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The Algerian Muslim Community in England
Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities

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Contents

1 Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction and Context

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 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 of origin 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 Algerian community. Individual reports for the other twelve communities covered by the study, as well as a separate report synthesising the overall research findings, are available from Communities and Local Government.

This report focuses on the Algerian 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 Algerian Muslim population

Algerian asylum seekers started arriving in the UK in the 1990s and this migration has continued over a decade of political conflict in Algeria. The population is predominantly male and there are still very few second generation Algerians in the UK. In addition to

refugees, there is a significant student and professional population, including women amongst these groups. There are also an unknown number of undocumented migrants within the community.

According to the census and respondents, the vast majority of Algerians in the UK live in London and are predominantly concentrated in North London and East London, although there are significant pockets in other boroughs such as Hounslow. Outside of London, Birmingham was identified as the other metropolitan area with a considerable community. Amongst the Algerian population in Britain, there is a significant Berber presence, although the exact proportion is unknown. Anecdotal evidence suggests this may be as high as 50 per cent, but this figure is difficult to verify.

1.3 Identity, religion and language

The Algerian community in Britain is diverse, with varied patterns and reasons for migration which have an important impact on the expectations and choices they have made in their adopted country.

Algerians fall outside of commonly used ethnic categories in the UK and are impossible to adequately identify through census data as they are often subsumed in the 'White other' category. The distinctiveness of Berber heritage is also thought to prevent many in the community from identifying themselves as 'Arab'. A large proportion of the Berbers in the UK are Kabyle[1], which coincides with the large Kabyle presence in and around Algiers.

In England 78 per cent of the Algerian-born population stated its religion as Muslim in the 2001 census. Whilst actual levels of religiosity are hard to define, the vast majority are either culturally or actively practicing Sunni Muslims, mostly following the Maliki *madhab* (school of jurisprudence).

As French and Arabic (Dareeja) speakers, many have faced difficulties in accessing employment or integrating into the wider community. However, the community has still managed to develop a thriving social and economic area based around Blackstock Road in London.

1.4 Socioeconomic situation

According to an analysis of Census data conducted by the Greater London Authority (GLA) in 2005, approximately 65 per cent of the working age Algerian population in London was economically active, with an employment rate of 55 per cent compared to 75 per cent for white Londoners.[2] In spite of the professional and economic success of a section of the community, there remains a high level of unemployment within the Algerian community.

[1]   Kabyles are a sub-set of the Berber group originating from the highlands of Kabylie in north eastern Algeria.

[2]   Data Management and Analysis Group (DMAG), *London Country of Birth Profile: The Arab League*, GLA, 2005 (based on 2001 Census).

Distinct from other communities in being predominantly young, male, single with a large proportion of illegal migrants and asylum seekers, many in the community have difficulties in getting paid work and are vulnerable to drugs and crime. Accessing employment opportunities is a key issue within the community and is dependent on the acquisition of language and vocational skills, as well as having the legal status to work in the UK.

A lack of education remains a key concern for many in the community, and this is confirmed by official data which suggests that approximately 33 per cent of Algerians in London aged 16-74 have no qualifications or unknown levels of education.[3]

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

The Algerian community is predominantly young, male and single, and the majority has very little contact with an older generation to help, advise and guide it, as would traditionally have been the case in Algeria. Furthermore, older Algerians express concerns about children born here developing an English mentality and forgetting all about their Algerian roots and traditions.

Many young people are believed to be facing psychological problems due to the trauma of the situation they grew up in, where many parents were not able to look after them. Furthermore, because most Algerians in the UK are single and have no family or community ties, homesickness and the lack of contact with their families is also thought to lead many into depression and other mental health problems.

Algerian women arriving into the UK face a host of problems in common with other new migrants. Many lack English language skills, and have to learn to understand and navigate a completely different socio-cultural, economic and political system than the one they are used to. They also need to cope with the additional stresses of high unemployment, policies towards asylum seekers, a perceived rise in Islamophobia and, depending on location, a growing hostility towards Muslim women. This contrasts with the situation in Algeria where women are highly visible in both public and private organisations, though there is a notable absence in senior positions.

1.6 Integration and cohesion

The majority of the Algerian community is a relatively new community, arriving predominantly as refugees and asylum seekers. In addition to facing the challenges of starting a new life in a new country, English language problems faced by new arrivals have so far made it difficult for many in the community to enter into a process of two-way dialogue and integration with the wider community.

[3]   DMAG, 2005.

On the other hand there is an older grouping of Algerian professionals across the country who are seen as having become completely integrated, with little contact or interaction with the newer Algerian migrants in London.

Respondents stressed that most people are keen to integrate, but also at the same time to preserve some of their cultural traditions. They also pointed out that integration is a two-way process and that more needs to be done by Britain to make Algerian and other Muslims to feel British.

1.7 Media and links with country of origin

In common with other Muslim communities, the Algerian community has also felt collectively targeted by the media as potential terrorists since the 9/11 attacks and the London bombings. Anger at the media and its representations of the Algerian community is widespread in the community. However, some sections of the media have been praised by the community, in particular some local papers such as the *Islington Tribune*.

There is a lack of established UK-based Algerian media sources, which could be reflective of the disparate geographical distribution of Algerians themselves. The community is small and fragmented, thus limiting the commercial incentive and viability of creating media bases that cater specifically for the UK Algerian population. Furthermore, the popularity of pan-Arab media sources (TV, newspapers) amongst British Algerians suggests that their needs are being catered for through other means.

Algerians have a strong link with their country of origin and most people travel back every year or every few years depending on their legal and financial circumstances. However, many Algerians working in the UK illegally are unable to fly home as they would not be able to get back into the country. There are also reportedly difficulties for those Algerians who still fear the possibility of persecution from state authorities back in Algeria.

Remittances back home are important and money is remitted through various means, mainly by hand or through banks. Many Algerians reportedly take cash when they travel to Algeria and some send money through bank transfers. Money is also transferred through credit transfer companies though some people have reservations about these, believing that they pass on people's identities to security services.

Recent Algerian migrants in the UK maintain a high level of interest and involvement in Algerian politics. For example, many voted in the 1997 Algerian general elections as part of a Northern European Algerian community that voted in a member of the 'Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie', or Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), to represent them in Algeria's legislative body.

1.8 Civil society and civic engagement

The Algerian community in the UK has grown considerably since the early 1990s but as yet civil society organisations and infrastructure remain weak and fragmented, and community organisations have significant capacity building needs including funding, venues and training support.

However, despite this there are a small number of civil society organisations that exist to aid Algerians and respond to community needs. Most of the early voluntary groups that have been established have primarily focused on assisting refugees and asylum seekers. Most also remain male dominated which acts as a barrier for women seeking access and support from these organisations.

Most individuals, and especially women, still tend to seek help from family and friends or from a few professionals and religious leaders who are well known within their immediate community. As with most other Muslim communities, mosques provide a significant focal point for religious and social welfare services.

Both formal and informal organisations have been proactive in establishing links and partnerships with public authorities, primarily at the local levels. However, many feel that relationships developed are not true partnerships and that the community often has to respond to agendas dictated by the authorities rather than represent their own interests and priorities.

A police operation to arrest illegal traders on Blackstock Road in March 2008 has left a deep scar within the community and is reported by some to have led to a breakdown of trust between the community and the police. Algerians believe they are targeted unfairly by the media, police and government legislation. The community also feels discriminated against on a day-to-day basis through stop-and-search measures.

Despite this, there is a strong belief that closer relations and trust in state actors is the way forward for the community, and civil society organisations are keen to work in partnership with government, local authority, police and media organisations in order to jointly address issues facing the community.

Dialogue and debate are seen as important means for encouraging engagement and partnerships. However, respondents were keen to stress that whilst mosques are important places for meeting, information exchange and service delivery, variations in the level of religiosity amongst the Algerian community in the UK mean that communication and engagement with the wider community should not be undertaken through purely religious channels. There is also a need for better representation of Algerian Muslims in wider national and local consultation forums.

1.9 Recommendations

This research has provided many insights into the Algerian Muslim community in England, particularly the 69 per cent of the population who live in London. While many areas are highlighted as community concerns some 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 Algerian community:

- Community rapprochement between Local Authorities, Police and the Algerian community following the Blackstock Road raids

- Integration and cohesion events for Algerians in partnership with existing civil society organisations – particularly new arrivals with limited English language and knowledge of the system

- Include Algerian representatives and organisations in consultations regarding the status of undocumented migrants and failed asylum seekers in the UK

- Increase Algerian representation on wider local consultation and decision making forums

- Targeted work with young men in the community to assist both social and economic integration

- Support the development of media understanding/partnering initiatives to increase understanding about the Algerian community

- Fund and support the establishment of women's support organisations

- Undertake further research into the health issues and problems facing the community as a result of post-traumatic stress

2 Introduction

Communities and Local Government 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[4] 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

Separate 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;

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[4] In this study the 'ethnic' communities have been delineated by country of origin. We realise that within these migrant communities identity and ethnicity are dynamic and often not related to country of origin.

- *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 Muslim ethnic communities in England on the Prevent agenda, 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 land 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.
2	Qualitative data collection	Community interviews (205 total, 12 with Algerian Muslim community) Focus groups (30 total, two with the Algerian Muslim 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 primary data was gathered from Local Authority and community respondents who were able to identify the locations of significant ethnic communities but were unable to provide exact numbers.

The main method for data collection on population characteristics was through a comprehensive review of a broad range of secondary data sources, including the 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 interviewees.

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.

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 2 focus groups with representatives of different communities. 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, key issues concerning violent extremism including perceptions, experiences and activities, current initiatives in place to counter this and existing civil society structures and development needs. The interviews also assisted in identification of further key contacts for the one-to-one and focus group research and covered a range of topics including:

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

The majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face and some by telephone where necessary. Respondents were chosen on the basis that they offered a range of different types of knowledge and perspectives on community issues and dynamics. Interviews for the Algerian research were conducted by two researchers who were not from the ethnic community.

Selection of interviewees involved drawing up a 'long list' of key contacts in each community in consultation with community interviewers, expert advisers and contacts made during the first phase of research. Shortlists were produced to ensure that there was adequate female and youth representation and a regional spread that reflected the distribution of the community in England. Additional names were added on the basis of subsequent recommendations made.

The profile of the twelve respondents was as follows:

- Nine males and three females.

- One was in the 20-29 age range; four were 30-39; four were 40-49 and three were 50-59.

- Seven were involved in community or religiously orientated roles, two were in educational roles, two were professionals and one was a student.

- Eleven respondents were from London and one from Birmingham.

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

- Piloting: Each community researcher was required to carry out 2/3 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 who might be expected to hold a wide range of views.

One male and one female focus group was conducted which were attended by individuals over 35 years of age. The male focus group was attended by ten people and the female group included seven. Both were held in London.

Focus group participants were recruited by the core research team through local community organisations and CI networks. The focus groups were conducted in London in July 2008. Language translation was required for some members of the male 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 Algerian 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.[5] Hence the research tended to generate data on problem areas and challenges, particularly in focus group discussions when respondents felt they had limited time to ensure that their voices were heard. This may not reflect many of the positive and optimistic views of respondents. However, respondents were often aware that the discussions may come across as negative in tone, and were quick to try and balance this by highlighting perceived positive aspects of both their communities and their lives in the UK. We have endeavoured to set out the 'best' story (in terms of explanatory power) in the context of what is already known about why some of our respondents might express negative feelings.

- In the current context, the politicisation of the research field meant that all respondents were conscious of being part of a community under public and government scrutiny. Respondents were made aware of the purposes of the research through a 'showcard' that explained the research as well as possible uses of the research.[6] 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).

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

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

- 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.

4   Country Profile and History
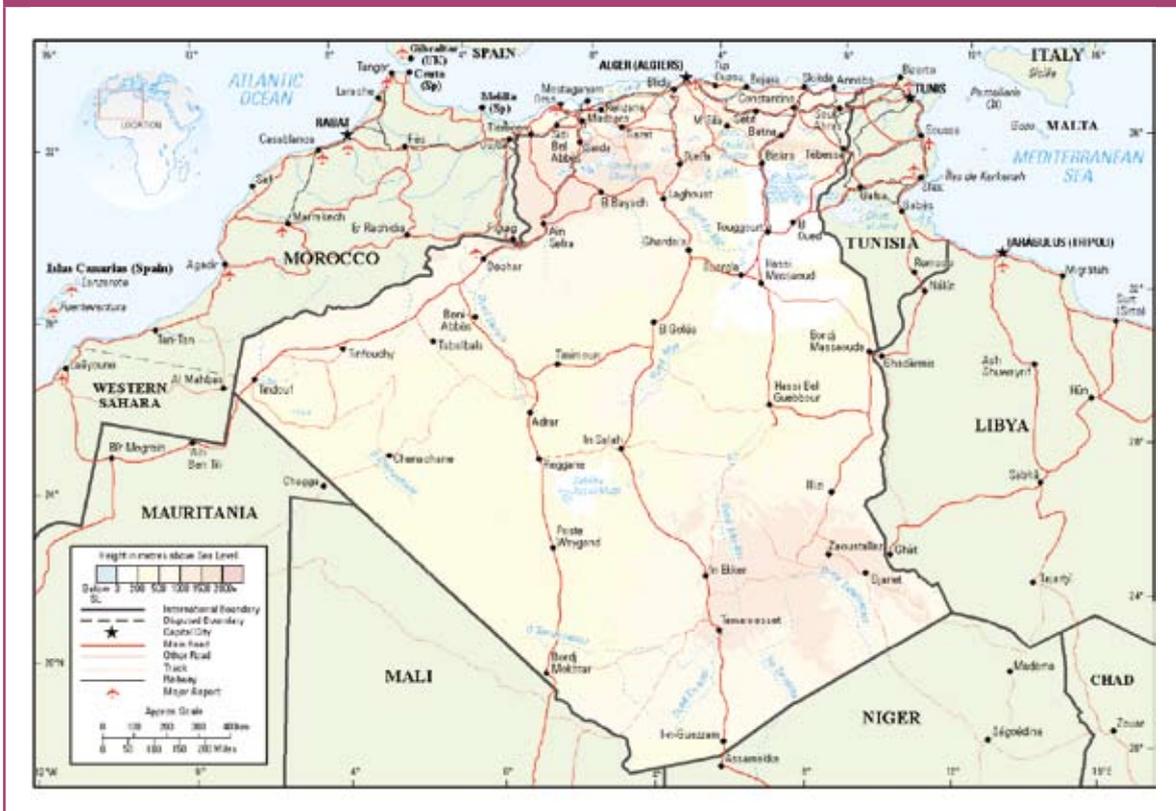
Algeria has a population of around 33.7 million, consisting mainly of Arabs (74%) and a significant Berber minority (with estimates ranging between 10 per cent and 30 per cent). Approximately two-thirds of Algeria's Berbers are Kabylians, from the mountainous Kabylia region in the northeast of the country. Smaller groups include the Chaouias from the Aures, the Mzab community around Ghardaia, and the Touareg nomads of the Sahara Desert. It is estimated that 50 per cent of the population is under the age of 30.[7] Algeria is a member of the Arab League, the African Union, and a founding member of the Arab Maghreb Union. However, it remains the chief opposition to Morocco over the disputed region of Western Sahara and its border with Morocco has remained closed since 1994.

Algeria's long and ancient history comprises of various Berber kingdoms interspersed with foreign rule by many invaders including the Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals, Arabs, Byzantines, Egyptians, the Spanish and the Ottomans. France was the last in a long line of foreign powers to exercise control over Algeria. Following more than a century of colonial rule by France and a bitterly fought struggle for freedom, Algeria finally gained

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[7]   Conference Report (2008), *Algeria Today and Tomorrow: the British Connection*, pp14, 15 & 19.

independence in 1962. The National Liberation Front (FLN), which led the popular movement against French rule, has been the dominant political party since independence.

Islam played a leading role in the resistance movement as a unifying force against colonial rule. After independence it was declared the state religion and the Ministry of Religious Affairs was established to maintain control over all religious matters including the building and control of mosques, imam training and appointments, and religious education.[8] However, independent Islamist organisations believed the measures did not go far enough and called for a more dominant role for Islam in Algeria's legal and political systems. Growing opposition to the ruling party during the 1970s and 1980s eventually led to the emergence of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in the early 1990s as the main opposition party with enough power to challenge the hegemony of the FLN.

In the 1990s, widespread dissatisfaction with the FLN and high unemployment fuelled further opposition to its centrality in Algerian politics. The electoral successes of FIS in 1990 and 1991 led to military intervention to prevent a perceived extremist-led group assuming power. The intervention and subsequent events escalated into intense fighting between 1992 and 1998 and resulted in over 120,000 deaths, the internal displacement of 200,000 Algerians, as well as the exodus of up to 450,000 nationals.[9] However, it should be noted that these figures are estimates and subject to dispute.

Mohammed Boudiaf was appointed as president by the army following the declaration of a state of emergency in February 1992. He was assassinated in June 1992 following the detention of 10,000 Islamist supporters. This was followed by targeted assassinations by Islamist activists including 200 assassinations in May 1993. The following year many of the Islamist groups involved held de facto control of many areas of the country. Recognising the fragile position of the government, France provided more than US$6 billion of military and economic assistance. Algerian civilians were significantly affected by the years of violence, particularly journalists, intellectuals, and cultural and political figures who were targets for assassination, as well as many women who were kidnapped and raped by members of armed groups.[10] In an effort to control the insurgency thousands of suspects were arrested, tortured and executed.

In 1999, Abdelaziz Bouteflika was elected president and implemented an official amnesty (the Civil Concord) for those who fought against the government during the 1990s, which was adopted via a national referendum, and violence declined significantly.[11] However, it was not until 2003 that the country could claim relative stability though the Islamist threat has not completely diminished. In 2004, Mr Bouteflika was re-elected for another four-year term in a poll overseen by foreign monitors. Since his re-election he has initiated the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation (2005) which builds on the Civil Concord and

[8]   Library of Congress (1994): Call Number DT275.A577.

[9]   *The Algerian Conflict and the Resulting Emigration*, ICAR, 2006. www.icar.org.uk/?lid=236

[10]   Tom Malinowski (2005), *Human Rights In Algeria: Testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives*, New York: Human Rights Watch.

[11]   'Algeria – Country Profile', *The Economist*, 2007.

extended the previous amnesty to many Islamists and security forces personnel. However, despite the fact that the human rights situation in Algeria is improving, including the criminalisation of acts of torture in 2004, the threat of arrest and suspicion continues to inform the psyche of many Algerians.

Also, despite concerted efforts aimed at peace and reconciliation, the Algerian government has continued to face threats from Islamist groups intent on using violence to achieve their aims, including from the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which emerged in the late 1990s as the foremost militant group in the country. The movement has a stated vision to create an Islamic state encompassing the entire Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia). In 2006 the GSPC merged with al-Qaida, followed by a change of name to al-Qaida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb. However, following continued attacks against government targets and infighting, it is not clear whether the change in name has created any significant shift in ideology and targets.

In addition to the longstanding problems in the country stemming from terrorist violence by Islamist groups, since the 1980s the Berber minority has also maintained an ongoing campaign for language recognition and greater autonomy over the Kabylia region. Whilst Tamizight was recognised as a national language in 2002 it remains a contentious issue as it has not yet been given the status of an official language. Other longstanding problems in the country that continue to influence migratory patterns include large-scale unemployment, a shortage of housing, unreliable electrical and water supplies, government inefficiencies and corruption.

5 Migration History and Trends

The first mass migration from Algeria took place after independence was declared in 1962, when about 650,000 French Algerians and more than 200,000 *harkis* (Algerian Muslims who fought on the French side during the war of independence and chose to retain French citizenship) emigrated to France. Due to historic links, France has always been the most obvious destination for Algerians. However, since the beginning of recent conflicts in Algeria, many have preferred to come to Britain. This is partly due to the changing profile of the new Algerian emigrants, who have culturally less in common with the French than the long-settled Algerian communities in France. There has also been a tightening of immigration rules in response to security considerations, which has made migration to France much more difficult for Algerians. Other reasons for the movement of Algerians from France to the UK include the perception that there may be a more 'Muslim friendly' environment in Britain, and that the UK is perceived by some as more 'hospitable' to illegal migrants.

While France has by far the largest Algerian population in Europe, in the region of 1.8 million[12], Germany has been the largest net recipient of Algerian asylum seekers in recent years. During the most unstable period of 1990 to 2003 Germany (41,355) received many more asylum seekers than France (19,623) and the UK (11,622) combined – see Chart 1.

Chart 1: Distribution of Algerian asylum seekers to the top eight receiving countries 1990 to 2003 (Source: UN High Commissioner for Refugees)

- Belgium 6%
- Canada 6%
- France 19%
- Germany 40%
- Netherlands 6%
- Spain 5%
- Switzerland 7%
- UK 11%

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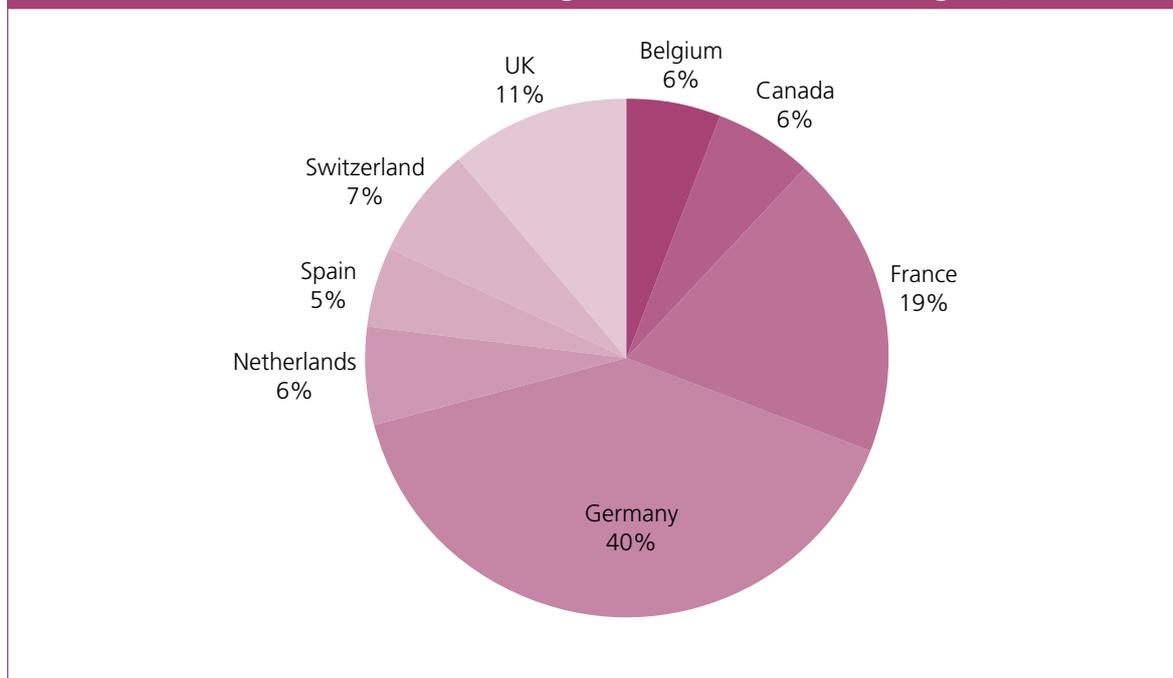
[12] Ceri Peach (2007), 'Muslim population of Europe' in *Muslim Integration: Challenging Conventional Wisdom in Europe and the United States*' Center for Strategic and International Studies, The Brookings Institution, Washington DC, 7-31.

Algerian asylum seekers started arriving in the UK in the 1990s, many driven by a well-founded fear of persecution for their religious activism and political dissidence.[13] Recent figures from UN High Commissioner for Refugees show that the number of asylum seekers from Algeria to the UK has decreased, partly as a response to the tightening of UK asylum and immigration rules, and partly due to improvements in the situation in Algeria.

Between 1980 and 2006 Britain received 11,368 applications for asylum by Algerian nationals, 99 per cent of which were received from 1995 onwards. Chart 2 shows the steep rise in asylum applications in 1995, followed by a second peak in 2000. Applications decreased to 295 in 2006, and in 2007 there were only 152.[14] The grants of settlement peaked twice in 1999 and 2004, both four years from the asylum application peaks. This suggests that the applications have taken four years to process, which fits with the experiences described by some of the Algerian respondents in this study.

Chart 2: Algerian asylum applications to the UK 1980 – 2006 (Source: Home Office)
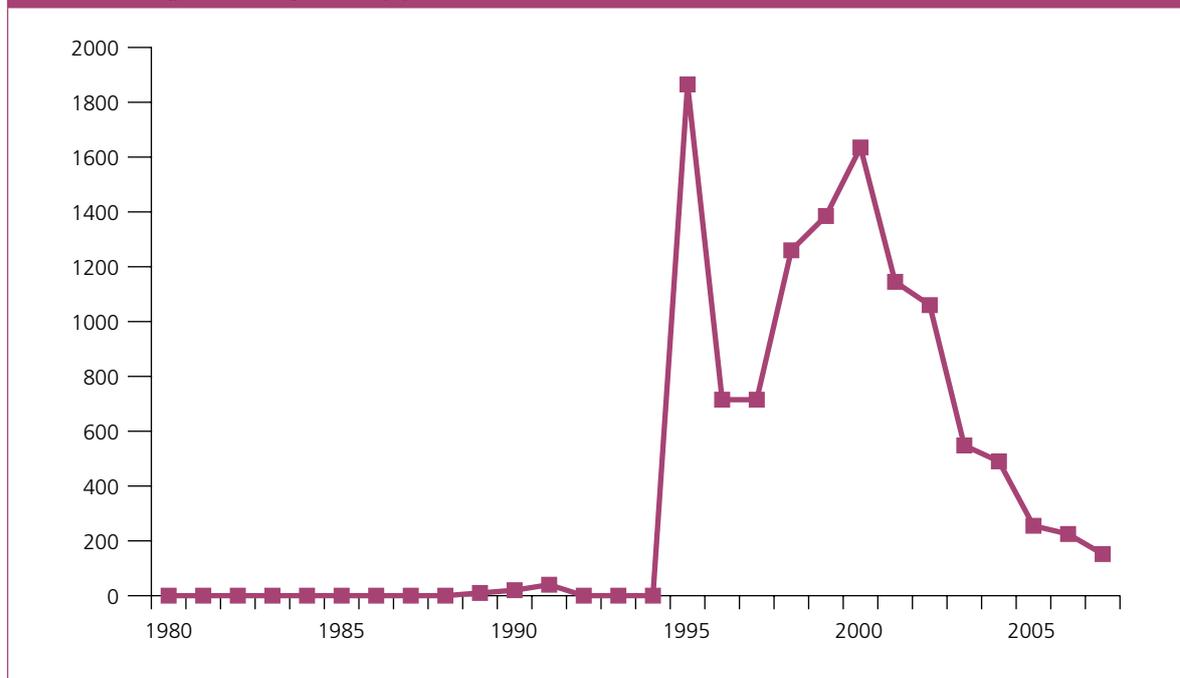
[13]   Ansari, H. (2004) *The Infidel Within: Muslims in Britain since 1800*, London: Hurst & Co, p. 164.

[14]   UNHCR (2008), *Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries, Statistical Overview of Asylum Applications Lodged in Europe and Selected Non-European Countries*.

Chart 3: Grants of settlement to Algerians 1991 to 2006 (Source: Home Office)
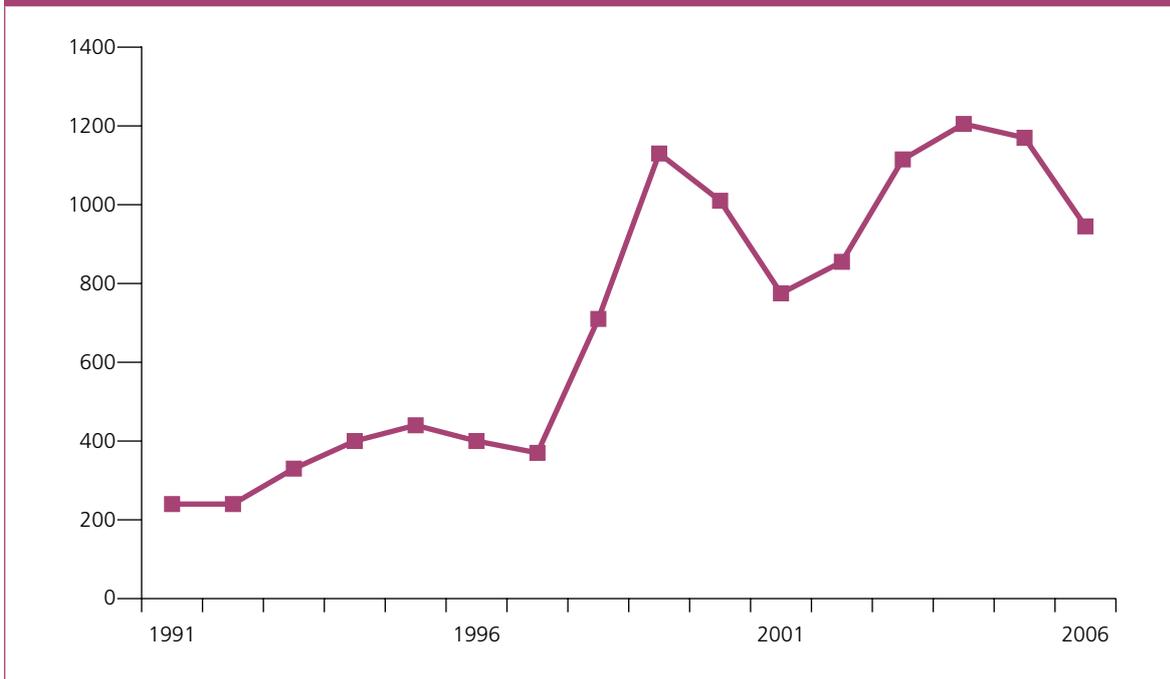
These recent immigration peaks are also reflected in citizenship acquisition by Algerians, which has increased substantially since the turn of the century (See Chart 1 below).

Chart 4: Citizenship acquisition by Algerians 1980 to 2006 (Source: Home Office)
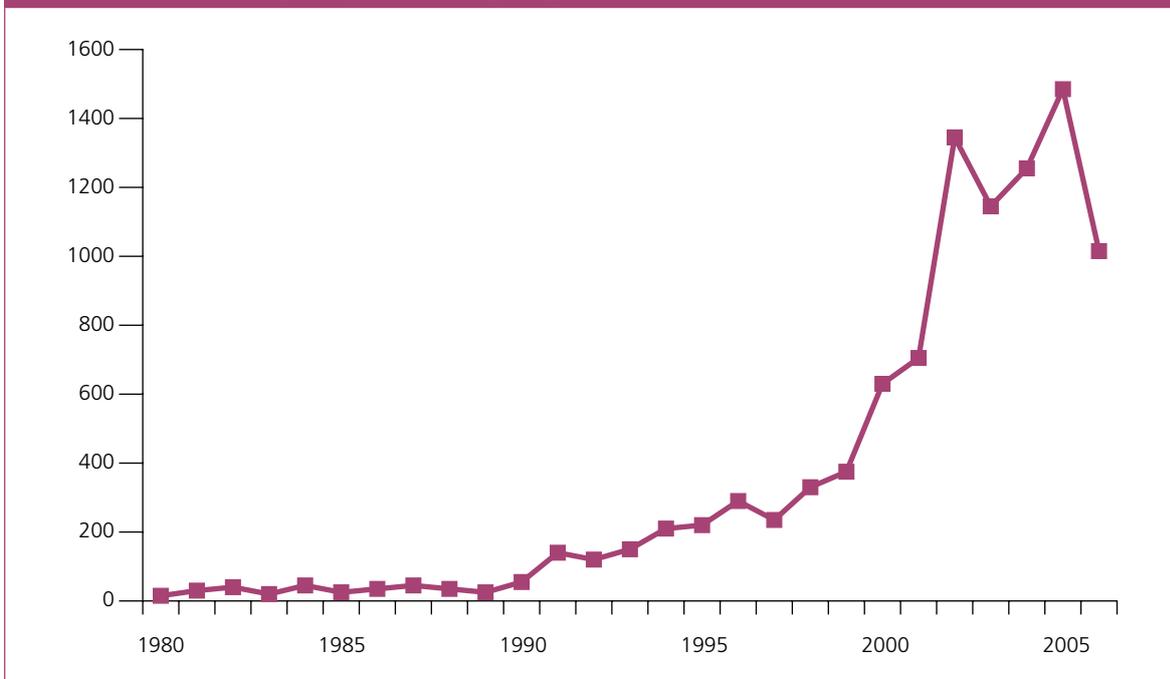
In comparison to France, which attracts a large number of immigrants from all over Algeria, most Algerian immigrants to Britain are from the capital city, Algiers. One respondent from the Algerian community estimated that the number of Algerian immigrants from Algiers is as high as 90 per cent.[15]

There is an emerging Algerian student population and a substantial, though fragmented, group of Algerian professionals in the UK. Prior to 2001 the Algerian government provided a number of scholarships to the UK, but an Algerian student in the UK noted that government scholarships have been dramatically reduced in recent years. The majority of Algerian students in the UK are thought by respondents to continue to reside in the UK after completion of their studies rather than return home. In 2005 there were 544 Algerian students in higher education in the UK paying international student fees.[16]

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[15]   Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

[16]   *Global Education Handbook*, UNESCO, 2007.

6 Community demography and key locations

Census 2001: Algerian-born Muslims in England: 7,785

The 2001 census recorded 10,672 Algerian-born residents in England of whom 78 per cent stated their religion as Muslim, including 83 per cent of the Algerian-born population in London. This population figure does not include British or French-born children of Algerian migrants so the figure for the total Muslim population in England of Algerian descent is likely to be considerably higher. According to the 2001 census, it is a predominantly young and male population (70.5 per cent male, 73 per cent between the ages of 25-44). Because Algerians have arrived in the UK relatively recently, respondents anecdotally reported that there are relatively small numbers of British-born children amongst the Algerian population in the country.

In 2004, estimates of the size of the Algerian population in the UK, irrespective of religion, based on 'best guesses' of NGOs and individuals and existing statistical data, suggested that there are somewhere between 20,000 and 25,000 Algerians in the UK.[17] Many Algerians are thought to have arrived undocumented and it has been estimated that potentially 60 per cent of Algerians in the UK have no legal status.[18]

The large majority of the Algerian population in the UK (estimates range from 70 per cent to 90 per cent) arrived during the peak period of internal conflict in Algeria between 1995 and 2003.[19]

As with most other new migrant communities included in this study, the vast majority of the Algerian population is concentrated in London. Outside of London there are small numbers in Sheffield, Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham, Bournemouth and Leicester.[20] Local authority stakeholders in Newcastle have also noted a small but visible Algerian community and significant student communities in Bristol and Cambridge. Table 1 shows the distribution of the Algerian-born Muslim population by Government Office region.

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[17] Collyer, M. (2004), *Refugee Populations in the UK: Algerians*, Information Centre on Asylum Seekers and Refugees (ICAR).

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] ICAR, http://www.icar.org.uk/?lid=1172. ICAR's report also notes that dispersal statistics collated at the end of January 2003 showed that the largest numbers of Algerian asylum seekers in dispersal accommodation were based in Glasgow, Sheffield, Birmingham and Manchester.

Table 1: Distribution of Algerian-born Muslim population in Government Office Regions in England (Source: 2001 Census, commissioned table C0644)				
GO Region	**Percentage of Algerian-born population who is Muslim**	**Algerian-born Muslims**	**Percentage of total Algerian-born population in England**	**Algerian-born Muslims as percentage of total Muslim population**
London	*83*	5,329	*68.5*	*0.9*
South East	*68*	719	*9.2*	*0.7*
North West	*72*	373	*4.8*	*0.2*
East of England	*70*	358	*4.6*	*0.5*
Yorkshire and the Humber	*66*	264	*3.4*	*0.1*
South West	*63*	231	*3.0*	*1.0*
East Midlands	*73*	230	*3.0*	*0.3*
West Midlands	*66*	188	*2.4*	*0.1*
North East	*71*	93	*1.2*	*0.3*
Total	**78%**	**7,785**	**100%**	**0.5%**

The Algerian community in London is predominantly concentrated in north and east London as well as significant pockets in west London. Table 2 shows that distribution of the Algerian Muslim population across the London boroughs.

Figure 1 illustrates below the distribution of the Algeria-born Muslim population across all London boroughs.

Borough	Percentage of Algerian-born population who are Muslim	Algerian-born Population	Algerian-born Muslims	Algerian-born Muslims as percentage of total borough Muslim population
Waltham Forest	87	481	419	1.3
Brent	94	382	358	1.1
Haringey	80	346	278	1.1
Lambeth	86	315	272	1.9
Newham	88	308	271	0.5
City of London and Westminster	82	301	247	0.5
Southwark	84	293	247	1.5
Kensington & Chelsea	78	305	238	1.8
Lewisham	77	294	227	2.0
Barnet	82	277	226	1.2

Table 2: London boroughs with the highest number of Muslims born in Algeria (Source: Census 2001, commissioned table C0644).

Figure 1: Distribution of Algeria-born Muslims in London (Source: Census 2001, commissioned table C0644)
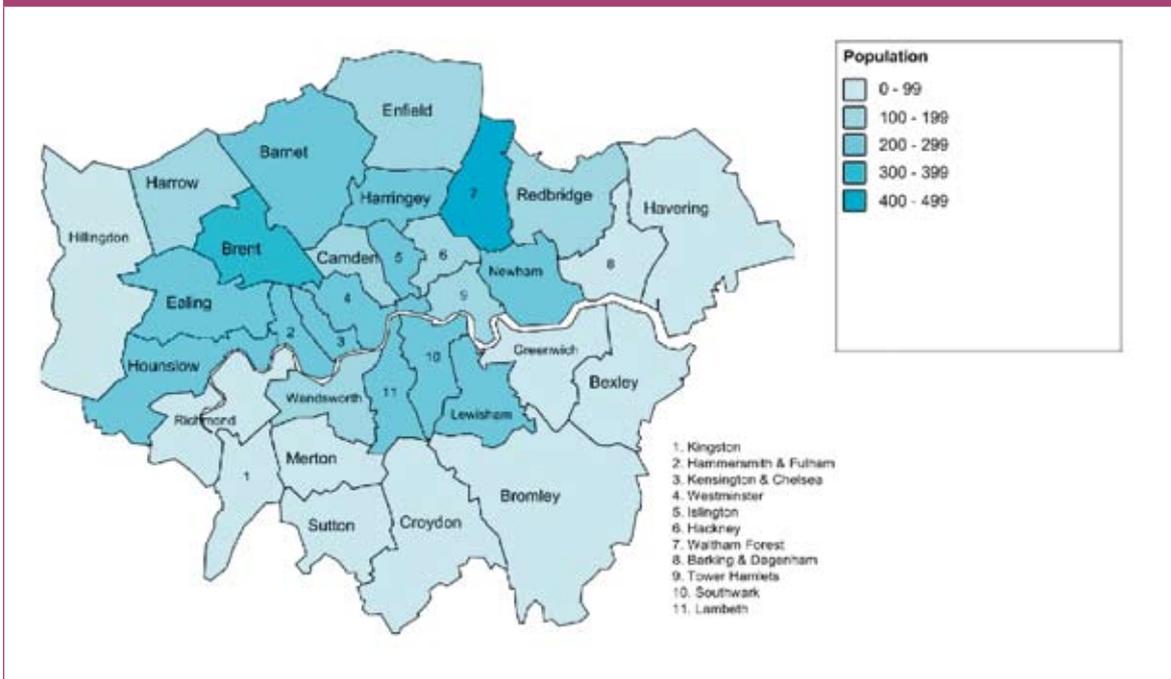
The North London Central Mosque (Finsbury Park) and the Muslim Welfare House are the main meeting places for Algerians in London. There are also a number of social spaces surrounding these two centres, particularly coffee houses on Blackstock Road (Finsbury Park) and Hoe Street (Walthamstow), and the Arab Advice Bureau in Finsbury Park (Formerly the Algerian Refugee Council).

Respondents reported that there is a significant Algerian population in Hounslow that is thought to be primarily from France although census figures report only a small number of people born in Algeria in the borough in 2001. Other areas are said to attract people for a variety of reasons. For example, respondents suggested that some people, mainly single men, are drawn to live in Brixton because of the Algerian imam at one of the mosques, whereas Walthamstow is seen to be more attractive for families. Communities in Kilburn, Cricklewood, Edgware Road, Wood Green and Lewisham are said to be composed of a mixture of families and single men. While there is a concentration of Algerians in North London, those outside of the area suggest that there is often a limited sense of community in London. As described by one respondent:

> *There isn't really an Algerian community. You can't gather people. We've got different ways of seeing the life of the community. Most people are illegal in the country so you can't make a community.*[21]

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[21] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

Another noted:

> *There is a lack of community interest, for example we will have a big gathering for Eid and maybe 100 people will turn up but then they will not attend meetings.*[22]

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[22]   Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

7   Socio-economic situation

According to an analysis of Census data conducted by the Greater London Authority (GLA) in 2005, approximately 65 per cent of the working age Algerian population in London was economically active, with an employment rate of 55 per cent compared to 75 per cent for white Londoners.[23] There was a substantial minority with higher-level qualifications (32%)[24], which is reflected in approximately 26 per cent working in professional occupations and managerial/senior positions.[25] Within the industrial sector, the highest concentration of workers was in hotels and restaurants, followed by wholesale and retail, transport and real estate.[26]

On Blackstock Road in North London, Algerians have created a cultural and commercial centre of activity encompassing a wide range of businesses including Algerian cafes, restaurants, bakeries, coffee shops, grocery stores and internet cafes. There are over 25 shops around Blackstock Road offering varieties of North African food and other goods and services. In the words of one interviewee:

> *Algeria has a rich culture that we have brought to Blackstock Road. Walk along the road and you will see the many coffee shops, you will smell the spices, we have created another image and we have put our stamp onto the area.[27]*

In spite of the economic success of a section of the community, respondents noted that there is a high level of unemployment within the Algerian community. Some respondents believed that whilst there are many well educated and successful Algerians in Britain, they are disconnected from the new arrivals in areas such as Finsbury Park that they are concentrated in. This is thought to deprive the young and unemployed of appropriate role models that they can look up to and emulate.

A lack of education was cited by many respondents and focus group participants as a key concern by many in the community, and this is confirmed by official data which suggests that approximately 33 per cent of people aged 16-74 have no qualifications or known levels of education.[28] Young men in particular are widely thought to be lacking the requisite skills for employment. Many respondents also felt that in a climate of growing Islamophobia, having an Arab/Muslim name makes it difficult for them to get work and that wider discrimination against ethnic minorities means that people have to be better qualified than the English to get the same jobs.

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[23]   Percentage refers to the working age population only. DMAG, 2005.

[24]   Degree level or equivalent and above. DMAG, 2005.

[25]   DMAG, 2005.

[26]   Ibid. From 2001 Census, Commissioned Table SCT021 (C0116).

[27]   Focus group respondent, Male.

[28]   DMAG, 2005.

These problems are exacerbated by the number of Algerians who are in the UK illegally, or who are awaiting asylum decisions and hence unable to access education. Most refugees and asylum seekers arrive in Britain with the aim of setting up a new life and recovering from the loss and trauma they have experienced in their country of origin. However, in reality they face a range of new challenges and obstacles to setting up a new life, due to which many are thought to be driven to drugs and petty crime. One male focus group respondent noted that:

> *They need to deal with the situation about the illegal people. Deal with the stealing and burglary. If the people here can have an education, if they can feel safe and secure then this will help them to get a job. But now they can't do anything because they have no papers so they survive the best way they can.*[29]

Access to employment training, and particularly language courses in the first instance, is seen as crucial in assisting the community to help develop appropriate employment skills as well as their integration into British society. As one respondent noted: *If you can't speak English it is like being disabled*.[30]

[29]   Focus group respondent, male.

[30]   Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

8 Key Characteristics

8.1 Identity

The Algerian community in Britain is diverse, with varied patterns and reasons for migration, which have an important impact on the expectations and choices they have made in their adopted country. Like most migrant communities, Algerians have wide ranging views on the question of identity and its links to citizenship, religion, language, politics, socio-economic status and ethnicity. Additionally, because there are many in the community who are asylum seekers fleeing persecution in Algeria, and who are now awaiting decisions concerning their future in Britain, their refugee and asylum status is a significant element in the way individuals see themselves and their relationships to both Britain and Algeria.

We encountered a range of views from respondents and focus group participants including those who emphasise their Algerian identity even though they may hold a British passport. There are others who prefer to be seen as North African, or individuals who wish to be solely identified as Muslim. Many emphasise their British identity foremost and respondents noted that most Algerians who have been born in the UK have very little knowledge about Algeria and hence tend to see themselves primarily as British. Alongside these are people who have been living in Britain for a long time but have homes in Algeria they wish to return to. They suggest that they only continue to stay in the UK because of ongoing problems in Algeria.

Most however were keen to stress the fact that Algerians are very adaptable and have a plural and multilingual culture that has easily been able to integrate the multiple religious, linguistic and ethnic identities that coexist in Algeria. Some respondents highlighted the fact that whilst there are significant numbers of Berbers who see themselves as culturally and linguistically distinct from the majority of Algerians, by and large Arabs and Berbers live together peacefully, with a high degree of intermarriage and extended family ties between the two communities.

They proposed that this experience in their home country has contributed to high levels of integration, and even assimilation, in the UK, and that few people have any strong attachment to the notion of an Algerian community. One respondent suggested that many individuals have integrated to the extent that they have become 'invisible Algerians'.

However, there are others that are keen to retain their Algerian culture and this feeling is thought to be particularly strong amongst parents with children who have been born in the UK. These parents are keen to ensure that their children retain their language and Algerian roots. In the words of one parent:

> We want to learn more about the UK, to get a good education here, to integrate. But we still want to keep hold of our identity and make our voices heard.[31]

A respondent from a community centre explained the challenge the community faces in providing the new generation a balanced sense of its identity as both Algerians and British:

> We want the second generation to be proud of Algeria, to know about their culture and their roots. Algeria is such a rich country, with so much diversity – we are Roman, Turkish and Iranian, and we want our children to be able to experience the historical and cultural richness of their homeland. The second generation, they are English and they are Algerian it is difficult for them to know Algeria, so a number of Saturday schools have been set up to teach Arabic and cultural heritage. As an organisation we shall also be organising events so that the British people can also experience the Algerian culture.[32]

8.2 Ethnicity

Algerians fall outside of commonly used ethnic categories in the UK and are impossible to identify adequately through census data as they are often subsumed in the 'White other' category. A number of respondents also highlighted the distinctiveness of Berber heritage and suggested that many in the community are reluctant to identify themselves as 'Arab': *The term Arab does not reflect the ethnicity of the people.[33]*

There is a significant Berber presence, although the exact proportion is unknown. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, given the areas from where Algerians have emigrated from, the percentage of Berbers in UK may be much higher than in Algeria,[34] with estimates varying from 20 per cent to 50 per cent, though some respondents disputed this claim. These variations in perception may in part be accounted for by the complexity around identity issues alluded to in the previous section as the result of many Arabs having Berber roots and many Berbers being 'Arabised'.

The exact relationship is complicated and the small sample of respondents and limited time to address the issue in focus groups means that firm statements are difficult. The variation in figures given by community members could also be due to their differing religious and

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[31] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

[32] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

[33] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 50s.

[34] Collyer, 2004.

political leanings. There is a great deal of debate within the community in the UK relating to Muslim, Arab and Berber identity, which is a reflection of the ongoing identity and autonomy debates around these issues in Algeria itself.

A large proportion of the Berbers in the UK are Kabyle[35], which coincides with the large Kabyle presence in and around Algiers. One respondent suggested that the Kabyle Berber group is very vocal and visible, and chooses to identify itself as Kabyle rather than Algerian. However on the whole, the Berber/Arab delineation is said to be not as apparent in the UK as it is in France. Respondents stressed that Berbers living in Algeria and in the UK have undergone extensive 'Arabisation', and that they are very well integrated in both countries. They stressed that Algerians in the UK appreciate diversity more, and that due to the fragmented nature of the UK Algerian community, there is less concern about differences in ethnicity. In contrast, the demarcation is thought to be quite prominent in France:

> *For us Algerians, we have Arabs and Berbers. In France there is tension between the two, but here the community is quite small and the people are mainly from Algiers so there is not much tension.*[36]

8.3 Religion

Islam is one of the founding principles of the Algerian state, and Sunni Islam is the official religion of the country. Muslims constitute 99 per cent of the population.[37] The remaining one per cent of the population is predominantly Christian, with a minority Jewish population.[38] The majority of Sunni Algerians adhere to the Maliki *madhab* (school of jurisprudence).[39] Although Algeria is not considered to be an Islamic State, Islamic Law (Sharia) is influential in the spheres of private and family law.[40]

In England, 78 per cent of the Algerian-born population stated its religion as Muslim in the 2001 census. While the Maliki *madhab* dominates, respondents noted that this does not preclude Algerians from worshipping in mosques that follow different traditions across the UK. One respondent suggested that a considerable number of Algerians are inclined towards Sufism but interaction with formal Sufi Tariqas is limited and that Algerians on the whole tend to share some Sufi ideas but without necessarily practicing them.[41] Salafi Algerians are believed by respondents to be over-represented in London in comparison to their country of origin.[42]

[35] Kabyles are a sub-set of the Berber group originating from the highlands of Kabylie in north eastern Algeria.

[36] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

[37] Central Intelligence Agency Factbook, 2008.

[38] Ibid.

[39] The Maliki madhab is a school of law attributed to Malik ibn Anas al-Asbahi in the eighth century in the Arabian Peninsula. It is dominant in much of North Africa as well as present in Upper Egypt, Sudan, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait. It is characterised by strong emphasis on hadith; many doctrines are attributed to early Muslims such as Muhammad's wives, relatives, and Companions. A distinguishing feature of the Maliki school is its reliance on the practice of the Companions in Medina as a source of law. (Source: John Esposito (ed) (2008), *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, OUP)

[40] Collyer, 2004.

[41] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 50s.

[42] Salafi: see glossary.

Algerians attend various mosques of different denominations in north London, particularly the North London Central Mosque in Finsbury Park, though many also attend the Brixton Mosque in south London. What respondents called 'orthodox' Algerian Muslims are said to attend the Muslim Welfare House in Finsbury Park.[43] Respondents also reported that a substantial number of Algerians from West London use the *Al Manaar* (The Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre, Westbourne Park).

Levels of religiosity are difficult to gauge from this limited sample, though it is evident that there is a wide variation. As this respondent explained:

> *People know they are Muslim because that is what we have grown up with, it is in our backgrounds and it is always there. Some people pray five times a day and others just know they are Muslim.[44]*

According to a Berber respondent, most Berbers traditionally come from Muslim family backgrounds and consider themselves as 'cultural Muslims', but may not actively practice the religion. In the views of yet another respondent: *Religion is part of our dignity, it's our values, and it is how we come to understand everything.*[45]

8.4 Language

The official language of Algeria is Arabic. Since 2001, Berber has been a 'national' language (Tamazight – which is a standard form that unites a number of northern Berber languages). Respondents noted that the Arabic spoken is an Algerian dialect that differs considerably from classical Arabic. Algerians educated to secondary level have a good level of French, although it is suggested that due to a deteriorating standard in education this may be diminishing. Those engaged in business and commercial environments communicate primarily in French. Respondents reported that most Algerians living in the UK primarily speak in Arabic with each other, though those from a Berber background may also use one of the Berber languages. A mapping study by the International Organisation for Migration found that 60 per cent of the respondents in its study showed a preference for receiving information in Arabic while 8 per cent chose Tamazight.[46] French is also spoken among those from more educated backgrounds. A respondent described the multilingualism of the community as follows:

> *In Algeria we speak Arabic and French. Many people speak three languages – I speak Arabic, French and Russian. There is also Berber. In England we speak a mixture of Arabic and French; it is slang and we call it Dareeja.[47]*

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[43] http://www.mwht.org.uk

[44] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

[45] Algerian community respondent: Male, Birmingham, 40s.

[46] International Organisation for Migration (2007), *Algerian Mapping Study*, London: IOM.

[47] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

As well as having to acclimatise to a new culture and different social and legal systems, a major challenge for Algerians has been developing competence in English. Many respondents noted that there is a lack of English language competency among Algerian migrants, particularly among women in the community, and that this affects their ability to enter the labour market and access public services. As one female respondent noted:

> *There is a major language barrier and people do not know their rights. It is difficult to access the NHS and Social Services, the NHS especially, because people don't understand about the GP. The reason why it is difficult is because you have to go to the GP, they want an address and it takes 3 months to get an address. Then you have to bring your own translator, and it takes a month to get a translator.*[48]

This has important consequences for communication with the community. As one community worker noted:

> *Written communication has to be in Arabic or French as people will read it. If it is written in English no-one will read it.*[49]

[48] Focus group respondent, Male.

[49] Algerian community respondent: Female, London, 30s.

9   Intra-community dynamics

9.1 Intergenerational dynamics

The Algerian community is predominantly young, male and single, and the majority has very little contact with an older generation who can help, advise and guide them, as would traditionally have been the case in Algeria. Most of the older settled Algerians are thought to live outside London and outside the main community concentrations. As a consequence, most young people are said to rely exclusively on their peers for support and guidance. According to one older interviewee:

> The men in their 20s to 30s don't really have contact with the older generation. They haven't seen anything of life and they are arrogant and do not want advice. When they grew up all they saw was guns, police, they were scared to go to the post office, their young lives were stolen and they have nothing. They have only seen war and killing. They don't trust anybody. They need to integrate and feel connected, and they need to believe that they can still do things and achieve something.[50]

Most older respondents also indicated that many young people are facing psychological problems due to the trauma of the situation they grew up in, where many parents were not able to look after them. For instance, one respondent explained:

> Now we are paying the price with the new generation. The kids saw fighting every day, people were killed, and now many of their generation have psychological problems and are lost.[51]

Furthermore because most Algerians in the UK are single and have no family or community ties, homesickness and the lack of contact with their families is also thought to lead many into depression and other mental health problems. The lack of female influence is also suggested by respondents to have a negative impact. As one older female respondent who works closely with the community noted:

> I spoke with a group of young men who were hanging around on the street and I asked them, if I was to set up a woman's organisation would you like to join and speak with the women? And they all replied it would be fantastic. One said it would be like being at home with his mum, and another young man started to cry because he missed his family. You see, Algerian boys and men they are very close to their mothers. These young men they are here alone, they have no guidance, they get into trouble because they just listen to each other. It is a very difficult situation.[52]

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[50] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 50s.

[51] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

[52] Algerian community respondent: Female, London, 40s.

A number of older respondents and focus group participants (young and old) noted that in many areas there is an evident conflict around values and outlook between the young and old. Older people have a strong belief in the value of hard work and study, bringing with them strongly rooted traditions and belief systems that some respondents feel have not been continued by the young. A middle aged man who had come to Britain as a young man described the change in his outlook with age:

> *Now as I am older I have become more patient, but when I was new here I also wanted everything quickly. The young are into the easy life and easy living, whilst the older people are more rational and not too concerned about the easy life.[53]*

Older Algerians also expressed some concerns about children born here developing an English mentality and forgetting all about their Algerian roots and traditions. Young people are viewed as having lost the culture and work ethic that older Algerians had, although paradoxically they are also seen by elder respondents to be 'more religious' on average than the older generation, at least in terms of regular mosque attendance.

9.2 Young People

The majority of the Algerian population are young men, many of whom are asylum seekers and refugees. Some respondents described themselves as 'suspended in Britain' by asylum policies and an administration system that leaves them waiting for papers to return home. Anecdotal evidence from community members suggests that the application process can take up to four years. In the interim, young Algerian men face extreme poverty, isolation and unemployment. One community worker described their situation as follows:

> *Algerian young people come here as asylum seekers. When their asylum fails they are left in limbo, they have no papers, they cannot work, they cannot claim benefits, they cannot get documentation to return home. Many are living in poverty and they come to Blackstock Road to find work. When they cannot they turn to crime. In this vulnerable state they can be used by criminals to carry out crime or more serious activity. Not one government organisation or police have come to the community to try and find out what is happening, or to ask how to help the young people. The government needs to create a concrete project to help the younger generation.[54]*

Another interviewee described his personal experience with the asylum process:

> *I came on a truck to the UK; I claimed asylum in 2000 and I was receiving NASS[55]. After four years they refused my claim. I left Algeria because of many problems… there are many Algerians like me…It has been two years I have been trying to get back to Algeria but they don't give me my travel documents.[56]*

53   Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 50s.

54   Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

55   The package of support provided by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) includes a weekly allowance.

56   Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 20s.

Young Algerian men were noted by respondents to endure ongoing racism and Islamophobia as a result of stereotyping by the media and authorities. Since 9/11 and 7/7 these incidents are said to be frequent. For example, one woman recalled an incident where her son was told on the underground: "Don't blow the train up". Stop and search procedures were mentioned by many and are felt to be used disproportionately on Algerian men, creating much anger and frustration. According to one male focus group respondent:

> *Because of the attitude of law enforcement, the community feels under pressure and in the black books of the law – it shouldn't have to be this way. For us we may act defensively because we anticipate bad behaviour from the authorities as soon as we mention we are Algerian.* [57]

A police operation to tackle Algerian criminal networks operating in the Blackstock Road area in March 2008 was said by many respondents to have had an additional alienating impact on the Finsbury Park community, particularly on young Algerians. According to newspaper reports, 600 police officers descended on the community in Blackstock Road and carried out raids on Algerian shops and businesses to look for criminals and others suspected of being involved in terrorist activities.[58] The respondents recognised that action was necessary and some have welcomed the long term effects of the raid, which has improved the reputation of the community and made Blackstock Road a safer place. However, the process was reported by most Algerian respondents to have soured relations between the community and the authorities, especially with the police. Despite recognition that some action was necessary, the process and lack of consultation still had some immediate negative impacts on the Finsbury Park Algerian community. As one respondent noted:

> *After the raid morale is down. My business partner, his behaviour has changed and he is like a different person now. People don't come to Blackstock Road anymore. People don't come to meet their friends. People stay at home.* [59]

Another incident during the course of this study led to many young men, who had initially agreed to be interviewed, to pull out due to their fears of arrests and deportation. This was the case of Hisham Yezza, an administrator at Nottingham University who was arrested under the Terrorism Act and released uncharged six days later, but immediately rearrested and detained pending deportation on unrelated immigration charges. Hisham Yezza remained in custody for 30 days before the deportation order was cancelled and he was released on bail following protests by university students, the press and his Member of Parliament.

Respondents and focus group participants emphasised that for many young men who are in the country illegally, the fear of arrest and deportation is a fact of everyday life. The arrest of Hisham Yezza under anti-terrorism laws, coupled with the increase in stop and search powers of the police, has made young Algerian men feel even more insecure and

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[57] Focus group respondent, male.

[58] 'Raid on Street in Crime Crackdown', *BBC News Online*, March 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/7317060.stm

[59] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

vulnerable than before and, as our experience demonstrates, most are highly suspicious of talking to anyone they perceive as being linked to the government or the police. There is also considerable frustration arising from their perception that the authorities are unaware of, or misunderstand the Algerian relationship with terrorism. A male focus group participant explained:

> *Most Algerians are religious, but people don't understand this piety – Islam promotes tolerance. We have moved to this country to get away from terrorism, not to create it. It is sad to see an intelligent government misunderstand communities so badly and confuse religious piety with extremism and terrorism.*[60]

9.3 Women

Algerian women arriving into the UK face a host of problems in common with other new migrants. Many lack English language skills, and have to learn to understand and navigate a completely different socio-cultural, economic and political system than the one they are used to. They also need to cope with the additional stresses of high unemployment, policies towards asylum seekers, a perceived rise in Islamophobia and, depending on location, a growing hostility towards Muslim women.

This contrasts with the situation in Algeria where women are highly visible in both public and private organisations, though there is a notable absence in senior positions. Most Algerian women are well educated. One interviewee noted that women in the coming years are likely to overtake men in terms of educational expertise, which will inadvertently affect the socio-economic dynamics of Algeria. According to the World Bank's Study on education in the Middle East and North Africa, illiteracy among females in Algeria has dropped from 75.5 per cent in 1980 to 39.9 per cent in 2003 and there are now more female than male students in secondary and tertiary education.[61]

Within the segmented Algerian community in the UK, there are a small number of female professionals and students. Also, the women who are aligned to the uneducated and illegal young Algerians in the UK tend mostly to be housewives, and hence less visible in the public arena. The invisibility of Algerian women in the public space stems from a complex combination of migration, and intra-community dynamics. For example Blackstock Road is reported to be inhospitable to women because the cafes are traditional and reminiscent of Algeria, where the majority of cafes are owned and frequented by men.

There is also reported to be a strong element of traditional control imposed by men who are reluctant to let their wives out of the house unescorted. Respondents suggest that this is due to a fear that they may become more liberated and end up challenging the

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[60] Focus group respondent, male.

[61] World Bank (2008), *The Road Not Travelled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa*. http://siteresources.worldbank. org/INTMENA/Resources/EDU_Flagship_Full_ENG.pdf

existing gender dynamic within the community. While it is difficult to conclude that this is widespread, more than one female interviewee described some of the fears that drive men to impose strict controls on women. For example one respondent explained:

> *When a man brings a woman into the UK he thinks that if she has freedom she will go against him. Some Algerians will escort their wives to go shopping and to courses. In Algeria the male dominates and has much more control. So in the UK he won't allow the woman to work, and he won't show her the rights that she has access to. Men gossip about what will happen if women know their rights. Once women start to know their rights, they start to change and they don't want that.[62]*

Another noted:

> *The reason why husbands are concerned is because once you go to meet people they might brainwash you. There are a few cases where the wife has complained to the police about her husband and they have taken him away and put him into prison. So some men don't want their wives to learn more tricks to cause havoc in the family. Some men do understand though and the ones who are educated will let their wives go to school.[63]*

Significant problems were raised by female interviewees and focus group participants concerning language skills, access to social spaces and domestic violence. Domestic violence is said to be a major issue and women report receiving limited help from social services. Many feel that their lives were better in Algeria since they had access to family support instead. The need for culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate support was evident. As one female focus group participant explained: *They won't talk to an English person about it, she will only speak to someone from her own country[64]*. There are currently no Algerian women's organisations in London, and reportedly women tend to seek out other women known to them within their immediate community for advice on a number of areas including education, housing, ESOL classes, job opportunities, domestic violence, and their children's needs. It is also difficult for women to access support from women's groups due to male influence over who they socialise with and what spaces they access. One female respondent explained:

> *Whatever the woman's background, whether she is liberal or conservative, whether she wears a hijab or not, she is highly influenced by her husband. If we have an organisation then the husband will want to know where she is going and what she is doing. If he doesn't know then he will be upset and stop her from attending the group. The men have a lot of power and so for an organisation to work you have to know both the husband and the wife. When people know they are creating something for everyone it is more successful.[65]*

[62] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

[63] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

[64] Female focus group participant.

[65] Algerian community respondent: Female, London, 40s.

To date there have been two prominent women's organisations in London, but anecdotal evidence at the time of writing suggests that these organisations have been disbanded due to conflicts with men and resource issues. Four women set up the Algerian Women's Association (SWA) in 1996 to promote the rights of women in the UK, tackle domestic violence in the community, and to improve literacy and education levels amongst women isolated in the UK community and in Algeria. SWA made links with Khalida Toumi, the minister of culture in Algeria, and held a number of conferences with invited female academics from Algeria. SWA disbanded in 2004 following a reported lack of time and resources. One female interviewee was also of the opinion that it is more difficult to get funding for community organisations in the UK than in France:

> *There is a great difference between France and the UK. In France it is easier to set up an organisation as you can get funds from the government. I worked with battered women and delinquent youth in France. When I came to the UK I dreamt of setting up an Algerian organisation that would link London and Paris. Somewhere that would enable an exchange of ideas. But here it is so different, women don't understand the system and they are facing their own problems like unemployment. With such a high rate of unemployment we cannot move forward.[66]*

9.4 Integration and Cohesion issues

The Algerian community is a relatively new community, arriving predominantly as refugees and asylum seekers. In addition to facing the challenges of starting a new life in a new country, the respondents from the community report difficulties generated from generally hostile media and public attitudes and a restrictive legislative framework in this country towards this group of migrants. This environment, coupled with the problems many new arrivals have with the English language, are reported to have made it difficult for the community to enter into a process of two-way dialogue and integration with the host country. On the other hand there is an older grouping of Algerian professionals across the country that are seen as having become completely integrated, with little contact or interaction with the newer Algerian migrants in London.

Algerian respondents stressed that most people are keen to integrate but also to preserve some of their cultural traditions. The largely oral culture of Algeria composed of stories, plays, music, and popular wisdom is an intangible source of cultural contact for the Algerian population in the UK and coffee houses are central to the oral transmission of this culture. One respondent explained this process:

> *People speak the language. They watch Algerian TV. Still here it is very traditional to eat Algerian cous cous every Friday, breakfast in the morning with coffee, French bread with butter and jam is still the same. The first generation they brought the traditions with them. Even the house in the UK it looks like an Algerian house.[67]*

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[66] Algerian community respondent: Female, London, 30s.

[67] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 50s.

Respondents suggested that there is a need to help many from the community to integrate into British culture, though they recognised that integration is a slow process. One interviewee said that he needed five years to just understand what was going on, and another five to begin to know the country and find his own place within it. Some respondents were keen to recommend ways in which the community could integrate better into British society. In addition to language skills, the need for debates and workshops were seen as critical. One focus group participant said:

> We need more debates, we need to organise debates on integration. Meet the youth and hear them. For them to integrate they have to be heard and their needs have to be understood. What is preventing them from integrating? If you don't know, how can they integrate?[68]

Others suggested that lessons need to be learnt from other countries. This respondent was referring to not just the Algerian community:

> The Muslim community in this country is different to the Muslims in the USA. The Muslims in the USA feel American but the UK Muslims don't feel British. The British should follow the lead of the Americans to make integration work better.[69]

Algerians in the UK still have strong family and cultural ties with France and hence an experience of both French and British approaches to integration. Some see the French model as being more successful in the long run as many Algerians have given their children French names and speak French at home. Respondents of this view noted that here in the UK they see communities that have been here for a while, but who have retained their cultural practices intact with very little accommodation with the host language and society. However, a contrasting opinion is that many migrants from Algeria view Britain's acceptance of diversity as a positive aspect evidenced by the number of French-Algerians who have migrated to the UK, and they point to the large numbers of Algerians who are well integrated into British society. This duality of views is no doubt due to the varying situations and experiences of Algerians living in the UK. However, the majority of respondents emphasised that they were keen to see more integration, and more assistance with integration, not less.

9.5 Mental health

To date there is little medical evidence about mental health issues affecting Algerians in the UK, but the majority of Algerians interviewed spoke about high levels of post-traumatic stress within the community informed by previous political and personal experiences of imprisonment and torture for political activism. This is seen to be perpetuated and enhanced by their experiences of life in Britain as asylum seekers and illegal migrants coping with isolation from families and high levels of unemployment.

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[68]   Focus group participant, male.

[69]   Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

10 Media

10.1 Perceptions of UK Media

As with most other Muslim communities, the Algerian community has also felt collectively targeted as potential terrorists since the 9/11 attacks and the London bombings. Anger at the media and its representations of the Algerian community was very widespread among focus group participants and interview respondents and most were very vociferous in their opinions.

A common example that was given to highlight the media treatment of Algerians was the incident in which some Algerians were arrested for apparently developing ricin in a flat in Wood Green in 2003. The arrests attracted a huge amount of media attention at the time with headlines such as 'Deadly Terror Poison Found in Britain' (*The Mirror*) and 'Terror Raid on Poison Factory' (*The Times*), but the subsequent release of all but one of the suspects without charge failed to make any headlines and hence correct public perceptions about Algerians. There is also anger about the fact that some government departments knew early on that no ricin had been found but that this information was not revealed to the public until two years later. According to one respondent:

> *The media makes Algerians out to be scapegoats. For example, the Algerians arrested in Wood Green. The media made a big example of them, but when they were released because they were innocent the media did nothing. The media aims to target Algerians and give us a tarnished image.*[70]

Since this case, the community feels that it gets very bad press in the UK media in general, and one of the Algerian organisations consulted is intending to send a charter to the media on fair and unbiased reporting:

> *Regardless of our successes, the media always uses us as a scapegoat and inflates the stereotype. This is a very bad thing for the community, government and relations between the two.*[71]

> *We have the best sunset in the world; let the people see this instead. I would like to see more positive things about Algerians on the TV.*[72]

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[70] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

[71] Focus group participant, male.

[72] Focus group participant, male.

There are also concerns about the media representing Islam and Muslims as predominantly Asian:

> *When the media talks about people they need to give the right information and not just about Pakistani Muslims or Indian Muslims. We are Algerians and we have a very different way.*[73]

Many respondents also expressed weariness about being unnecessarily labeled 'Muslim' in all circumstances, for example:

> *If an Algerian does something the English media always say a Muslim Algerian has done this. Why do they have to mention he is Muslim and Algerian, why don't they just say his name? For the Muslim they always mention his religion. Even the Muslims are human beings and they can make mistakes like everyone else.*[74]

However, some sections of the media have been praised by the community, in particular some local papers such as the *Islington Tribune*, that are seen to have been even-handed and unbiased in the aftermath of the Blackstock Road raids, and which have condemned the police tactics employed as heavy-handed and disproportionate. Likewise, Channel 4 has been praised for its *Dispatches* documentary, ('Spinning Terror' 20.2.2006) and the BBC for its balanced coverage of the ricin case.

10.1 Media Consumption

There is a lack of established UK-based Algerian media sources, which could be reflective of the disparate geographical distribution of Algerians themselves. The community is small and fragmented, thus limiting the commercial incentive and viability of creating media bases that cater specifically for the UK Algerian population. Furthermore, the popularity of pan-Arab media sources (TV, newspapers) amongst British Algerians suggests that their needs are being catered for through other means.

Algeria's television and radio stations are state-controlled, but there is a lively private press. There is no direct censorship, but there are laws in place that can result in imprisonment for insulting or defaming the president, MPs, judges and the army. Satellite TV is extremely popular in Algeria, with most viewers watching pan-Arab channels such as *Al Jazeera*, *Rotana Europe, Canal Algerie* and *Al Araabiyah*, although the national channel *Canal Algeri*e is reportedly not viewed as much as pan-Arab ones.[75] This is said to be reflective of the viewing patterns of Algerians living in the UK.

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[73] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

[74] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 20s.

[75] These channels were mentioned by respondents and were also found to be the most widely watched channels in an IOM mapping study on Algerians in the UK (IOM, 2007).

The best-selling newspaper in Algeria is *El Khabar* (private, Arabic). There are numerous other newspapers in Arabic; however their readership is not as large. The popularity of *El Khabar* can also be seen in the Algerian community in the UK, however access to the newspaper is usually via the internet. There are very few outlets (if any) in the UK that sell Algerian newspapers. There is also a notable selection of pan-Arab newspapers which many Algerians refer to, including: *Al Hayaat, Al Quds, Al Arabi* and *Ashraq Al Aswadt*. There is also a selection of Algerian newspapers in French that are privately owned and which have a good circulation. The state newspapers on the other hand have lower readership in comparison to that of *El Khabar* and other popular private French printed papers.

There are three main radio stations in Algeria in three different languages: Arabic, Berber and French. There are no UK-based Algerian radio stations. However, there are pan-Arab stations such as Spectrum 558 am that broadcast in Arabic and cover issues to do with Algeria.

Educated groups of Algerians living in the UK are more likely to access information via the internet in comparison to the predominantly illiterate illegal immigrant Algerian population in the UK. Networking sites such as HI5 and MySpace are also commonly used, but again primarily by white-collar, educated Algerians. Another popular website is said to be Arab Media Watch[76]. Algerians in London have created a site on Youtube showing the perspectives of Algerians in London, which is connecting communities from as far as Texas, Canada, the US and Europe.[77] The role of Youtube was mentioned by many as providing a space where the community can represent itself and see itself in a more positive light given existing media representations of the community. For example one young male focus group participant noted that:

> *Youtube links the people, we try to educate people in how to do good by giving advice, we express our feelings to the government. It's like our TV and we try to communicate through Youtube that we live here; we want the government to hear what we have to say.[78]*

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[76]   www.arabmediawatch.com

[77]   The site is called 'Hna Fi Hna': www.youtube.com/sal64lon

[78]   Focus group participant, male.

11 Links with countries of origin

11.1 Travel

Algerians have a strong link with their country of origin and most people travel back every year or every few years depending on their legal and financial circumstances. In 2006, there were 10,100 admissions to the UK for 'passengers returning after a temporary leave of absence'.[79] This accounts for 41 per cent of all flights by Algerian nationals, the highest percentage among all 13 communities included in this study. Just over 8,000 Algerian nationals visited the UK in 2006.

There are, however, difficulties for the many Algerians working in the UK illegally who are unable to fly home as they would not be able to get back into the country. There are also reportedly difficulties for those Algerians who still fear the possibility of persecution from state authorities back in Algeria.

Social networks are reportedly sustained and enhanced via the use of technologies including mobile telephones and internet. Like many migrant populations, phone/call shops and international calling cards are also used for the cheap communication with Algerians living back home, and most people are said to call back at least once or twice a week.

11.2 Remittances

Money is remitted through various means, mainly by hand or through banks. Many Algerians reportedly take cash when they travel to Algeria and some send money through bank transfers. Money is also transferred through credit transfer companies though some people appear to have reservations about these. According to one respondent:

> *Western Union we don't use because I feel that if I give my name as X, they will give my name to the CIA or MI5. I have read about this also in the UK media so I know that they give away people's identities.[80]*

The World Bank estimates worldwide formal remittances to Algeria as close to US$3 billion. However there is limited data on the level of remittances to Algeria from the UK and many respondents were reluctant to describe this process in greater detail.

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[79] Home Office, Control of Immigration Statistics, 2006.

[80] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

11.3 Political links

Research on political engagement of Algerians in the UK and their country of origin is limited, but alongside anecdotal evidence, there are clear indications that political involvement does take place. For instance, those Algerians in Britain who voted in the 1997 Algerian general elections, formed part of a Northern European Algerian community that voted a member of the 'Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie', or Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), to represent them in Algeria's legislative body, the National Assembly. The RCD is a strongly anti-Islamist Berber party. Unfortunately, the vote is not disaggregated so this provides only a broad indication of the political affiliations of Algerians resident in Britain.

Respondents also noted that in the UK there are also many secular Algerians who tend to be aligned to secular political parties in Algeria such as the Front of Socialist Forces and the Assembly for Culture and Development. These organisations have a predominantly Berber support base. Respondents also reported that many Algerians have loosened their adherence to the desirability of Sharia law in Algeria:

> *Most Algerians are religious, and some have strong views on religion. Once they have stayed in the UK for a while they go to school, they go to colleges, they have changed their views about religion, and they are much calmer now than before, especially when they were in Algeria. Newcomers are not particularly religious and there is more trust now compared to 9-10 years ago. There are less FIS now in the UK. Most want to get on with their job and some believe that applying Sharia is a myth.[81]*

The political situation and troubles in Algeria continue to impact on the community in the UK. For instance, in 2007 there were between 700 and 1,100 Algerians killed through terrorist attacks. According to Andrew Henderson the UK Ambassador to Algeria:

> *We cannot make invisible the effects that suicide bombing in Algeria have on the Algerian community in London. Salafist groups retain a constant presence, and the suicide bombings of 2007 create security issues for Algerian people and have further ramifications within Europe.[82]*

Such events have an emotional impact on Algerians in the UK. In the words of one interviewee:

> *It is difficult to talk about the attacks which were very upsetting. When you are so far away what can you do? We don't agree with the attacks and we don't want our children to identify Algeria with violence.[83]*

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[81] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

[82] Conference Report MEP (2008), *Algeria Today and Tomorrow, the British Connection*.

[83] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 50s.

In London, it is reported that political activism has been thwarted by negative intra-community dynamics. Activists protesting against ongoing political developments inside Algeria and the role of women have had a number of difficult encounters. At one demonstration it was reported that there was a significant clash between two opposing groups, one which had a strong male representation, whilst the other was predominantly female.

There are a number of movements in Algeria pushing for the recognition and rights of Berber Algerians. However, such movements do not have a similar momentum in the UK. An interviewee noted: *There has only been one demonstration in the UK which attempted to highlight the Berber cause.* [84]

It was suggested that current difficulties within the community are rooted in the past experiences of Algerians with a 'police state', and that as a consequence, there is a lack of trust amongst each other and towards state institutions.

11.4 Business and commerce

The Algerian government is actively trying to get skilled Algerians to return by trying to open up more opportunities for people to work and settle in Algeria, with the result that many people who have been here for years are now thinking about returning to Algeria. The Government is advertising many jobs to Algerians in the UK, especially the finance and management fields, and communication between UK and Algerian companies is also said to be on the increase. Like in other migrant communities, there are many individuals who have either established homes in Algeria, or would like to save enough to afford a property and set up business back home.

[84] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

12 Civil Society

12.1 Overview

The Algerian community in the UK has grown considerably since the early 1990s but as yet civil society organisations and infrastructure are weak and fragmented. According to interviewees and other sources, the small number of Algerian associations that exist in the UK are not necessarily representative of the population as a whole, and although bonds of solidarity between individuals are extremely strong, there is little sense of a unified 'community'.[85]

Respondents made reference to a number of organisations that were formed in the early 1990s but which no longer exist. These include an organisation with religious affiliations that was unsuccessful because of internal religious tensions and conflicts of interest, the language-based Berber Community Association, and an Algerian group in Birmingham which worked with young people. Two Algerian women's organisations were also active for a short period but have closed down so currently there are said to be no women's organisations within the community. These organisations had a more international than UK focus, and were primarily concerned with supporting women in Algeria.

12.2 Types of organisations and services offered

Respondents noted that most individuals, and especially women, tend to seek help from family and friends or from a few professionals and religious leaders that are well known within the immediate community. Most of the early voluntary groups that have been established have primarily focused on assisting refugees and asylum seekers.

As with most other Muslim communities, mosques provide a significant focal point for religious and social welfare services. The role of the mosque as a community and social centre was highlighted by many interviewees, particularly the role that the Finsbury Park Mosque plays in the Algerian community and the positive work it is doing with young people. This was contrasted with the period from the 1990s to early 2000s, when radical imams were known to preach there. In the early 2000s many Algerians stayed away from the mosque since it was believed to be under surveillance, and prayed at home. Since 2003 the mosque is perceived to have been turned around. As one male focus group participant noted:

> *The North London mosque is very good. It was different before, but now the organisation of the mosque is forward looking. The majority of the community is refugees and the influence of the mosque is great. People go there for guidance. It is a religious and social place.[86]*

85   Collyer, 2004.
86   Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

According to another interviewee:

> *The mosque is very important to Algerians; it is like their second home. In Algeria, every village has a mosque. The imam in North London Mosque is doing a lot of good work and is working closely with the Arab Advice Bureau.*[87]

12.3 Key Organisations

North London Central Mosque Trust is a registered charity in the UK, serving the local Muslim community in Finsbury Park and surrounding areas of North London, and working with everyone to promote dialogue and understanding. The imam, Ahmed Saad, attracts many Algerians to the mosque.

The Arab Advice Bureau on Seven Sisters Road currently occupies a prominent position within the community, which has been enhanced because of the mediating role it has played between the police and community since the Blackstock Road raids. The organisation was set up eight years ago as a drop-in centre and has since expanded.[88] Within a relatively short space of time, the Arab Advice Bureau, (ABB) has created relationships with a diverse number of public organisations that range from Local Authorities, the Police, and Local Government. It advises community members on a wide range of issues such as housing, asylum, personal, legal, family, and marriage as well as other issues. It also offers a translation service and previously ran ESOL (English as a second language) classes, but these have now been stopped.

The Algerian Refugee Council offering support services for refugees and asylum seekers is now a home-based organisation without any formal point of contact at present.

The Algerian Education Project based in Leyton offers advocacy, mediation, support to asylum seekers and refugees and leisure activities including sport. It also provides a wide ranging supplementary educational support programme to children and adults that includes numeracy, literacy, ESOL classes, Arabic and ICT.

The Algerian Welfare Association which has its base in Waltham Forest and the **Algerian British Association** in South London are examples of organisations that are trying to foster social and cultural links between Britain and Algeria, and to support the Algerian community in the UK in promoting Algerian arts, cultures and traditions respectively.

The Algerian League in Britain organises seminars, trips, sports days for children and young people, as well as educational, cultural, social, and welfare activities. It actively encourages disabled people and women to participate in all its activities around education, employment and general social life.

[87]   Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 30s.
[88]   Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

The East London Mosque, also known as the Whitechapel Mosque, also attracts a number of Algerians. The mosque offers a range of services that enable young people to engage in a positive environment.

The Algerian British Association in South London fosters greater awareness, understanding and appreciation for Algerian culture and ethnic heritage amongst Algerian-British, Algerians and the wider community. It carries out educational programmes, social gatherings, art exhibitions, film screenings, concerts, lectures and seminars.

The Algerian British Connection was set up to advance the education of the public in the UK and Algeria of Algerian culture, arts, history and related subjects. It runs programmes in education, arts and culture, sports, heritage, community development, conservation and employment.

Suleymaniye is a Turkish Mosque in Stoke Newington that is reported to attract many Algerians. The mosque opened in October 1999. Suleymaniye holds a number of events, seminars, fairs, circumcising ceremonies and religious ceremonies.

Al Manaar (Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre, Westbourne Park) in West London is also said to be popular with Algerians in the surrounding areas.

In addition to the more formal associations, there are also a number of informal networks that allow effective communication to occur, existing relationships to be maintained and new relationships to be formed. One such informal network is an Algerian post-graduate student's network that meets regularly to socialise and support each other. The **Ibn Badis Scientific** is an example of an Algerian-based organisation that produces a journal and has organised conferences on technology in the developing world in the UK as well as in Algeria.

The Algerian Embassy, in addition to its administrative role, also runs events for the community in the UK.

12.4 Engagement with public authorities

Both formal and informal organisations have been proactive in establishing links and partnerships with public authorities, primarily at the local levels. However, many respondents were critical about the nature and quality of this contact. Such relationships are not perceived to be reciprocal partnerships. Respondents claimed that often it is the local authority, the government or the police who either set the agendas for community-based organisations or source knowledge from organisations without putting anything back. For many the impact of such an approach has proved to be fruitless. One respondent explained:

As an organisation we would benefit from more funding and guidance on how to access funding. We have learnt how to do all of this by ourselves; we had no outside help from councils or government. We have set up programmes to help young people come off drugs and alcohol and we have employment programmes to try and help young people into the labour market. We have had no help from Islington Council or Hackney, and Haringey Council has been very difficult. In fact the Council uses us – they have sought advice from us on the community on many occasions but they have not helped us or given us funding. We feel that we do not have an equal partnership, instead that we are used for our knowledge.[89]

Similar issues were raised with respect to the relationship with the police. The Algerian community has always been keen to develop close and reciprocal relationships with the police, including partnership projects that can be delivered through community organisations. Indeed, it was the community itself that had been proactive in asking the police to help tackle the criminal gangs operating in the Blackstock Road area.[90] In the words of one respondent:

Before the raid we had many meetings with the police. We asked them to police the area more sufficiently. There were complaints about the youth acting violently and we also knew there was some criminal activity. We are very aware of the terrorist threats and we were working with the police to clean up the area.[91]

[89] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

[90] In July 2007, a multi-agency operation was set up in Blackstock Road, conducted by The Safer Islington Partnership (SIP) to reassure the public and to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. Partners included Islington Council, London Fire Brigade, Environmental Health and the Immigration Service.

[91] Focus group participant, male.

What was evident from the discussions held with a number of community leaders was the belief that building relations with state actors is the way forward for the community, particularly the concentration in North London. However many observed that the police and government actions over a period of years lack any real meaning for them. The Blackstock Road raids have had a very negative impact on local community relations and levels of trust, and some local community leaders see the raids as a good indicator of the ultimate lack of equality, transparency and partnership between a community and the state.

Most respondents believed that the way forward includes more work with young men in the community to assist both social and economic integration. It is also felt that the methods of the state need to shift away from increasing heavy handedness. Respondents made a variety of recommendations that include the following:

• Improving community relationships through 'soft' engagement: *They [police and government] should aim at finding soft ways to improve things and promote positive things instead of using repressive forces*[92]

• *They must gain Algerian's trust. The police have to create a strategy to create trust with the Algerian communities. They have to work together to gain trust, they can't do it by themselves*[93]

• Organised dialogue and debates: *We need more talks and debates by boroughs and have conferences; for example the community and government work to organise a conference to speak about the issues that the Algerians are facing and that way you stop isolating them and labelling them as terrorists. That way they can have help. They are the ones who must come to visit us*[94]

• Using sports and education to address high rates of crime: *Our methods are different they believe in 600 police, we believe in football and education.*[95]

12.5 Civil society capacity building needs

Despite existing community organisations which are held in high regard by many within the community, there is still a sense that these do not represent or fit the needs of the community adequately. This is often because they see them to be administrative or service-led rather than community hubs and often because they do not have access to enough funding. Two interviewees suggested that the Algerian community needs a community centre even though this would require building trust amongst Algerians and forgetting about religious and political affiliations.

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[92] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

[93] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

[94] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 40s.

[95] Focus group respondent, male.

Existing organisations are accessing funding but this appears to be inconsistent. Fin Future, local councils, the Islington Forum and the LDA were all mentioned as sources of funding for community projects and activities.

One community organisation representative interviewed has highlighted the need for a separate organisation to deal with issues facing women in London such as domestic violence, as many of its current users are men and this is known to be a barrier for women in the community. It is currently writing a proposal to submit to local authorities.

Levels of trust need to be addressed urgently to ensure that the community feels comfortable in engaging with public and community services. According to a respondent:

> *After the raids on Blackstock Road in March we have had to stop the (ESOL) classes because people are too afraid to come out. This is a great pity because it is the lack of language skills that is really not helping the community when it comes to finding work.[96]*

There is also a need to get better representation for Algerian Muslims in larger forums in London, although this was not expressed as a widespread complaint:

> *We are all Muslims but between us there is no communication. There is a Pakistani man who is meant to represent Muslims in the UK, he doesn't represent me.[97]*

[96] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 30s.

[97] Algerian community respondent: Male, London, 20s.

13 Conclusions and Recommendations

The Algerian Muslim community has been present in significant numbers in England, particularly London, since the early-1990s. The Algerian community is most visible in the Blackstock Road area of North London where there are numerous cafes and Algerian shops. However, there are both 'visible' and 'invisible' parts of the population and while many Algerians are economically integrated into British society, there are large numbers of undocumented Algerian migrants who struggle without any legal status in England.

Most Algerians follow the Maliki *madhab* but levels of religiosity are said by respondents to vary. Local mosques were said by many respondents to be important as both spiritual and community hubs for the population including the Finsbury Park mosque, Al Manaar Cultural Centre in West London and the Brixton mosque.

Because the community has arrived in numbers relatively recently links to the country remain strong including links to political parties and sending remittances. Some respondents mentioned that they were keen to return to Algeria because the situation facing Algerian Muslims in the UK was becoming increasingly worse.

There are limited civil society structures in place for the Algerian Muslim community. There are some organisations that specifically support the needs of Algerian refugees and the Arab Advice Bureau in north London provides a range of services from language support to organising cultural activities. Whilst there are some organisations serving the community, these often provide administrative support but no social space or hub outside of the mosque for the community.

There is also a great deal of scepticism towards authorities in the community. This is no doubt influenced by experiences with authorities in Algeria, but many respondents also noted that legislation and policy in Britain is increasingly having a negative effect on Algerians in the UK. Algerians are also keen that their positive contributions to British society are recognised rather than being continually 'scapegoated' or portrayed negatively in the media.

13.1 Recommendations

This research has provided many insights into the Algerian Muslim community in England, particularly the 69 per cent of the population that lives in London. While many areas are highlighted as community concerns, some 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 Algerian community:

- Community rapprochement following the Blackstock Road raids

- Integration and cohesion events for Algerians in partnership with existing civil society organisations – particularly new arrivals with limited English language and knowledge of the system

- Include Algerian representatives and organisations in consultations regarding the status of undocumented migrants and failed asylum seekers in the UK

- Increase Algerian representation on wider local consultation and decision making forums

- Targeted work with the young men in the community to assist both social and economic integration

- Support the development of media understanding/partnering initiatives to increase understanding about the Algerian community

- Fund and support the establishment of women's support organisations

- Undertake further research into the health issues, including mental health, and problems facing the community as a result of post traumatic stress.

Glossary

Berber: Ethnic group from North Africa.

CI: The Change Institute.

FIS: Islamic Salvation Front.

FLN: National Liberation Front.

GLA: Greater London Authority.

Hadith: Reports of Prophet Muhammad's deeds and sayings, an authoritative source of guidance for Muslims.

ICAR: Information Centre about Asylum Seekers and Refugees.

Kabyle: Kabyles are a sub-set of the Berber group originating from the highlands of Kabylie in north eastern Algeria.

Madhab: Literally "school" or "orientation," usually meaning one of the schools of Islamic law.

Maliki judicial 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.

Salafi: Name (derived from salaf, "pious ancestors") given to a reform movement led by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh at the turn of the 20th century. Emphasised restoration of Islamic doctrines to pure form, adherence to the *Qu'ran* and Sunnah, rejection of the authority of later interpretations, and maintenance of the unity of ummah.

Shariah: Literally means the path that leads to the well of water. It is the path to Islam – including Islamic theology, ethics, law and spiritually. It is often considered to be God's will for humanity, especially as presented in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet, providing the basis for Islamic law as defined by Muslim scholars over the centuries.

Sufi/Sufism: Spiritual aspect of Islam. Sufi has a range of meanings deriving different interpretations of the word's etymology but generally refers to those who are interested in inner knowledge and practice towards spiritual awakening and enlightenment. There are a number of Sufi orders or 'paths' (*tariqas*), including the *Tijaniyah* and *Qadiriyah*, many which developed between the 9th and 12th centuries. (Esposito, 2008)

Sunni: Muslims who emphasize 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 Shīʿa beliefs. About 85 per cent of all Muslims are Sunnīs.

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This report presents a picture of the Algerian 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.