migration, hostility from the public/media and restrictive asylum policies, as well as increasing levels of Islamophobia. As a consequence, there are significant general and mental health problems within the community, coupled with a lack of access to services due to language barriers and a lack of knowledge of how health services operate in this country.

The socio economic situation of old and new migrants differs considerably, with new arrivals reported to be finding employment much harder to access than did the middle class and well educated professionals who arrived in the 1960s and 70s. Young middle class British born Iraqis are doing well in education and the professions but low educational achievement and unemployment are a growing cause for concern in relation to young people from less well off backgrounds, many of whom are reported to be getting involved in drugs, crime and gang culture. Respondents suggest that these problems are not confined to boys and young men alone.

The issues that young people are facing are wide-ranging but reflect many of the problems that other young people from both Muslim and other minority communities are facing, such as a crisis in identity, an increase in violence, high levels of unemployment, and a drop in educational achievement. There are very few people and organisations within the communities that are attempting to create culturally sensitive activities and services for young people, and those that are doing valuable work are failing to get support and recognition from both their own community and public authorities.

Iraqi women and girls in the UK face many challenges and although the situation for some women is improving, for others it appears as though the situation is worsening in relation to education and employment. All women regardless of their socio economic situation continue to face constraints imposed by religious and cultural values, as well as suffering from issues such as domestic violence and problems in accessing culturally sensitive services and social spaces outside the home.

There is a complex and diverse civil society infrastructure within the community with many well established and emerging community organisations, but most are struggling with the common problems facing civil society organisations in other new migrant communities. Most are solely supported by volunteers and community donations and do not have the skills or capacity to develop their organisations further. Others have managed to provide quality services but there is still a reported lack of engagement with public authorities or significant evidence of partnership working with the community.

Engagement with authorities is hampered by lack of capacity and understanding of administrative and communication systems on the one hand, and by the lack of proactive approaches by public authorities on the other. In light of the war in Iraq, the community is highly critical about the failure of government and other authorities to reach out, support and consult with the Iraqi community in Britain.

13.1 Recommendations

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

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

- Community capacity building through a package of support measure including targeted funding and training support

- Specific support for the development and management of community organisations providing venues and services to meet women's needs

- Recognition and funding of organisations working with young people to address issues impacting on young people's behaviour and life chances

- English language and employment skills training for new migrants

- Development of an outreach and consultation strategy by government departments and local public authorities to engage and communicate with different groupings within the Iraqi community

- Research into the experiences and expectations of young Iraqi women

- Research into the mental health issues and service needs of the community

- Research into the demographics, issues and experiences of the Iraqi Kurd and broader Kurdish community in the UK.

14 Glossary

Ahl al-bayt: literally means "people of the household" and in this context refers to the family of the prophet Muhammad and his descendants.

Assyrians: Indigenous Christians population from northern Iraq, who claim descent from the Assyrian nation that conquered ancient Syria, Israel and Mesopotamia in the 8th and 7th centuries BC.

CPA: Coalition Provisional Authority.

ECRE: European Council on Refugees and Exiles.

Hanafi School: Major Sunni Islamic school of law which emphasises analogous reasoning of jurists over literal interpretation of *had ith.* Predominate in the Arab world and South Asia. It is the oldest of the four schools of thought (jurisprudence or Fiqh) within Sunni Islam. Named after its founder, Abu Hanifa an Nu'man ibn ThÇbit (699 – 767), the Hanafi school is the oldest, but it is generally regarded as the most liberal and as the one which puts the most emphasis on human reason. The Hanafi school also has the most followers among the four major Sunni and is predominant among the Sunnis of Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and most of the Indian Subcontinent, China as well as in Iraq, Turkey, Albania, the Balkans and the Caucasus. (Esposito, 2008).

IOM: International Organisation for Migration.

KRG: Kurdistani Regional Government.

Maliki School: School of law attributed to Malik ibn Anas al-Asbahi in the eighth century in the Arabian Peninsula. Predominant in North Africa, with significant presence in Upper Egypt, Sudan, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait. It is the third-largest of the four schools, followed by Muslims mostly in North Africa and West Africa.

Mandeans: A Gnostic sect originating from Jordan and now found mainly in Iran and Iraq. Mandeans follow the teachings of John the Baptist.

Muharram: First month of the Islamic calendar. Shi'as fast during Muharram and commemorate the death of Imam Hussein, grandson of the Prophet Mohammed, at Karbala in AD680.

Sabians: One of the oldest religious groups in the world and referred to in the Quran along with Judaism and Christianity.

Shabak: Ethnic group from the Iraqi province of Ninawa with a distinct and unique religious practice.

Shafi School: School of Islamic law founded by Muhammad ibn Idris ibn al-Abbas ibn Uthman ibn Shafii in the eighth century. Prominent in Egypt, Palestine, and Jordan with a significant number of followers in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Hejaz, Pakistan, India, and Indonesia and among Sunnis in Iran and Yemen. The Shafi school also refers to the opinions of Muhammad's companions (primarily Al-Khulafa ar-Rashidun). The school, based on Shafi's books *ar-Risala fi Usul al-Fiqh* and *KitÇb al-Umm*, emphasises proper *istinbaat* (derivation of laws) through the rigorous application of legal principles as opposed to speculation or conjecture. It is considered one of the more conservative of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence. (Esposito, 2008).

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. (Esposito, 2008).

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. (Esposito, 2008).

Turkomans: Ethnic group from Turkmenistan and neighbouring areas including a significant number in Iraq.

Twelvers: Twelver is a branch of Shi'a Islam that refers to Muslims who adhere to the twelve succeeding imams ending with the Prophet Muhammad al-Mahdi in the 10th Century. The majority of Shi'as are twelvers. Also known as Ja'fari or Ithna Ashari. (Esposito, 2008).

UN: United Nations.

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

VARRP: Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme.

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

It has been commissioned by the Department for Communities and Local Government to enhance the understanding of the diversity of England's Muslim population and as an effective route to engagement.