

Report Part Title: Population and Demographics

Report Title: Somalis in London

Report Author(s): Open Society Foundations

Published by: Open Society Foundations (2014)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27110.8>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Open Society Foundations is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to this content.

2. POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

2.1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

² Census 2011.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹¹ CLG, “The Somali community in England”.

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

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

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

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

¹⁴ CLG, “The Somali community in England”.

¹⁵ Cole and Robinson (2003).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.3 Citizenship in the U.K.

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

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

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

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

²⁶ "Ethnicity in Tower Hamlets", analysis of 2011 Census data, Tower Hamlets Council Research Briefing, 2013, at http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=4&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CEYQFjAD&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.towerhamlets.gov.uk%2Fidoc.ashx%3Fdocid%3D9844a055-178d-420d-94f7-6a2e96a9a8a4%26version%3D1&ei=-nN7U9PqFY-iqhAeBv4HYDA&usg=AFQjCNEIa2_dYcYb_Yp2WROYb_FSOZgbg (4 August 2014).

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

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

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

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

Table 2. Asylum applications, 2001–2011³³

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

Source: Home Office, Immigration Statistics January–March 2014

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

²⁹ Blinder, “Migration to the UK”.

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

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

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

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

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