

Report Part Title: Introduction

Report Title: Somalis in London

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1. INTRODUCTION

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

1.1 Methodology and Methods

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.2 Report Structure

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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