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AT HOME IN  
EUROPE

# SOMALIS

IN EUROPEAN CITIES

[Overview](#)

# Somalis in European Cities

At Home in Europe

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AT HOME IN EUROPE

OPEN SOCIETY INITIATIVE FOR EUROPE

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UK

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## Open Society Foundations Mission Statement

The Open Society Foundations work to build vibrant and tolerant societies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. Working with local communities in more than 100 countries, the Open Society Foundations support justice and human rights, freedom of expression, and access to public health and education.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is the accumulative effort of many people who have been part of the *Somalis in European Cities* report series. It brings together the findings from seven cities in western and northern Europe, and within them, specific neighbourhoods: Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Leicester, London, Malmö, and Oslo.

*Somalis in European Cities* has been designed and prepared by At Home in Europe, part of the Open Society Initiative for Europe, Open Society Foundations. The research and analysis was conducted by local/national based experts from each of the countries.

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### **Amsterdam**

Dr. Gery Nijenhuis, International Development Studies, Department of Human Geography and Planning, Utrecht University

Dr. Ilse van Liempt, Assistant Professor, Urban Geography Department, Utrecht University

### **Copenhagen**

Helle Stenum, PhD, Institute for Culture and Identity, Roskilde University

### **Helsinki**

Dr. Marja Tiilikainen, Academy Research Fellow, University of Helsinki and Honorary Visiting Fellow, City University, London

Abdirashid Ismail, Department of Social Research, University of Helsinki

### **Leicester**

Dilwar Hussain, Founding Chair of New Horizons in British Islam, Senior Programme Advisor to the Institute of Strategic Dialogue, and Research Fellow at the Lokahi Foundation

Jawaahir Dahir, Founder and Managing Director of Somali Development Services, Leicester Ltd

### **London**

Dr. Anya Ahmed, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy, School of Midwifery, Nursing, Social Work and Social Sciences, University of Salford, Manchester

Asha Abdillahi, Project Officer, Account 3, London

**Malmö**

Professor Benny Carlson, School of Economics and Management, Department of Economic History, Lund University

**Oslo**

Cindy Horst, Research Director, Research Professor, Refugee and Migration Studies, Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), Oslo

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At Home in Europe has final responsibility for the content of the report, including any errors or misrepresentations.

**Open Society Initiative for Europe Team (At Home in Europe)**

Nazia Hussain	<i>Director</i>
Ana Macouzet	<i>Program Coordinator</i>
Hélène Irving	<i>Program Coordinator</i>
Andrea Gurubi Watterson	<i>Program Officer</i>
Klaus Dik Nielsen	<i>Advocacy Officer</i>
Csilla Tóth	<i>Program Assistant</i>
Tufyal Choudhury	<i>Sen. Policy Consultant</i>
Szilvia Szekeres	<i>Finance Coordinator</i>

## PREFACE

A central belief of the Open Society Foundations is that all people in an open society count equally and should enjoy equal opportunities. The Open Society Foundations work day-to-day with civil society organizations across Europe to respond to discrimination, prejudice and injustice; to understand the emergence of new and sometimes worrying political phenomena; to inform better practices in policing and security; to connect those seeking justice and equality with policymakers and institutions; to promote inclusion for Europe's minorities; to support a critical and informed discourse among nongovernmental actors; and to empower grassroots organizations to seek change for themselves, unique to their own local context.

At Home in Europe, part of the Open Society Initiative for Europe, Open Society Foundations, is a research and advocacy initiative which works to advance equality and social justice for groups excluded from the mainstream of civil, political, economic, and, cultural life in Western Europe. It places a high priority on local community and city level practices that mitigate discrimination and seek to ensure access to equal opportunities for all. At Home in Europe engages with policymakers, civil society organisations, and communities at the local, national and international level to improve the social inclusion of Europe's diverse minority and marginalised communities in different ways.

Minority communities – whether Muslim, migrant or Roma – continue to come under intense scrutiny in Europe today. This complex situation presents Europe with one its greatest challenges: how to ensure equal rights in an environment of rapidly expanding diversity. The Somali community is one such emerging minority group on whom a lack of precise data hampers the possibility of achieving meaningful integration.

People of Somali origin have lived in parts of Europe for many generations but in the past 15 years their numbers have increased. There are no accurate figures for the number of Somalis in Europe but on the whole, whilst small in absolute numbers, they are among one of the continent's largest refugee groups and a growing minority population. Europe's Somalis can be divided into three broad categories: people of Somali origin born in Europe, Somali refugees and asylum seekers (who came directly from Somalia or neighbouring countries largely as a result of conflict) and Somalis who migrated to a country in Europe from elsewhere in Europe, such as from Sweden to the UK for example. They are a diverse and vibrant community who suffer from negative and biased media representation and stereotyping. There is a limited understanding on the specific needs of this community and they are in the category of groups that experience significant inequalities in accessing education, employment, health, and housing with resulting poor outcomes. Somali community groups are very present in certain countries in Europe but their engagement with policymakers and in local and national bodies can be relatively limited.



The comparative research series ‘Somalis in European Cities’ examines city and municipal policies that have actively sought to understand Somali origin communities and their specific needs. The research aims to capture the everyday, lived experiences as well as the type and degree of engagement policymakers have initiated with their Somali and minority constituents. An underlying theme is how Somali communities have themselves actively participated in tackling discrimination and whether the needs of specific groups warrant individual policy approaches in overcoming barriers to equal opportunities.

The ‘Somalis in European Cities’ series contains seven individual city reports and an overview. The cities selected take into account the population size, diversity, and the local political context. They are: Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Leicester, London, Malmö, and Oslo. All seven city reports were prepared by teams of local experts on the basis of the same methodology to allow for comparative analysis. Each report includes detailed recommendations for improving the opportunities for full participation and inclusion of Somalis in wider society in the selected city. These recommendations will form the basis for At Home in Europe of the Open Society Initiative for Europe’s advocacy activities.

# Somalis in European Cities

Overview

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction .....	13
2. Identity and Belonging .....	16
2.1 Somali Identity .....	17
2.2 European National Identity .....	18
2.3 Local and City Identity .....	21
2.4 Contextual Nature of Identity .....	23
2.5 Religion and Identity .....	24
2.6 Clan Affiliation .....	25
2.7 Discrimination .....	26
2.8 Gender and Identity .....	27
2.9 Key Findings .....	28
3. Education .....	29
3.1 Qualifications and Experience of Schools .....	29
3.2 Understanding the Educational System .....	32
3.3 Teachers' Expectations and Pupils' Aspirations .....	34
3.4 Language .....	36
3.5 Pupil Mobility .....	36
3.6 Key Findings .....	37
4. Employment .....	39
4.1 Low Employment Rates, in Low-paid, Low-status Jobs .....	39
4.2 Challenges in Finding Employment: Language Proficiency .....	42
4.3 Challenges in Finding Employment: Knowledge about the Labour Market .....	43
4.4 Challenges in Finding Employment: Discrimination .....	43
4.5 Support for Finding Jobs .....	44
4.6 The Impact of Unemployment .....	45
4.7 Key Findings .....	46
5. Housing .....	48
5.1 Housing and Refugee Resettlement .....	48
5.2 Home Ownership and Renting .....	49
5.3 Meeting the Costs of Renting and Buying .....	49

5.4	Understanding the Housing System .....	50
5.5	Discrimination .....	51
5.6	Overcrowding .....	52
5.7	Segregation .....	52
5.8	Homelessness .....	53
5.9	Key Findings .....	54
6.	Health Care .....	56
6.1	Levels of Health .....	56
6.2	Mental Health .....	57
6.3	Use of and Access to Health Care .....	58
6.4	Female Genital Mutilation .....	60
6.5	Children’s Services and Support for Families .....	61
6.6	Khat .....	62
6.7	Key Findings .....	63
7.	Policing and Security .....	65
7.1	Perceptions of Crime and Security .....	65
7.2	Perceptions of Policing .....	65
7.3	Stop and Search .....	67
7.4	Counter-terrorism and Radicalisation .....	68
7.5	Key Findings .....	70
8.	Civil and Political Participation .....	71
8.1	Access to Citizenship .....	71
8.2	Political Participation .....	72
8.3	Influencing Change .....	73
8.4	Civic Participation .....	74
8.5	The Role and Development of Somali Civil Society Groups .....	75
8.6	Key Findings .....	76
9.	The Media .....	78
9.1	Negative Media Coverage .....	78
9.2	Experiences of Engagement with the Media .....	81
9.3	Somali Participation in the Media .....	81
9.4	Key Findings .....	82
10.	Conclusions .....	84
Annex 1.	Bibliography .....	86

## Index of Tables

Table 1. Labour market participation rate for Somali immigrants (%) .....	40
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## Index of Boxes

Box 1. Good Practice in Oslo: Somali Student Association .....	37
Box 2. Good Practice in Leicester: Taylor Road Primary School .....	38
Box 3. Good Practice in London: Tower Hamlets STEP Project .....	47
Box 4. Good Practice in Amsterdam: Somali Women's Foundation .....	47
Box 5. Good Practice in London: Tower Hamlets Homes .....	54
Box 6. Good Practice in Oslo: the Housing Project in Groenland .....	55
Box 7. Good Practice in Copenhagen: Health Communicators .....	64
Box 8. Good Practice in Oslo: Equal Health Services Project .....	64
Box 9. Good Practice Malmö: Civil Society Training .....	77
Box 10. Good Practice in Copenhagen: CODKA .....	83
Box 11. Good Practice in Oslo: The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation's Trainee Project .....	83

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report forms the overview of the Open Society Foundations' At Home in Europe project on Somalis in European cities. At Home in Europe is a research and advocacy initiative that works to advance the social inclusion of vulnerable communities in a changing Europe. The project explores the political, social, economic and cultural participation of marginalised majority and minority communities in western Europe. It places a high priority on local community and city authority measures that mitigate discrimination and seek to ensure equal treatment for all. The project's underlying theme is to identify the barriers to full and equal treatment, better understand the factors leading to marginalisation, identify and promote effective integration policies and practices in Europe, and undertake research-based advocacy in order to improve participation and opportunities through engagement with residents, civil society and policymakers.

The Somalis in European cities project builds upon and develops the work of earlier OSF research on Muslims in EU cities. The need for research that provides a greater understanding of experiences of Somali communities first emerged during discussions with policymakers and practitioners in the course of completing the research and engaging in advocacy for the Muslims in EU cities reports. National and city officials in a number of cities where OSF was engaged noted that, compared with the older minority communities that had arrived in the postwar period as economic migrants, Somalis formed a new rapidly growing community that was little understood by policymakers. Initial indications suggested that they were communities that were at risk of social exclusion and for which there was a need for solid research evidence to support the development of effective inclusion and integration policies.

The studies cover the experience of Somalis in seven cities in six western and northern European countries: Amsterdam (the Netherlands), Copenhagen (Denmark), Helsinki (Finland), Leicester (UK), London (UK), *Malmö* (Sweden) and Oslo (Norway). Based on available statistics, 37,432 Somalis are estimated to live in the Netherlands, 57,873 in Sweden, 19,707 in Denmark, 36,651 in Norway and 16, 721 in Finland.<sup>1</sup> In the

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<sup>1</sup> These numbers are based on the latest statistics available from the respective national statistical agencies on residents born in Somalia or born of Somali-born parents. The statistics can be found at the following sites: Netherlands (2014), at <http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?DM=SLen&PA=37325eng&D1=a&D2=a&D3=0&D4=0&D5=192&D6=a&LA=EN&HDR=T&STB=G2,G1,G3,G5,G4&VW=T> (accessed 9 June 2015); Sweden (2012), at [http://www.scb.se/Statistik/BE/BE0101/2011A01B/be0101\\_Fodelseland\\_och\\_ursprungsland.xls](http://www.scb.se/Statistik/BE/BE0101/2011A01B/be0101_Fodelseland_och_ursprungsland.xls) (accessed 16 June 2015); Denmark (2015), at <http://www.statbank.dk/statbank5a/default.asp?w=1366> (accessed 16 June 2015); Norway (2014), at <http://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/statistikker/innvbe/aar/2014-04-24?fane=tabell&sort=nummer&tabell=193678> (accessed 16 June 2015); Finland (2014), at [http://193.166.171.75/Dialog/varval.asp?ma=030\\_vaerak\\_tau\\_102\\_en&ti=Language+according+to+age+and+sex+by+region+1990+-+2013&path=../Database/StatFin/vrm/vaerak/&lang=1&multilang=en](http://193.166.171.75/Dialog/varval.asp?ma=030_vaerak_tau_102_en&ti=Language+according+to+age+and+sex+by+region+1990+-+2013&path=../Database/StatFin/vrm/vaerak/&lang=1&multilang=en) (accessed 16 June 2015).

UK, the 2011 census recorded just over 101,000 people living in the UK who had been born in Somalia; however, given the longer migration history and the presence of a significant second and third generation of British-born Somalis, the total British Somali population is likely to be significantly higher.

Somalis across five of the cities share a common experience through their arrival over a similar period of time as refugees rather than economic migrants. Somalis arrived in most of the cities in this study in two main cohorts. The first group began to arrive in significant numbers in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as refugees fleeing from political persecution and the ensuing civil conflict in Somalia. Many of those who arrived in this first group were educated, and some were professionals with experience of living and working in urban cities. A second period was in the mid-2000s, when significant numbers of refugees arrived in Europe from Somalia, due in part to the increase in conflict following the rise of the al-Shabaab movement. This second group of Somali arrivals had experienced the trauma of living through a decade-long civil war; many were from rural areas and were less likely, compared with the earlier group, to have formal education or training.

The experience of Somalis in the UK is different. Since the British colonisation of Somaliland (northwest Somalia) in 1897 there has been an almost continuous pattern of migration. Somali seafarers settled in port areas of east London, Cardiff and Liverpool. Somali migration is therefore an integral part of the UK's 20th-century postwar immigration history, particularly before the 1962 Immigration Act. In the 1960s many sailors travelled to industrial cities – Sheffield, Birmingham and Manchester and London – for work, while Somali women started to migrate and students also settled as citizens. Thus, while many Somalis did arrive in the UK from the late 1980s onwards as refugees, they were often settling in cities with a longer-established Somali community. A further distinct feature of Somali communities in the UK is the significant number that arrived after 1999 from other European countries. These were Somalis who had initially arrived in other European countries, like the Netherlands or Denmark, in the late 1980s and early 1990s and received refugee status and then citizenship of these countries. However, having secured EU citizenship, they then moved to the UK as EU migrants. This is a key feature of the Somali population in the Leicester report.

There are large populations of Somalis, often concentrated in particular neighbourhoods in each of the cities studied.

In Amsterdam, the official statistics on Somalis counted 1,286 Somalis, mostly living in the city districts of Nieuw West (287), West (244), Zuid Oost (238) and Noord (205) in 2013.

The Danish-Somali population in Copenhagen was also concentrated in four neighbourhoods, Nørrebro, Brønshøj, Husum and Bispebjerg which combined to host over 61 percent of the total population of 4,742 Danish-Somalis in the city in 2011.

The population of Somali-speakers in Helsinki in 2012 was 6,843, approximately half of the total Somali population in Finland.

The total number of Somalis in Leicester was estimated to be between 10,000 and 15,000 in 2011, nearly 70 percent of which live in the four wards of Spinney Hills, Stoneygate, Beaumont Leys and Charnwood. The London boroughs of Camden and Tower Hamlets were chosen as the research focus, based on the nature and size of the British-Somali population in each borough: there were close to 3,000 Somali-born British-Somalis in each borough, according to the 2011 census, although some estimates put the number of people of Somali origin in Tower Hamlets at closer to 10,000 people.

In 2011, there were 1,551 Somali-born individuals in Malmö, of which 77 percent lived in the three city districts with the highest number of foreign-born inhabitants: Rosengård (622), Södra Innerstaden (315) and Fosie (263).

In 2012, there were 12,779 Norwegian-Somalis in Oslo, making up the third-largest immigrant group in the city. Norwegian-Somalis are mainly concentrated in the centre and east of the city.

The common migration and settlement histories of Somalis in most of these cities provide an opportunity for assessing the impact of different policies on integration and inclusion.

While the individual city reports (published alongside this Overview Report) focus on the experiences of Somali communities living in each city, this report provides an opportunity to consider the commonalities and differences across the cities and the extent to which these are shaped by the divergences in the policy approach adopted by the individual city authorities. Chapter 2 begins with an exploration of the issues of identity and belonging. Chapters 3–8 explore experiences in the key domains of social inclusion and integration: education, employment, housing, health and social protection, policing and security, and civil and political participation. Chapter 9 examines the role of the media on integration and inclusion. Chapter 10 provides some tentative conclusions that emerge from the findings.



## 2. IDENTITY AND BELONGING

This chapter explores the findings relating to issues of identity and belonging among Somalis in Europe. How individuals identify themselves and the way in which they are identified are important for integration. A person may be employed, or succeed in education, but may not feel a sense of belonging to the place where he or she lives. Furthermore, as noted in the previous chapter – with the exception of the participants in the London research – a majority of Somalis in the other cities arrived in Europe after the late 1980s as refugees or are the children of such refugees. Group belonging and identity has already played a role in their presence in Europe as people who are granted refugee status, having satisfied officials that they fled their country owing to a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion”.<sup>2</sup>

The approach and design of the At Home in Europe research project, with its focus on Somalis, is underpinned by an assumption that ethnicity (in this case being Somali) is an important marker of identity that has an impact on the processes of inclusion and integration. While this is a common starting point for the research, the discussion in the individual city reports highlights the diversity of experiences within this group along lines of gender, age, migration history and generation. The research explored participants’ concepts and ideas of a range of different identities (ethnic, national and religious) and how their experiences shaped their sense of belonging in relation to each. It also examined their sense of belonging to the neighbourhoods and cities they lived in, as well as the country, noting aspects of everyday experience that affected their sense of belonging.

Self-perception and description are important, but this does not mean individuals are entirely free to determine their identity; in fact the perception of others is also crucial. Young Somalis born in Europe face challenges from how others perceive them in negotiating both their European and Somali identities. The chapter begins by examining how participants viewed their Somali identity before looking at their sense of having a European national (that is, British, Dutch, Danish, Finnish, Norwegian or Swedish) identity.

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<sup>2</sup> UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951 article 1 defines a refugee as a person who ‘owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it’.

## 2.1 Somali Identity

All participants viewed their Somali identity as an important aspect of their identity. However, across all cities, experiences of Somali identity and belonging differed between those born in Europe or who arrived as young children and those born in Somalia and who arrived in Europe as young adults. The strength of emotional and personal ties for first-generation migrants to their country of origin is common among migrant groups and may perhaps be stronger among refugees who left their country due to fear of persecution rather than through a positive choice of planned migration. In many cases, individuals, sustained by memories of childhood and formative years, continued close ties with family in Somalia, combined with experiencing the challenges of adjusting to a new cultural and social environment, and retained a desire to return to Somalia.

My heart is not here. It is in Somalia. We are to raise our children here but I belong to Somalia and I am concerned about the country's wellbeing so my future is there and being part of its rebuilding. My heart, mind and soul are invested in Somalia. (Leicester)

By contrast, those who arrived as young children often had a stronger sense of attachment to the country they were growing up in:

I came to this country when I was little, whatever I know, I have learned in this country. When I think of what I have learned and if I could apply it in another country, it feels very difficult. I feel like I can't apply it anywhere else if I don't make an extra effort. So I don't think I am going anywhere else any time soon. (Helsinki)

Most participants considered it important to retain and develop a Somali identity. Many valued living in larger cities with a significant Somali community, as this provided the space and opportunities for maintaining and developing their Somali identity. Across the cities, fluency in the Somali language was viewed as a key prerequisite for retaining and supporting Somali identity. The Oslo report suggests that the teaching of the mother-tongue language can play an important part in a student's identity and self-esteem. Such classes can be a way of supporting young Norwegian-Somalis to learn about their homeland and strengthening their Somali identity; confidence in their Somali identity, the report's authors argue, can help them navigate their position in Norwegian society with a Somali identity and give them the advantage of being multilingual.

In London, the longer history of settlement means that there is a more firmly established Somali community in the city than in other European countries. This, together with the larger size of the population, is seen as providing a basis for sustaining a Somali identity and for attracting Somalis from other European countries to the UK:

What I hear from a lot of the older generation is that people are losing their culture in these [other European] cities, because the Somali population is very small. So they're coming over to the UK and joining with British Somalis. (London)

One example of how Somali identity, music, culture, poetry and food are celebrated in London was the publicly supported Somali Week festival. The annual London event brings together artists from Africa, the UK and other Somali diaspora communities for events, lectures and discussions.

In all the cities there was concern that the younger generation would lose their Somali identity. A number of factors were seen as contributing to this. Some emphasised the lack of direct experience and knowledge of Somalia, particularly for those who were born in Europe and had not visited Somalia. Others felt that the process of integration was leading to a loss of Somali identity. This was most strongly expressed, often with regret and a sense of sadness, by older participants in their description of how the younger generation of European Somalis is integrating. As the Oslo report observes, underlying this is the question of what integration means and contestation over which aspects of the new ways of being are compatible with Somali identity. During a focus group with young Somali men, one participant observed:

This issue of identity ... All those who talk here are more Somali. But if we speak the truth there is a lot of Norwegianness in us. We are well integrated, to put it differently. Because we live here and have grown up here, it is impossible for us to be fully Somali after such a long time. Like the others said, it is about how Norwegian we accept ourselves to be. Norwegian in the sense of drinking alcohol and eating pork with them, or Norwegian in the sense of reading *VG*, playing handball? We are positive for that part and want to integrate and be with our fellow countrymen, the Norwegians. (Oslo)

The inference is that there are people who have accepted parts of the host society's ways of being that are thought to be incompatible with being Somali. Where that boundary lies, however, is not the same for all and is the cause of many debates among Somalis in European cities.

## 2.2 European National Identity

The reports identify factors that affect the extent to which Somalis identify with a national European identity, that is see themselves as British, Danish, Dutch, etc. In the cities in this study, there were Somalis who regarded themselves as belonging to the country where the study took place. This was more prevalent among participants who were born in that country or had citizenship. Employment and the consequent feeling of making a positive contribution to the country were also mentioned as activities that helped individuals feel they were part of and belonged to their wider society. Individuals talked about their ability to pay their bills or their taxes as contributing to society and feeling part of it. A young participant in a focus group in London noted

that the opportunities for education and employment contributed to her sense of belonging and citizenship:

I feel more ... citizenship to this country than to the country where I originally come from. Because this country has given me more than my other country, I feel more of a British citizen than a Somali or Somaliland citizen. (London)

As a corollary, exclusion from the labour market had a bad effect on feelings of belonging. The findings here underline the nexus between employment, civic participation and belonging.

A key element that affects the sense of belonging is the extent to which participants felt that they were seen as belonging by mainstream society. Belonging and self-identification can be heavily influenced by the perception of how the mainstream society perceives, receives and refers to otherness. In this regard, references to and language regarding not just migrants in general, but African migrants more specifically, and in this context Somali migrants also in particular (who are sub-Saharan African and Muslim) are not merely semantic, but have a very powerful impact on identity and self-perception.

Participants identified several considerations that made them feel like a citizen, including speaking the national language, paying taxes, participating in society and obeying the law. While these were seen as key features of citizenship, Somalis felt that even those who met these requirements were often still not seen as citizens. The comments from a Somali man in Amsterdam who had been in the Netherlands for two decades point to the feeling that citizenship is constrained and conditional rather than full and equal:

I arrived here as a guest, and the host has given me the impression that I am welcome here, "on the condition that", and that constrained me ... The idea of citizenship has been undermined, due to all kind of factors, the PVV,<sup>3</sup> etc. You can observe that here, in the Netherlands, but also at the EU level. I am a Somali, and I will remain a Somali, and I no longer have the feeling that I can get the feeling of belonging here, of Dutch citizenship. I participate, but I am not a citizen. (Amsterdam)

For Somalis as for any other minority group, a sense of belonging is undermined when it is repeatedly questioned in different ways. In Helsinki and Copenhagen, a sense of belonging to Finnish or Danish society is undermined by the hostile and negative public discourse and media discussion about Somali communities. The comment from a young Finnish-Somali illustrates how this is the case even for those who have European citizenship:

Even though I have Finnish citizenship, I am shy to say that I am Finnish because I know that they do not want to see me as a Finn and that they will ask

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<sup>3</sup> The PVV is the Partij Voor de Vrijheid (Freedom Party) led by Geert Wilders.

me about my origins anyway, so I start with my origin and then if they do ask me do I have Finnish citizenship I tell them “yes”. (Helsinki)

Comments from participants in the Oslo and London research reinforced the ways in which Somalis are not viewed as belonging due to their visible difference in appearance:

Irrespective of whether you speak Norwegian, the first thing he sees, his first impression is the brown skin and long beard. (Oslo)

The fact is I live in a society where people don't see me as either a British citizen or as a Somali, they only see me as a foreigner. It doesn't matter if you have a British passport ... they only see you as a black foreigner. (London)

For young Somalis growing up in Europe, who feel uneasy with national identification in the face of experiences of discrimination and hostile public and media discourse, visits to Somalia or meeting family from Somalia can provide a moment when aspects of identity shaped by the experience of living in Europe become more visible to them. In Amsterdam, a 19-year-old student with a strong sense of her Somali identity recalled her surprise at noticing how Dutch she felt when meeting relatives visiting from Somalia:

I had one period, in which I thought “I am very Somali”, but right now I do not have that feeling any longer; some relatives visited us, and then I noticed that I am actually quite Dutch, in the way we talk, what we do ... I had not spoken in Somali for quite some time, I really find it difficult to pick up ... many Somalis also think differently than Somali that grew up in Europe. (Amsterdam)

A second student, also in Amsterdam, reported a similar experience during a visit to Somalia:

I have been to Somalia, but they immediately see that you are from abroad, I dressed in the same way, but they noticed. I didn't dare to speak Somali, those people speak it so well, I rather said nothing, otherwise they might think “She cannot speak Somali.” (Amsterdam)

This sense that an individual experiences their sense of national belonging when most removed from that national context is perhaps reinforced by the findings in Leicester. As noted in the previous chapter, many Somalis living in Leicester arrived there in the first decade of this century, having previously arrived as refugees in other European countries, most notably the Netherlands, Sweden and Norway. By the time these families moved to the UK, they had young children who had grown up in those other European countries. The strongest expression of identification with a European nationality was made by a participant who was born and grew up as a child in the Netherlands before moving to the UK and was now participating in the Leicester research. She talked of her Dutch identity:

[w]e are grateful to Leicester for accommodating us but I personally still feel close to Holland. I regard it as my motherland. (Leicester)

### 2.3 Local and City Identity

The reports focused on cities in which there were significant Somali populations. The Somali participants who live in these cities value the access to cultural goods and services that are available in these larger urban areas compared with smaller towns and villages. As a civil society stakeholder in Sweden noted,

Here we, as immigrants, have all kinds of food and stores. Malmö is the best city in Sweden. (Malmö)

The opportunities for employment and education, and connections for travel to other European cities as well as to Somalia, were identified as important features of the capital cities. Not surprisingly perhaps for populations with memories of war and conflict, safety was also a recurrent theme in the narratives of belonging from Somali participants. In Oslo and Helsinki the peaceful and safe nature of society featured as a key positive aspect of living there. As well, others referred to a different sense of psychological safety and security arising from living in areas of concentration of Somalis, which provided a more accessible network of support for newcomers who did not speak the national language:

There are a lot of Somalis in Helsinki, it's possible that others view it as negative aspect that these people are many in number in this city but for a Somali it means having people who share [their] colour of skin, language and people they discuss with and it feels good. In the other towns, people feel lonely and so on, and the people view immigrants as strange and there is a lot of discrimination [in other towns]. (Helsinki)

There were also examples given across the cities of how positive everyday interactions with others, such as greeting each other in the street or helping take shopping up the stairs, made participants feel welcome and part of their local community. The reports highlight examples of projects that aim to increase opportunities for greater interaction and dialogue with the wider society. The reports suggest that many younger European-born Somalis in particular, who go to school with other young people, have friends from a wide range of backgrounds. While recognising that there was interaction with non-Somali neighbours and colleagues in all the cities, many participants agreed that for some, particularly more recent arrivals, their social life was largely within the Somali community.

Leicester was one city in which the report highlighted the relationship between Somalis and other minority groups. The report notes some tension in these relationships. In particular, many of the Somalis were renting housing from landlords from the South Asian community; the report suggests that bad experiences with poor-quality housing

were creating a feeling among Somalis that they were being exploited by these landlords.

The participants in the research in these cities differed in their experiences of ethnic and multicultural diversity. In Leicester and Malmö, they noted the important advantages that came from the familiarity and experience of ethnic and cultural diversity that already existed in these cities in relation to other minority groups.

It was recognised that while life was initially more difficult for those living in smaller towns and villages with smaller Somalis communities, there were also positive impacts of this in the long run in terms of integration, language skills and interactions with the wider society:

When I first arrived in the Netherlands I was sent to a reception centre in Dronten, that was in 2008. The people I met there who went to villages in Friesland, they speak much better Dutch than I do; they are much better integrated. I think it is better in a small village where people can help you. In Amsterdam everybody is busy. And here, in Amsterdam, you only get one year of language support, then you need to pass the civic integration test, but I heard in villages people sometimes get three or four years of language support. (Amsterdam)

A participant in the Malmö research, who was initially given accommodation in a small community in northern Sweden, noted a similar positive experience:

I was the only Somali in the whole municipality. I learned Swedish within three months.

Some participants expressed concern about the effect on integration arising from living in areas where there was a significant concentration of minorities and few majority Swedes. This was most strongly expressed by a participant in Malmö:

When only immigrants live in an area like Rosengård there is no integration.

Local identities are more open and accessible than national identities. The report on Copenhagen suggested a strong sense of belonging and attachment to the city where individuals had settled or grown up. The head of a Somali diaspora organisation in Copenhagen talked about the different neighbourhoods in the metropolitan area of Copenhagen where he grew up and where he now lives as the place where he feels at home:

When I say Copenhagen, I am thinking [of] the metropolitan area. I grew up on the West side, High Taastrup and Rødovre, but now I live in the South Harbour – and so I feel at home in Copenhagen and never ever think I will be able to accustom myself to stay in a smaller city. (Copenhagen)

The one exception to this seems to be Amsterdam, where the report did not find a strong attachment to the city among the Somali research participants. This is unusual

and noted in the report, as it contrasts with the positive attachment to and identification with the city found among other minorities. This may reflect the fact that there is no one neighbourhood in Amsterdam where Somalis are concentrated. The absence of an identifiable Somali area may reflect the short period of settlement as well as the impact of a national refugee resettlement policy of dispersal of refugees across the Netherlands and the migration of many Dutch Somalis to other European cities.

#### 2.4 Contextual Nature of Identity

The comments from a participant in Leicester further emphasise the extent to which identities are not singular or fixed, but are fluid and change depending on the context in which the individual finds himself:

Younger people have not been to Somalia, [a] majority come from other European countries. However, identity would first be Somali in the general public as we are identified in this country as first Somali and then black. Amongst Somalis it would be Swedish/our European country and then with people outside Leicester it would be what part of Leicester we identify ourselves with. There is a great pride amongst young people about being identified with Leicester, compared with other areas in the UK. (Leicester)

The participant suggested that the priority given to his Somali identity was due to the way Somalis are perceived by others, due to being “identified in this country as Somali first”. The comment illustrates how beneath this prioritisation of Somali identity, the articulation of identity changes according to the audience being addressed: whether it is the general public, among Somalis, or people outside Leicester. Their non-UK European identity becomes most significant in the interactions with other Somalis. The ways in which a person’s self-identification changes depending on the context was also emphasised by an exchange between participants in Malmö. Here, one participant stressed how the answer depended on who was asking:

If an immigrant asks, I will call myself a Swede,

while another added

However, if a Swede asks, one does not know what to say.

It also changed depending on where one was:

When abroad, I call myself a Swede, but in Sweden I call myself Somali.

The comments of a participant in a London focus group showed how complex and contextual multiple identities, while often allowing Somalis to navigate different situations, may also leave them exposed and isolated:

Somali people ... they do sometimes not fit into any particular category. When you go to schools, because you’re Muslim you get put in with other Muslims as



well, but most of those Muslims are from an Asian background, because you're African you sometimes fit in to the African category, but then the Africans don't identify with you because you're Muslim, sometimes the Muslims don't identify with you because you're black, sometimes you do not quite fit into a group, that's why Somali people a lot of the time just stick together and don't really branch out into other communities because they feel like they don't really fit into any particular group. (London)

Somalis also noted how different parts of their identity – gender, religion, ethnicity, colour, their experience as refugees – while creating multiple ways to connect with others also left them exposed to different forms of discrimination and so was a further barrier to integration.

## 2.5 Religion and Identity

Very high numbers of the population in Somalia identify themselves as Muslim. It is not surprising therefore that Islam is identified as a central feature of Somali identity.

There is a growing literature on the complex and diverse reasons that have brought religion and religious identity to the fore among minorities, particularly Muslim minorities, in Europe. For some Muslims a greater identification with religion and emphasis on religious identity is a reaction to experiences of religious discrimination and the negative stereotyping of Islam in public discourse; for others religion plays a positive role in supporting integration by providing resources for challenging and reinterpreting ethnic and cultural traditions. Research on young Somali refugees in the north of England found that “experiences of forced mobility and loss of attachment to place mean the identity ‘Muslim’ becomes for many young Somali people the most important and consistent way that they have of defining who they are”<sup>4</sup>.

In all the cities in the OSF research, participants felt that negative perceptions about Islam add to the prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination that they face. For many participants the new context of living in a largely secular post-Christian society has sharpened their sense of religious identity. Somali women in Malmö, for example, argued that questions about religious practice in the new context of Sweden was a catalyst for seeking to understand and learn more about their faith.

In London a participant explained how their Somali and Muslim identities can be a barrier to integration for some:

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<sup>4</sup> Deborah Sproton and Gill Valentine, “Identities on the move: the integration experience of Somali refugees and asylum seeker young people”, at [https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.268533!/file/identities\\_on\\_the\\_move.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.268533!/file/identities_on_the_move.pdf) (accessed 30 March 2015).

In many ways, although providing security and belonging, ethnic, religious and cultural identity also acted as powerful barriers to acceptance by mainstream society and therefore to integration. (London)

Somalis emphasised the extent to which they felt that restrictions on their actions, that they identified as arising from their religious beliefs and practices, created barriers or limits to integration and participation in several cities. Not drinking alcohol, going to the sauna or eating pork were identified as habits that prevented or limited their interaction and participation with others.

Somalis in a number of cities also noted ways in which they felt their participation in education and educational activities was restricted by their religious beliefs and practices. In Copenhagen, the participants cited physical education, school parties and camps as examples of school activities that they did not participate in due to their religion. The discussions also picked up on the way in which young people, sometimes with the support of their schools, were negotiating to overcome objections from their parents. One participant recalled that when she was younger she had to bribe her parents to go on school trips, but noted that today girls in her family were allowed to go to camps without any objections.

A number of participants also cited examples of limitations on practising their faith at their place of work. Hostility and discrimination against women who wear the hijab were the main examples given. Experiences of discrimination undermined their sense of belonging. They felt that in a largely non-religious or post-religious society, people did not fully appreciate the importance of religious practice for a person of faith. A young woman in Helsinki recalled an example of not being able to pray in school and concluded, "The worst kind of discrimination is when your religion is discriminated against and you are not allowed to pray, it's very saddening." This was also reflected in the experience of Somalis in Malmö:

We are asked how will you be able to work in those clothes? But it is not the clothes that are going to work, it is us and our religion and culture need to be able to come with us.

## 2.6 Clan Affiliation

Clan identity is feature of society in Somalia and for those who are newly arrived in Europe it can provide access to networks of support in their new environment. One of the issues that arose in the research was the extent to which clan affiliations and identity are relevant for European Somalis. The discussions in focus groups and interviews with community stakeholders suggested some wariness among Somalis about the focus on the clan system. This topic was most often raised by stakeholders and officials, who regarded clan structures as something unseen and operating below the surface. They felt that many Somali civil society organisations are structured around clan identity, although this was not direct or explicit. Most interviewees working in Somali community organisations stressed that the cogency of clan identity

has weakened in successive generations of Somali migration. Thus, clan membership can be an issue among those from Somalia, but it does not have the same salience among the younger generation who were born or grew up in Europe.

## 2.7 Discrimination

The reports find that experiences of racism and discrimination have a powerful impact on participants' sense of belonging to and identification with the wider society. This was the case for individuals who felt that they had made efforts to integrate by going beyond their comfort zone and interacting with a more diverse range of people. For those who were already experiencing marginalisation, through unemployment or homelessness, experiences and expectations of discrimination reinforced their sense of alienation and hopelessness. In Copenhagen a social worker working with young homeless Somalis noted the impact on the motivation of individuals:

But it is just difficult for me to tell any Somalis that you just have to keep fighting [...] because I see that behind this, reality is slightly different, because they say, well okay, if we do all of this, get out of crime, enter into rehabilitation for substance abuse, if we do this and do that, well, what then? Will there be a job, will it be easier to get into a nightclub? Will we then not be spat on in the streets? Will people stop calling us terrorists, etc., etc., you know?

The reports reveal the varied and diverse forms of discrimination that Somalis encounter. This ranged from physical assaults and verbal abuse to less direct forms of discriminatory behaviour:

I have also experienced discrimination, now that I have become a mother, I push my pram and hear a lot more curse words than before ... when I get off the metro they push me ... the elderly people are the worst. When you are with a baby they look at you in a negative way: "These people only know how to make babies." (Helsinki)

In other contexts the discrimination was more subtle and implicit in the comments made. The Helsinki report noted that many participants related being constantly asked where they were from and when they would be going back. There were also reports of being treated with suspicion and always being followed by security guards in shops. The cumulative impact of this was to make participants feel unwelcome and believing that they would never be accepted as full members of society. A participant in the research in Copenhagen recalled a school trip during which her son, a Danish-Somali pupil, misbehaved. Telling him off, the teacher said, "In Denmark, this is how we do this." The mother felt that such a remark would not have been made to a white-majority Dane; its implied suggestion, that the boy's behaviour was due to his lack of familiarity with Danish norms, reinforced a feeling of exclusion and ignored the fact that he was born and raised in Denmark. Another example arose in Helsinki, where a father recalled his children being questioned by the teacher on whether they were forced to fast during Ramadan.

The report on Oslo noted examples of positive comments from Norwegians about how well a person spoke Norwegian, which revealed surprise about their expectations of Somalis.

The kinds of comments I do not like are, for example, “But you are a competent Somali who has a job.” If people say such a thing as if it was something special, one wonders what kind of impression people actually have about us. (Oslo)

In all seven cities, Somalis recognised that they were vulnerable to complex forms of discrimination which combined many factors, such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender and refugee status.

Somalis are simultaneous black and Muslims, and in this way, there’s something extra about us. For example, Arabs are a bit fairer. We are black, we are Muslims [...] so we are the ones who are black Muslims, it’s always this thing about us being black and Muslim, and it is always as if you’re saying then it’s only right for us to be reminded of who we are. (Copenhagen)

Being black, a Muslim and being a foreigner, that’s a deadly combination right there for you. (London)

Discrimination in employment, education and housing contribute towards socio-economic exclusion which in turn further undermines the sense of belonging and identity with the wider society.

## 2.8 Gender and Identity

Both the Oslo and Malmö reports referred to the differing experiences of men and women. In particular, they highlighted the extent to which migration changes community gender dynamics, as older men especially are unemployed or in low-paid work and therefore less able to fulfil their traditional roles as bread winners. Many older men have not managed to replace the role they had in Somalia in a meaningful way in Europe. Thus, young people – and especially boys – lack role models in both the public and private sense. Women, on the other hand, maintain their role in caring for the family, so there is continuity in their status.

Several of the reports noted a significant demographic trend towards female-headed single-parent households in Somali communities. This seems to be both an assertion of increased gender equality and in many ways a facet of the Somali migration experience. The report on Leicester detailed the prominent role played by Somali women in the development of the city’s Somali civil society organisations. Other reports related the pressures and challenges arising from female-headed single-parent households in supporting young people in fields such as education.

## 2.9 Key Findings

Retaining and maintaining their Somali identity was important to the research participants. However, there were differences in understanding and attachment depending on experience and exposure to life in Somalia; the research found that the older Somalis feared that the young people were losing their Somali identity. However, discussion about losing Somali identity also revealed differences in views on how much integration and the adaptation of new ways of being were acceptable.

Retaining the Somali language was seen by many as critical to keeping the distinct cultural inheritance which forms part of a developing and enriched self-identification. It is also relevant to parents' perceptions of success and failure. Bringing up a child in Europe to learn and integrate into the host society while attaining a strong cultural heritage was a primary motivator in Somali households.

Younger Somalis also identified with the European countries where they were living either as citizens or settled residents. Their attachment to the wider national identity was bolstered where they were able to participate in and contribute to social and economic life. Economic activity is a cohesive agent which contributes to integrative processes and a sense of commitment to and from the wider society. There was also a strong attachment to local and city identities. They were valued for the access to both cultural goods and services, supporting the maintenance of a sense of Somali community and identity, while at the same time offering opportunities for meeting and interacting with people from a diverse range of backgrounds.

However, belonging and a secure sense of full and equal citizenship also required acknowledgement and acceptance by the wider society. Discrimination remains a significant experience of many Somalis, undermining their sense of belonging. Many feel that they are vulnerable to multiple forms of discrimination, combining issues of race, religion, ethnicity, gender and their status as refugees. For many Somalis religion is an important aspect of their identity; however, many felt that negative perceptions about Islam add to the prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination that they face. For others, religious norms and practices were also felt to place a limitation on their interactions with others.

The impact of the migration and resettlement experience on the socio-economic dynamics of Somali households in all the cities has had profound consequences for traditional gender roles, resulting in a significant demographic trend towards female-headed single-parent households. The policy implication of these demographic changes in household composition may necessitate a focus on avenues of support for vulnerable households.

### 3. EDUCATION

Education is viewed as central to long-term integration in all the cities. Educational qualifications are critical for employment opportunities and schools play an important role in passing on an understanding of the rules, norms and values of society to pupils. Young Somalis and their parents have a more sustained and direct contact with schools than with any other public institution. The quality of that contact, how teachers and education officials treat them and respond to their needs can also have a powerful effect on their sense of identity and belonging.

The cities in this research differ in their experiences of providing education in an increasingly diverse society. The schools in London, Leicester and Amsterdam, like other actors in the city, have many years of experience serving an ethnically and culturally diverse population and have been able to apply, adapt and adjust existing approaches to support the education of Somalis. In other cities like Helsinki, there is less long-term experience of diversity and the educational system is only now beginning the process of adapting to the increasing diversity of the city's population.

#### 3.1 Qualifications and Experience of Schools

This section begins by setting down data on the level of formal educational qualifications among different European Somali groups. It was reported that levels of formal education were higher among Somalis arriving in the late 1980s and 1990s compared with more recent arrivals. Many of these were educated to the secondary or college level and in some cases were graduates with professional qualifications. Since 2005, there have been more arrivals from rural areas as well as from refugee camps. There was no formal education in Somalia during years of civil conflict. These facts are not only important in shaping their employment opportunities (as discussed in Chapter 4), but also as regards their understanding of schools and formal educational systems. Parents' lack of experience and ignorance limit their ability to support their children, while Somalis who arrived as young adults may have to adapt to attending formal schooling for the first time.

Data on the formal qualifications of Somalis in Europe, while not comprehensive or consistent across the cities, provide an important indication of the context for understanding Somalis' experience of education in Europe. The level of formal educational qualification of many Somalis who arrived in Europe as refugees is low. Data in the Netherlands found that 30 percent of Somalis had only a primary education as their highest level of education, while 28 percent had no formal education. This rose to 62 percent for Somali women.<sup>5</sup> In Malmö, the figures are similar for those who were born in Somalia: 36 percent had only primary-school education, 25 percent secondary education and 11 percent higher education, while the

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<sup>5</sup> *Somalis in Amsterdam*, p. 53.

education levels of 28 percent were unknown.<sup>6</sup> In Norway, while there are no official statistics on the educational qualifications of Somali immigrants, survey data found that most Somalis arriving in Norway had no formal education and only 14 percent had higher education.<sup>7</sup>

In all the cities there is a picture of low educational achievement, reflecting the limited education of many Somalis. As increasing numbers of Somalis go through the educational system in these cities, achievement levels are improving, in some cases very dramatically. In particular, there is a pronounced difference in the educational trajectories of those born in the European cities compared with those who arrived as children or young adults. In Oslo, in 2009 52 percent of Somalis aged 16–18 years who arrived in Norway as immigrants were enrolled in education, but the figure was 73 percent for those born in Norway.<sup>8</sup> In Amsterdam between 2003 and 2009, there was an increase in the number of Somalis participating in the higher levels of certain vocational trajectories.<sup>9</sup> The Helsinki report also noted an increase in the number of Somalis in upper-secondary general education.

The data for a number of cities point to significant gender differences in educational achievement, with girls performing better than boys. In the London borough of Tower Hamlets in 2011–2012 58 percent of Somali students got five GCSEs at grades A\*–C.<sup>10</sup> But this conceals a big gender difference, as the figure is 70 percent of Somali girls and 49 percent of boys.<sup>11</sup> The improved educational trajectory of Somali girls was also noted in Oslo, where data for Norway found that Norwegian-Somali girls were outperforming other immigrants entering university: in 2009 46.2 percent of Norwegian-Somali girls aged 19–24 years old were in higher education, higher than the average for immigrant children in general (42.6 percent).<sup>12</sup>

There are also indications of differences in educational achievement between different waves of Somalis, with the children of those who arrived first scoring significantly better than those who arrived later. In Oslo, for example, on the one hand, enrolment figures among the age groups 16–19, 20–24 and 25–29 were low in the period 1998–2008. On the other hand, in 2008 enrolment in academic courses among descendants of Somali immigrants aged 16–19 was in fact well above the national average, at 51.3

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<sup>6</sup> *Somalis in Malmö*, p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> *Somalis in Oslo*, p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> *Somalis in Oslo*, p. 50.

<sup>9</sup> *Somalis in Amsterdam*, p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> Examinations for GCSEs (General Certificate for Secondary Education) are usually taken by students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Scotland has a different educational qualification) at the age of 16. GCSEs are graded on a scale of A\*–E. A standard measure for attainment is the percentage of pupils in a school obtaining 5 GCSEs at grades A\*–C.

<sup>11</sup> *Somalis in London*, p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> *Somalis in Oslo*, p. 50.

percent for Norwegian-Somalis compared with 39.9 percent for the Norwegian population as a whole.<sup>13</sup>

Education of Somalis in Leicester emerges as one of the most striking success stories in the reports. Leicester is the city that has seen the most dramatic improvement in educational achievement. There are national tests to measure educational achievement at different ages, referred to as Key Stage tests (KS). The number of Somali pupils that achieved the threshold (required) at Key Stage 2 (tests taken when pupils are around aged 11) for English and math rose from 61 percent in 2008 to 77 percent in 2012.<sup>14</sup> The percentage of Somalis achieving five GCSEs at grades A\*–C (a standard measure of achievement for 16-year-olds) increased from 27 percent in 2008 to 45 percent in 2012.<sup>15</sup> While these are still below the national and city averages, this shows Somalis outperforming some of the longer-established minority groups in the city such as Bangladeshis. Understanding the reasons for Leicester's success in this area may therefore offer valuable lessons for other schools.

The community groups and participants in the research in Leicester referred to the high aspirations of the parents for their children. While these were contributory to this success, it seems unlikely to be a sufficient explanation for the positive results in Leicester, as a similar outlook was found among Somali parents in all the other cities. Other factors will therefore have been important in helping to translate high aspirations into high achievement. The migration history of Leicester's Somali community may be important; many arrived as refugees in the 1990s in other European states, particularly the Netherlands, and only later relocated to Leicester. They therefore arrived with young children who were in education in other European countries before coming to Leicester. The research finds that Somalis who came to Leicester were active in engaging with educational authorities, and encountered a municipality that was itself open to engagement and change and was experienced in responding to the needs of new communities. As early as 2004 the city authorities commissioned research to map the educational needs of Somali pupils. The report's recommendations provided the basis for an action plan for improving the achievement of Somali children, such as the employment of bilingual Somali assistant teachers and the assessment of the academic ability of Somali children who did not have a sufficient grasp of English in a language they were more confident in, possibly Somali but also other European languages such as Dutch.

The city authorities recognise the importance of robust data; from 2008 onwards, the data on ethnicity collected by schools in Leicester included specific data on Somalis, which enabled the educational system to better monitor and understand the experiences of Somali pupils compared with other pupils. The achievement of Somalis in the London borough of Tower Hamlets is also good. There are some similarities in

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<sup>13</sup> *Somalis in Oslo*, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> *Somalis in Leicester*, p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> *Somalis in Leicester*, p. 51.



approach to Leicester, such as the recruitment of a diverse teaching staff including 14 teachers of Somali background and provision for additional tuition in after-school homework clubs.

### 3.2 Understanding the Educational System

In many of the cities covered by this research the educational system relies on a strong partnership between schools and parents, with parents supporting educational development through reading with their children and assisting them in their homework. Somali pupils, whose parents may lack the background and knowledge to provide this support, find themselves at a disadvantage over their school careers.

A recurring theme across all the cities among Somalis participating in the research was the need for greater guidance, understanding and information about the educational system. The reports suggest that parents value education and have high expectations of education, but often lack the skills, knowledge and information to be able to support their children effectively. In Leicester, a participant talked about the lack of formal education among some parents as a challenge that requires additional support for them:

There is a big problem with the fact that Somali parents have little or no education themselves and therefore struggle to help their children with their education. Parents need training to develop skills to help them help their children. (Leicester)

There are also different cultural expectations of the role of parents and teachers. Many Somali are not used to an educational system that requires more active involvement and participation by parents both in their children's education and in the governance of the school. As noted by a Somali parent in Copenhagen, "In our culture, children learn in school. There are none of all those extra meetings." In Oslo, a Norwegian-Somali stated that in Somalia parents were only called to meetings in school when the child had done something wrong.

However, there were barriers even when individuals understood the need for greater participation and involvement. Lack of knowledge or confidence in communicating in the language of the country was a key obstacle cited in all the cities. Parents in Oslo have the right to an interpreter for their meetings with teachers, but the right is not well known or widely taken up. For many parents from Somalia, their own lack of formal education and schooling, as well as their limited knowledge of the national language, curtails their ability to support their children's education. In Helsinki, again poor language skills and low expectations on the part of teachers were among some of the challenges facing Somalis that were identified in discussions on education:

Many people have gone to school in Helsinki and yet only few have proceeded to higher education, where is the problem, is it the system or the parents? ... The reasons are many; the Somali in comprehensive school might not receive

enough support from his school. The problem might also be the parents who are unable to support their child, the Finnish language which is a difficult language, the schools that are not prepared and putting the Somali child in different position than the Finnish child, even though the child should receive more support because he is studying in a language that is not his mother tongue. No one is interested in them entering high school, if (the authorities) wanted Somali children to proceed to high school, they would support them a lot more in the schools and in language, there is no policy that dictates that Somali children should be enabled to go to high school. It feels like they just want them in lower-level jobs. (Helsinki)

Parents in Copenhagen experienced barriers because of their lack of familiarity with the educational and school governance system and limited ability and confidence in the use of Danish.

There are many parents, many mums, who wish to do what's best for their children. But they're held back, they can't participate fully in the conversation, such as school consultations, because they lack the language skills. Or they haven't had any proper schooling in Somalia, so they need an interpreter [...] but no one is aware of it, which rights they have. There are a lot of mothers who do not know. (Copenhagen)

The ability to support children in education is also shaped by the amount of time that parents have at their disposal. The Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Leicester and London reports noted the particular vulnerability of female-headed single-parent households, where Somali mothers are already struggling with a range of different roles and have less time to provide support for each child's homework. This is of course a challenge for all female-headed single-parent families, irrespective of ethnicity; however, the large size of some Somali families makes this an even greater challenge for many Somali mothers. A teacher at a school in Copenhagen with a high proportion of Danish-Somali families characterised the family size as a special condition of Danish-Somali children:

What grabs your attention is that many of these families have a lot of children. And that becomes a challenge for a system in which you only have your parents, and not the extended family to care for the children. The parents carry a full load, compared with that of other minority groups. They simply just have so much to do. And then there is also a large share of single mothers, not all but there are some, and that is hard on the mother, but also on the children [because of] the attention children need during that age ... in relation to succeeding academically.

In Leicester, the Somali Development Services (SDS) and other Somali organisations, recognising the difficulties women were facing in having to raise children on their own, developed a training programme for women at their community centre, providing

ESOL (English as a Second Language) classes and computer skills instruction, as well as some advice on gaining a fresh insight into the needs of their children.

The transition from primary to secondary education is a particularly critical period where parents' lack of knowledge or understanding of the educational system can put Somali students at a disadvantage. In Helsinki a successful pilot project that aimed to support students with an immigrant background to advance in secondary education not only provided additional Finnish language instruction and helped to improve grades but also provided students with mentors who shared their knowledge of the Finnish educational system that many Finnish parents take for granted. The mentors were able to give advice on when to apply, where to apply and where a student was likely to get a place.

### 3.3 Teachers' Expectations and Pupils' Aspirations

Teachers of course play a critical role not only in delivering good-quality education but also in instilling aspiration and motivation among their pupils. Low expectations, informed by stereotypes about how well a child from a particular minority group is likely to do, can be a big barrier. This is even more critical in educational systems where the teacher's assessment of a pupil plays a key role in determining the options for secondary education. A number of reports recalled negative experiences that arose from low expectations. In Amsterdam, a female research participant who went on to study at university recalled her family's experience of having to challenge her teacher's assessment of the qualifications that she should pursue:

At primary school my mother pushed me a lot: I should get high grades, do the utmost. She also performed a very active role in the choice of secondary education. According to the CITO assessment, I could do VWO [the highest level, preparing for academic education], not with ease, but I got sufficient points to do so. However, the teacher suggested taking the HAVO [one level lower], and my mother then protested against this decision – with success!

In Copenhagen a focus group participant vividly recalled examples of teachers who did not believe that they had the ability to pursue higher education; their stories recall the tremendous impact a teacher's perception has on the confidence of their pupils:

It destroys your self-esteem when your teacher doesn't believe in you, while you yourself know that you can do it, and you can prove through your grade point average that you can do it, and then they still will just say, "No you can't." I do feel that this is also racially motivated ... just being Muslim. I thought there must be something behind this, since she just did not want me to continue.

In Copenhagen the impact of low expectations and aspirations held by teachers was also identified as a problem by officials and key stakeholders.

In London, a participant who was also a teacher found that in his experience children from minority-ethnic groups were expected to go into vocational rather than academic education; the employment options offered to them were also more limited:

The school I was in they gave us a test, it was basically a careers test ... every person who was from minority-ethnic background, either got dancer, musician, chef, and none of us were interested in that ... so then we would look at the next white kid who was in our class and it was like, oh, I got options of engineering, doctor.

In Oslo, Somalis were also dissatisfied with the options and trajectories suggested by school advisers, as these focused on vocational rather than academic education. It was felt that school advisers did not have the same high ambitions for the Somali pupils as their parents had:

I believe that the reason why advisers are so generalising towards Somalis is that they do not have knowledge about us from before. It seems as if they have very little experience with Somalis. I do not know how it is with ethnic Norwegians, but with Somalis, it is like this: you meet your adviser maybe once or twice in the course of your lower and upper secondary school. How will he or she know what you can or cannot do? Maybe the solution is to have a meeting with your class teacher and adviser two or three times a year so that they have an overview of the pupils' development.

There were, however, examples of teachers who made a positive long-lasting impact on their pupils, providing them with the self-belief and motivation needed to do well.

I loved my form teacher. She was great. Really. If we needed extra lessons, she was there. She let us know where we fell short and what we could do better. I remember during exams, she'd kick us under the table if we were giving a wrong answer. So then you knew that you were in the wrong and needed to straighten yourself up a bit. And she'd give you hints. So she was an excellent teacher. (Copenhagen)

Even where teachers are seeking to be supportive and recognise the particular needs of some Somalis, it is always important to acknowledge the differences within the Somali communities. This is particularly the case where schools have Somali pupils born in the country alongside new arrivals. Each will have different educational needs:

I remember at school that I was taken out of class to join other Somali girls to talk about our experiences of war. I've never been there. English is my first language. I felt that I missed out on core English language lessons because I was assumed to be a new arrival from a war-torn place. (London)

### 3.4 Language

The educational systems in cities covered in this research place a strong emphasis on communication skills. The ability to understand and express yourself in the language of the country you live in is critical to educational success. Many Somali pupils in school are bilingual; they have parents who speak Somali and have a limited understanding of the majority language of the city they live in. This limits the support parents can provide to their children with school work.

My mum wasn't speaking to me in English at home, I didn't know the past tense of that, even now I feel like sometimes when I'm at work I'll be, I don't know, I feel a bit more disadvantaged than the other people. (London)

In several cities, there is a focus on improving the competence in the national language(s) as this is recognised as crucial to educational success. Copenhagen's inclusion strategy targets vulnerable bilingual speakers, including young Somali children, before they even begin formal school, with support in nurseries to improve their Danish-language skills and assessment of language skills at the ages of three and five.

Copenhagen and Helsinki are among the cities that offered mother-tongue education for bilingual students, that is, formal teaching of Somali. Participants in the focus group valued the opportunity of learning Somali and saw this as important for sustaining and developing Somali identity.

The Helsinki city authorities seeks to ensure that immigrant children have the language skills needed for education, through the National Core Curriculum for Instruction Preparing Immigrants for Basic Education. There is also additional funding given to schools with immigrant children to ensure that they are able to provide the additional support needed.

A specific issue that arose in Helsinki was the placement of Somali students in what are referred to as S2 classes, Finnish as a second-language classes. While S2 can be beneficial and supportive for some students, the research suggested that Somali students were being placed in the S2 classes with limited reference to their actual needs and whether for example they were second-generation Finnish-born Somalis.

### 3.5 Pupil Mobility

The movement of Somali pupils in and out of a school as families move to another city or travel abroad was also sufficiently significant to merit mention in the Copenhagen and Leicester reports. In both cities this was seen as having not only an impact on the particular child but on the school as a whole. At the Taylor Road Primary School in Leicester, where close to half the pupils are Somali, 51 pupils left the school and 46 joined the school during one school year. For schools and pupils mid-year integration into the class is a challenge. In Copenhagen it was felt that the move was often to other schools within the city, due to a range of factors, but that in some instances such

disruption could be avoided through better communication with parents and emphasis on the importance of continuity in education.

### 3.6 Key Findings

The educational levels of Somalis who have arrived in Europe have varied: the Somalis who arrived in the late 1980s and early 1990s had higher levels of formal education compared with the more recent arrivals. Nevertheless, across all the cities there are high aspirations and a clear focus on increasing young Somalis' educational achievement. There are also common barriers that most Somalis face: a limited knowledge or understanding of the educational system; a limited capacity to support the education of their children, due to their own lack of education; low expectations and in some cases discrimination from teachers, and having to acquire a European language as an additional language. The educational policy differs across the cities in this study. In some cities, schools and teachers have a significant experience of teaching students from a diverse range of backgrounds, while others have only recently started to consider how to respond. The reports suggest that, with the right educational policies and support, Somalis can overcome these barriers and succeed in education, since there are significant opportunities for learning in all the cities.

#### Box 1. Good Practice in Oslo: Somali Student Association

The Somali Student Association (Somalisk Studentforening, SSF) was established in 1993 and is among the oldest Somali organisations in Norway. SSF consists of Norwegian-Somali students at universities and university colleges who work voluntarily to motivate and help Norwegian-Somali children and young people to take higher education and create a positive attitude towards education. Central to the work are homework assistance, motivational seminars, debate evenings and other social gatherings.

Homework assistance is on offer for Norwegian-Somali pupils in primary and secondary schools. Most of those providing homework assistance are Norwegian-Somali students in higher education who also function as role models. SSF focuses on homework assistance because many Norwegian-Somali pupils face academic challenges in schools, as many parents are not in a position to help them with their homework.

Another main focus is the yearly motivational seminars on higher education that SSF organises. Somali academics, students and other inspirational figures are asked to give a presentation about their education, job or ambitions. Representatives from universities and

university colleges as well as Norwegian-Somali students are present to inform prospective students about the study programmes offered at various universities.

#### Box 2. Good Practice in Leicester: Taylor Road Primary School

As early as 2004, Leicester city authorities commissioned research to map the educational needs of Somali pupils. The report's recommendations provided the basis for an Action Plan for improving the achievement of Somali children. Actions taken included the employment of bilingual Somali assistant teachers and the assessment of the academic ability of Somali children who did not have a sufficient grasp of English in a language they were more confident in, whether Somali or another European language such as Dutch.

The local authority also supported a local NGO to run supplementary school classes (that is, additional classes run in the evenings and at weekends) to help underachieving primary-school pupils, particularly Somali pupils, to improve their education. The city recognises the importance of robust data; from 2008 onwards, the data on ethnicity collected by schools in Leicester included specific data on Somalis, this enabled the educational system to better monitor and understand the experiences of Somali pupils compared with other pupils.

This approach seems to be bearing fruit in the success of Somali pupils in schools such as Taylor Road Primary School, where 46 percent of pupils are of Somali background (and 60 percent of the school are black and minority-ethnic, BME). The school has been recognised by the UK's Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) and the UK Home Office for its positive performance. The chief strengths of the school have been the engagement of Somali parents as governors in the school and in the community more broadly. The school has invested in Somali teachers, teaching assistants and parents as role models. The school has used additional funding given to schools in areas of poverty in one-to-one tutoring, Saturday morning school support, the breakfast club, after-school activities and the school's role model initiatives.

## 4. EMPLOYMENT

Work is recognised as central to identity, integration and social inclusion. Research by the Migration Policy Institute suggests that a failure to find employment plays a greater role in undermining immigrant integration in Europe than religious and cultural differences.<sup>16</sup> This chapter identifies some of the challenges and difficulties that Somalis face in trying to find employment.

Employment rates correlate to education and qualifications as well as time in a new country. A key indicator of integration would be the employment rates for the second generation, Somalis born in Europe to parents born outside Europe; however, with the exception of the UK, there are very few in this group old enough to be in employment, so these figures are not available yet. The chapter therefore focuses on the experience of Somali immigrants. In understanding their challenges it is important to bear in mind that most Somalis who arrived since the 1980s came as refugees rather than economic migrants. This has had a profound impact in shaping their employment position. Like other refugees fleeing persecution, they did not choose their destination because their skills matched the labour market needs of the countries that they settled in. In most cases, they arrived in countries with a very small Somali population and limited community support structures.

The situation in the UK is different; London has a longer history of Somalis arriving and settling as students or economic migrants. As a consequence, more recent Somali arrivals are able to draw on support from the older, established Somali community. Many of the Somalis in Leicester are from other European countries. Thus, while many had arrived as refugees in the Netherlands or Sweden, the move to Leicester was one that was more carefully planned and was a form of economic migration. In fact, interviews with participants suggested that the opportunities for employment and self-employment were significant features in the decision to move to the UK.

### 4.1 Low Employment Rates, in Low-paid, Low-status Jobs

The type of labour market data that is collected differs across the countries in this research,<sup>17</sup> making comparison difficult. The data in Table 1, for example, are extrapolated from data on national labour market participation rates given for Somali immigrants in the different city reports; however, caution is needed as the data are from different time periods and are based on differing definitions of the working-age population.

<sup>16</sup> R. Hansen, *The Centrality of Employment in Immigrant Integration in Europe*, Migration Policy Institute, Washington, DC, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> For more robust comparative data on aspects of integration including labour market data, for different minorities, including Somalis, in Norway, Denmark and Sweden, see <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:700578> (accessed 6 July 2015).



**Table 1. Labour market participation rate for Somali immigrants (%)**<sup>18</sup>

	Somali men	Somali women	Gender gap
Denmark (2012)	30	26	4
Finland (2011)	24	13	11
Netherlands (2009)	38	17	21
Norway (2011)	37	23	14
Sweden (2010)	28	18	10
UK (2008)	40	9.8	30

Two key points emerge from the data on the employment rates of workers born in Somalia: first, employment rates are very low, in most cases half that of the national employment rate; and second, there is a large difference between the employment rate of men and women.

Across all six countries the employment rate for Somali men is higher than for women. The employment rates for Somali men in the Netherlands, Norway and the UK are similar at 37–40 percent. This is followed by Denmark and Sweden, where employment rates are 30 percent and 28 percent respectively. The lowest employment rate for men is in Finland at 24 percent. The employment rate for Somali women is highest in Denmark, at 28 percent, followed by Norway at 23 percent. Sweden and the Netherlands have similar employment rates for women, at 18 percent and 17 percent respectively. The lowest employment rates are in Finland at 13 percent and the UK at 9.8 percent.

A number of explanations have been posited to explain the overall low labour market participation rate of Somali women. It has been suggested that Somali women have cultural and religious preferences as well as family obligations (the combination of child and other caring responsibilities), which limit participation in the labour market. This is especially an issue for Somali female-headed single-parent families. As most Somalis arrive as refugees, they often lack access to an extended family and so cannot rely on a wider network of family for support. While these factors can contribute to the overall low employment rate for women, the interesting feature here is the clear variation in the employment rate for Somali women and men across the six countries.

<sup>18</sup> Figures are taken from national statistics provided in each of the city reports: *Somalis in Copenhagen*, p. 69; *Somalis in Amsterdam*, p. 63; *Somalis in Oslo*, p. 67; *Somalis in Malmö*, p. 77; the exception is the UK, where the data are taken from Kamran Khan, *Employment of Foreign Workers: Male and Female Labour Market Participation*, Office of National Statistics, London, 2008 (hereafter Khan, *Employment of Foreign Workers*).

It is also noticeable that the gender gap in employment rates between Somali men and women differ significantly across the cities. The narrowest gender gap of 4 percent is found in Denmark. The report for Oslo remarks that the gender gap in employment for Somalis is the largest of any immigrant group in Norway. However, compared with the other countries in this research, Norway is in the middle between the low 4 percent of Denmark and the UK, where the gap in the employment rate between Somali men and women is 30 percent.

Caution is needed in comparing the employment rates for Somalis in all six countries as the data were collected at different points in time. Nevertheless, differences such as those identified above raise the question of the extent to which these differences reflect the effect of the different national contexts, in other words, whether these differences are the consequence of different policies of varying effectiveness or different labour market structures rather than the individual characteristics of the Somali population in that country. Further research is needed to understand why, for example, Somali women have a much higher labour market participation rate in Denmark and Norway than in the other countries, or why the employment rate for Somali men is so low in Finland. They may reflect different labour markets, educational systems, gender equality policies and policies on women's participation in the labour market. They may also be shaped by different general expectations of women's participation in the labour market: for instance, in the Netherlands it is more acceptable for a woman to be a stay-at-home mother than in Norway. In the UK, the large 30 percent variation between male and female employment rates may partly be due to the structure of the welfare system. For example, mothers with children under the age of eight and in receipt of welfare benefits are not required to actively seek work until all the children have attained that age. This is partly in recognition of the cost of child care, but also reflects a social and policy consensus relating to child welfare.

Even when looking at one country rather than several, a number of the reports noted that the employment rate of Somalis was low compared with other minority or refugee groups. For example, the report for Oslo stated that in 2008, only 49 percent of Norwegian-Somalis were economically active in the labour force, of which almost 36 percent were employed. This was low compared with Iraqi and Afghan refugees, who had employment rates of 49 percent and 56 percent respectively.<sup>19</sup> The report on Amsterdam found that the employment rate of Somali refugees who had been in the country for more than 14 years was lower than that of other refugee groups.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Somalis in Oslo*, p. 67.

<sup>20</sup> *Somalis in Amsterdam*, p. 63, citing J. Dagevos, "Positie op de arbeidsmarkt" (Position in the labour market), in E. Dourleijn and J. Dagevos (eds), *Vluchtelingengroepen in Nederland. Over de integratie van Afghaanse, Iraakse, Iraanse en Somalische migranten* (Refugee Groups in the Netherlands: On the Integration of Afghan, Iraqi, Iranian and Somali Migrants), SCP, The Hague, 2011, pp. 108–125 (data are from 2009).

As many in the Somali community are recent arrivals, the amount of time an individual has been in the country has a bearing on their employment position, with the situation improving over time. In Denmark, the employment rate in 2004 was 23 percent for men and 10 percent for women, and by 2009 this had increased to 30 percent and 26 percent respectively. In the UK, the 40 percent employment rate for men in 2008 was almost twice the rate of 21 percent in 1998.<sup>21</sup> In the Netherlands, the employment rate increased with the length of time Somalis had been in the country: 43 percent of those who had been in the Netherlands for more than 14 years were in employment compared with 17 percent of those who had been there for less than four years.<sup>22</sup>

Basic employment rates do not provide any information on the nature or type of employment in which Somalis are engaged. Data in individual city reports suggest that Somali who are in employment are likely to have low-skilled, low-paid jobs, which in many cases are only part-time. In the Netherlands 80 percent of Somalis were in unskilled or low-skilled jobs. The Amsterdam and Copenhagen reports identify cleaning as one of the chief sectors in which Somalis are employed. The Copenhagen report also referred to women working in health and social care. Danish-Somali men are also occupied in trade, travel agencies and transportation. Crucially, much of this employment provides only basic pay, little training and no opportunities for promotion.

#### 4.2 Challenges in Finding Employment: Language Proficiency

In all the cities policy officials cited the lack of proficiency in the national language as the main barrier to gaining employment. In Amsterdam, language support was provided in integration classes, although many Somali women felt more was needed. In particular, it was argued that the language training provided by integration courses, while useful for everyday interactions, was not sufficient for securing employment. The Leicester report suggested that it is not only language but the social context in which communication takes place that can be unfamiliar, and so training is needed to cover the nuances of meanings as well as behaviour, in order to avoid misunderstandings.

A number of interviewees from Somali community organisations, policymakers and practitioners felt that sometimes the lack of language proficiency is used as a cover for discrimination. In Helsinki, a senior city official agreed that a non-Finnish mother tongue is used as a mechanism for exclusion in the labour market and therefore disadvantages Somalis. In Leicester, a research participant noted: “Although the language is a barrier, there are jobs that do not require a high level of language skills and we are struggling to get even those.”

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<sup>21</sup> Khan, *Employment of Foreign Workers*, table 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Somalis in Amsterdam*, p. 63.

### 4.3 Challenges in Finding Employment: Knowledge about the Labour Market

As in other areas, Somalis new to Europe are at a disadvantage because of their lack of familiarity with the labour market and how the employment scene operates in European societies. This includes knowledge and understanding of employment rights, as well as the informal ways of the labour market. In London and Malmö participants recognised the importance of networks in finding employment; Somalis were acutely aware that they were not linked into the networks through which information about new opportunities and informal recommendations were made. The experience of Somalis across the cities confirms existing research on the impact of access to networks in finding jobs.<sup>23</sup> The research also suggests that reliance by Somalis on others in the Somali community for advice and information limits their ability to find employment, as most Somalis will be outside the labour market and so will not have relevant information of vacancies or opportunities to pass on.

The process of looking for employment, completing applications, drafting covering letters and writing CVs can be daunting for many people. The research focus groups found this to be the case particularly for older people who were looking for employment for the first time. In London, the challenges of finding employment were especially big for older Somali women, many of whom have been outside the labour market bringing up young families until their late 30s or early 40s. However, with children at school they were now looking for employment. A participant in the London focus group for older Somali women articulated these challenges:

It's wrong to tell a mother who's been stuck at home raising her children, who doesn't already know the language [to go to work without support]. She doesn't know the way in which to look for work or the language. We don't even know how to use the computer or go online. We can't read or write, how are we meant to find work?"

### 4.4 Challenges in Finding Employment: Discrimination

The chapter on identity and belonging notes the many forms of discrimination that Somalis feel they are confronted with, of which one is employment. There was particular emphasis on the impact of discrimination on labour market participation in Helsinki. Participants vividly echoed the findings of the EU-MIDIS study on the scale

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<sup>23</sup> See M. Kahanec and M. Mendola, "Social Determinants of Labor Market Status of Ethnic Minorities in Britain", IZA Discussion Papers 3146, Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA), 2007, for a summary of the literature and empirical research based on the Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities conducted by the Policy Studies Institute in 1993–1994.

and intensity of discrimination faced by sub-Saharan African Muslims in Finland with examples from their personal experience:<sup>24</sup>

I used to work for ... two years; a Finnish man came there and worked for three months. The manager was a woman and she asked me, “Can you work overtime?” I said yes and did the overtime work well. The man who was there for three months got a permanent job and my contract was ended after the two years. I asked her why she gave the man a permanent job, when I had been there longer. She evaded me. I was the better worker and I had training in electronics, he didn’t have a degree and I had worked longer even for other companies. (Helsinki)

Women who wore the hijab felt that they faced even greater hurdles as employers failed to see beyond their attire and value them on their abilities:

I took me two years after my BA to get a job, and good grades did not help. When you call, the boss sounds satisfied on the phone and is open and nice. But during the meeting I can see from the face that they cannot place you. A considerable share of interviews begin normal but then move to the headscarf, belonging, language and such. (Oslo)

The Amsterdam report gave an example of an employer who recognised the individual’s ability but refused to hire her from fear of a negative reaction from the business’s clients to one of their employees wearing a hijab. Some people mentioned,

I certainly would like to hire you, you are a nice girl, but I am afraid our clients will have problems with you.” Or this one: “I would like to hire you, but only if you remove your headscarf.

#### 4.5 Support for Finding Jobs

An important question that arose across the reports is whether initiatives for supporting individuals into employment should be targeted specifically at Somalis (for example, by working in partnership with Somali civil society organisations, or recruiting Somalis for this role) or whether a more general approach works better for long-term integration.

In many cases the employment support enabled Somali women to be placed in educational and training courses, often for the first time in their lives. Again, a participant in London referred to the special difficulties this can pose for older Somali women:

<sup>24</sup> European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS), “Data in Focus Report: Muslims”, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009, at [http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/448-EU-MIDIS\\_MUSLIMS\\_EN.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/448-EU-MIDIS_MUSLIMS_EN.pdf) (accessed 6 July 2015).

Before I was told to go to work, I used to study at college. I struggled a lot during my time there, the language isn't my mother tongue, I'm older and my brain isn't what it used to be. This isn't the (right) time in my life to be studying. My brain's moved on. An older person sits through a class, the same thing repeated over; they lose it the moment they leave the room.

In London, such older women expressed a preference for support from Somali community-based organisations, which they felt had a better understanding of their problems and needs.

In Copenhagen, the municipality has moved away from funding initiatives directed at specific ethnic groups. For example, the project From Dependence to Participation that was run for unemployed Somalis by a Somalia diaspora organisation no longer received referrals or funding from the municipality. NGOs and community organisations have criticised the municipality's new approach, as it removes the need for staff members to possess the language skills that would allow them to communicate with clients; at the same time they feel that in-service training appears to prioritise general competences and exclude specific cultural and intercultural knowledge and experiences.

In contrast to Copenhagen, in Leicester Somali organisations have received funding from the municipality to provide employment support to the community, including support in job search activities, preparing for interviews, CV development, filling in job applications, liaising with employers, and building confidence and self-esteem.

#### 4.6 The Impact of Unemployment

Despite all the support that is provided, many Somalis are demoralised by the failure to find employment. In Copenhagen, Oslo and Helsinki there was frustration at being placed in an endless number of training or activation programmes without receiving offers for actual jobs on completion. In Copenhagen and Oslo the Somali women wanted the never-ending job training to end and to be offered real jobs:

It is not that Somali women want to sit at home and look after our children. That's not the way it is, we want to work, but we're not sent out to work, they are just sent to something in between ... We're like a herd of animals, fenced in and just whipped to move around. (Copenhagen)

I have taken a Norwegian language course, a job application course, a data course, a health and nursing course. I have taken all kinds of courses. They ask you to do course after course. How many courses does one have to take before one gets a job? (Oslo)

The cumulative impact of being on constant training programmes and failing to secure a job over many years made people feel demoralised and ready to give up:

The labour market is closed off. It's stagnant. I have lived here for 16 years, during those 16 years I've interned and tried to work and tried to work and tried to work ... Now I'm old, and I've become angry and sad. (Copenhagen)

The failure to find employment or only low-paid jobs means that many Somalis rely on state support for their income. Various views were expressed in the research across the cities on the impact of this on Somalis. Some were critical of Somalis' dependence on welfare. Others found the welfare system to be too punitive, with welfare payments cut or suspended when appointments were missed. A female participant in Copenhagen felt the system was often too rigid and ignored the realities of life:

I have experienced forgetting an appointment and having my benefit payments cut. No one understands the human aspect, it happens that you forget an appointment. I am human and sometimes forget ... And they say, that's the way it is. When the Danes say "That's the way it is," then there are no options.

These participants had a great fear of the possibility of losing their benefits. Without benefits they faced a real risk of poverty, so their stress levels and feelings of precariousness increased.

In Amsterdam, the report raised the issue of indebtedness among those who had low-paid jobs or were receiving benefits. The debts arose from trying to stretch their small incomes to support their extended families in Somalia or elsewhere.

#### 4.7 Key Findings

The ability to make an economic contribution to society through participation in the labour market is critical to integration and a sense of belonging. Lack of employment or the preponderance of low-paid, low-skilled, low-status jobs are the chief contributors to undermining the social inclusion and integration of Somalis.

Many Somalis' experience of migration as refugees has had a profound impact on shaping their employment situation. Unlike economic migrants, Somalis who came as refugees did not choose their destination because their education, skills and work experience matched the labour market in the countries where they arrived. They had limited knowledge of the formal and informal mechanisms that are needed to navigate the labour markets. It is not surprising therefore that the labour market participation rate of Somalis is low. Nevertheless, a comparison across the six countries reveals quite stark differences in the employment rates among Somalis. This raises the question of the extent to which these differences reflect the characteristics of the countries in the study, such as different policies and labour markets, rather than the characteristics of the Somali populations.

**Box 3. Good Practice in London: Tower Hamlets STEP Project**

In London's Tower Hamlets, the STEP (Support to Employment Programme) project provides free employability training and works with participants to develop the skills needed to secure employment. The programme includes professional CV writing workshops; help with completing job application forms; help with effective interview skills and techniques; job interview preparation; work and volunteering placements; and apprenticeship and employment opportunities. The project worked with 100 British-Somali women over an 18-month period and helped 50 women into paid employment and 50 into further education. One stakeholder working with Somali women considered this to be very successful.

**Box 4. Good Practice in Amsterdam: Somali Women's Foundation**

The Stichting Somalische Vrouwen (Somali Women's Foundation) Iftin, a Somali women's organisation in Amsterdam, helps women to participate in local society. In cooperation with two Somali organisations, Iftin provides support and training for Somali women to set up their own businesses and/or helps them find paid work in order to increase their economic independence. Unemployed Somali women aged 25–55 are offered six days of training. Awareness meetings are also organised about gender roles in the family and the labour market.



## 5. HOUSING

Housing contributes to integration and social inclusion in a number of ways. The neighbourhood where people live and its ethnic mix can shape opportunities for meeting people from different backgrounds. Discrimination in access to housing can restrict where individuals are able to rent or buy a home. While clean, safe and secure housing contributes to a sense of wellbeing, poor-quality, overcrowded housing has a negative impact on both mental and physical health. It can also affect education, by limiting the space needed for private study. Overcrowded housing affects public order and safety in an area; with less space at home, young people are more likely to spend time meeting friends and congregating in public spaces, gatherings which other people perceived to be threatening. Finally, home ownership is the most valuable asset for people in some countries, particularly the UK and Norway, which in turn means increasing disparities of wealth between owner-occupiers and renters.

### 5.1 Housing and Refugee Resettlement

The first experience of housing and settlement for most of the Somali participants in this research was shaped by state policies on refugee settlement. The experiences were very disparate. Somalis who arrived as asylum seekers in the Netherlands were offered accommodation in reception centres located all over the country away from population centres. They remained in these centres while their asylum applications were processed. Those who were granted refugee status were offered housing in villages, towns and cities. The policy has meant that Somalis were dispersed all over the Netherlands. The report on Oslo also picked up on this, with the comment that Norway has a policy of settling refugees in different municipalities, but that half of refugees become secondary movers who leave the area they are first settled in usually to go to larger population centres. Crucially, secondary movers have no right to communal support for the first six months in their new municipality. By contrast, the approach in Sweden, as shown in the Malmö report, allows refugees to choose where they wish to live. This was supported by most Somalis interviewed, but it is also seen as contributing to the concentration of Somalis in areas of cities with other Somalis or minority communities.

As explained below, most Somalis live in rented rather than owner-occupied accommodation. In most cities, the majority of renters live in some form of public or social housing. The exception to this is Leicester. Somalis in Leicester arrived from other EU countries, and so were not settled through a refugee settlement programme. As EU migrants, most had to find their own accommodation and so found housing through the private rental sector. This may explain why the housing experience of Somalis in Leicester stands out as particularly poor, compared with the other areas of life examined in the report for that city. The quality and standard of accommodation in the private rental sector are far more variable, and in many cases much worse, than in the public sector. Participants felt that public social housing in Leicester was maintained at a higher level, due to statutory minimum standards, than private

landlords, who had fewer obligations. The worst examples of poor housing came from participants in the Leicester focus group who reported living in homes infested with mice and cockroaches.

In Oslo, by contrast, participants thought that private rental accommodation was better than social housing, where size, lack of repair and poor conditions were an issue. A further concern was that social housing was often located in problem neighbourhoods. In Malmö, people in social housing were generally happy with the quality. Complaints about delays and difficulties in getting repairs done were a theme in the London and Leicester research.

## 5.2 Home Ownership and Renting

The fact that the Somali communities in this study (with the exception of London) arrived in the past two decades means that their housing situation differs from that of the general population. In particular, Somalis are far more likely to live in rental accommodation, whether in social housing or the private sector, than to be home-owners. While the percentage of home ownership among the general population varies in all the cities, very few Somalis are home-owners. In Copenhagen, 80 percent of Somalis live in social housing compared with 20 percent of the general population. In Helsinki in 2003 some 70 percent of Somalis in the city lived in social housing; only 1 percent of them lived in owner-occupied housing. In the UK, 95 percent of Somali born population lived in rented accommodation, of which 80 per cent live in social rented housing, compared with 24 percent of UK born households that live in rented housing, of which 24 per cent live in socially rented housing.<sup>25</sup> In Sweden, more than 90 percent of Somalis lived in rental apartments. The Oslo report stated that successive Norwegian governments had pursued a policy of encouraging home ownership for several decades, and as a consequence 80 percent of Norwegians were home-owners, 15 percent lived in private rental accommodation and 4 percent in social housing. The policy has meant that Norwegian-Somalis have the highest levels of home ownership; 16 percent are home-owners compared with Somalis in the other cities. Nevertheless, 58 percent of Norwegian-Somalis live in flats, the largest of any group.

## 5.3 Meeting the Costs of Renting and Buying

The Amsterdam report said that a shortage of accommodation means that rents in the city are high and those in low-paid jobs might have to spend half of their monthly income on rent. For many Somalis, low-paid work, unemployment, ill health or exclusion from the labour market mean that they rely on public support to cover their rents. In the UK, the rent for private and social housing is generally met by housing

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<sup>25</sup> Jill Rutter and Marie Latorre, "Social Housing Allocation and Immigrant Communities", Research Report 4, Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009, p. 25, at [http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/4\\_social\\_housing\\_allocation\\_and\\_immigrant\\_communities.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/4_social_housing_allocation_and_immigrant_communities.pdf) (accessed 16 June 2015.)

benefit payments. The report on London stated that recent changes in the welfare system, in particular the limit on the total amount of welfare that is paid to a household, the so-called benefit cap, disproportionately affects Somalis in London due to a combination of their large family size and the high rents in the private sector in London. Research suggests that British-Somali households in receipt of housing benefit are 10 times more likely to be affected by a benefit cap than white British recipients. Somalis in central London in this situation are faced with a choice of either moving into cheaper (smaller and therefore more overcrowded) accommodation or relocating to outside central London, where rents are cheaper, away from their work, schools, families and community support.

The access to Islamic finance was raised in the discussion with Somali civil society members in Amsterdam and Oslo. In Amsterdam it was suggested that difficulties in accessing an Islamic *halal* mortgage has prevented some Somalis from buying their own homes. The relevance of Islamic finance seems to be more of an issue for Somalis than other Muslim groups. The emphasis on home ownership in Norwegian public policy may explain why this emerged as a key theme for discussion in Oslo:

The system in Norway makes it expensive to rent an apartment so one is forced to buy. It is difficult for us who do not want to buy an apartment ... I have personally heard [prime minister] Stoltenberg on the television saying that all should take up a loan and own their own place to live. They make it into something positive, they make it into something nice, but I do not find it to be something positive.

#### 5.4 Understanding the Housing System

The need for Somalis to have more information and a better knowledge of the housing system was a common theme. The report on Copenhagen suggested that a lack of confidence, knowledge of the system or legal rights combined to ensure that few Somalis submitted complaints of discrimination or poor treatment. The report said that many in the Somali community, particularly when they first arrived, had little knowledge of the rules and regulations for renting houses, maintenance and the conditions surrounding deposits. The report referred to the complexity of the complaints mechanism, which requires complaints to be in writing, accompanied by a fee, with time limits within which a complaint must be made; all of these make it difficult for those unfamiliar with the system to raise complaints and leave many feeling vulnerable and exploited.

The lack of knowledge of legal rights as tenants was an issue in Leicester. This remains the case even after the housing department, following the recommendations of an earlier report, employed Somali-speaking staff, translated information into Somali (which is posted on the council's website) and organised awareness-raising sessions for the community with interpreters.

Lack of knowledge of the housing system was also cited in London. Again, as in Leicester, information is available but understanding the system is still difficult. The research found that British-Somali households prefer to access local community organisations rather than engage with official channels. But Somalis were also accessing mainstream organisations that provide housing advice such as the Citizen's Advice Bureaux. In Oslo, lack of knowledge and understanding of the system and its rules were also raised. Most focus group participants believed that they were not provided with adequate information about housing, and many found it difficult to understand the institutional structures.

## 5.5 Discrimination

Discrimination featured in relation to both access to housing as well as the treatment from landlords by tenants seeking repairs and improvements. The Helsinki report referred to discrimination in housing as a "major problem". It noted that complaints of discrimination and poor treatment included Somalis trying to get maintenance and repairs completed as well as finding that their complaints were not taken seriously. A female participant illustrated her experiences:

If there's something in the apartment that needs fixing, and we call (the housing office) and tell them that there's something that needs to be fixed in the apartment, nobody listens or pays attention to it. I once contacted them about a problem in the toilet that needed to be fixed, they came and saw it, I showed them everything, they said "We will send someone there", it was last summer and now the summer is soon again, they have done nothing about it. Finally the children called and yelled at them, told them that there's no lock in the toilet and we enter when it's occupied and we pay rent so why are you not fixing it? So the biggest problem we have is the housing office. (Helsinki)

The report for Helsinki argued that perceptions of discrimination in accessing housing were aggravated by the lack of transparency in the system of allocating housing.

In London there were reports of letting agencies operating discriminatory policies, not offering Somalis rental accommodation in particularly desirable areas. In Oslo, a Norwegian-Somali single mother described how she went to the Social Office with a letter from her doctor saying that her apartment was in such a bad condition that it affected the health of her children. She recalled that she was told, "You Somalis just complain all the time," and was not helped. The report provides vivid examples of discrimination in the private rental sector recalled by research participants from their own experiences or the experiences of family and friends. Examples of discrimination include landlords openly telling Somalis that they did not want Somali tenants. Phrases that participants in the focus groups had encountered were: "I don't rent out to Somalis and smokers"; "I do not want a Somali, and those who are single mothers are poor"; "I do not like Somalis"; "Somalis cannot be trusted, they ruin everything in the apartment and they smell."

## 5.6 Overcrowding

For many Somalis, one of the biggest problems in housing was overcrowding. Somalis tend to have larger families than other groups, and this can mean that their houses are overcrowded, as well as leading to wider problems and complaints from other residents about noise and disputes with neighbours. In Helsinki, Somali households tend to be larger than other immigrant groups and the native-born population. This larger family size affects the Somalis' housing situation. Only 3 percent of all rental apartments in the Helsinki region have five or more rooms, while 61 percent of Somalis live in a household with over five members or more and 29 percent of them live in a household with over six members. Not surprisingly therefore, 80 percent of Somalis in Helsinki live in overcrowded housing compared with only 9 percent of Finns and 25 percent of the general immigrant population. Such overcrowding has an effect on many sectors, including education, employment, health, crime and anti-social behaviour (when older children congregate away from their homes).

Let me tell you the case of my family as an example, we are a nine-member family and during the last 10 years we lived in a two bedroom apartment and during that 10 years my application was in the housing department in the city. I sleep in the living room and the rest sleep in the two bedrooms. How rational it could be to expect from children growing up within that situation, who are unable to find a space do their homework, to properly integrate into the society? But I am also aware that there are cases that are much worse than ours. (Helsinki)

In Leicester and London focus group participants commonly spoke of higher numbers of children, frequently seven or more, in Somali families, thus affirming that many Somali schoolchildren are growing up in very overcrowded conditions. The Oslo report said that Somalis live in the most overcrowded conditions in Norway.

## 5.7 Segregation

In most cities it seems that ethnic segregation is a visible manifestation of more general socio-economic segregation in the allocation of housing. Helsinki until the 1990s operated a housing policy that sought to create socio-economically mixed neighbourhoods. The move away from this in the 1990s created greater socio-economic segregation but also coincided with a period of increased immigration. This has meant that since 2000, in addition to the socio-economic divide, there are more visible ethnic concentrations in various parts of the city. However, as the increase in socio-economic segregation is a recent process and less developed, the levels of ethnic clustering are less pronounced than in other Nordic states. Nevertheless, the Finnish government issued guidelines on immigration and refugee reception that aim to prevent ethnic clustering. In Helsinki this led to a local integration policy memorandum emphasising that “council dwellings are to be allocated to immigrants evenly from different parts of the city, if possible, so the emergence of areas with an

exceptionally large immigrant population could be avoided". The policy of dispersal across Finland has not had a lasting effect, as most Somalis have tended to move to the Helsinki area, citing cultural and employment opportunities in areas with more Somalis as reasons for moving. Racial harassment was also reported as an issue for many in Helsinki and was part of the reason why many Somalis were looking to move to areas where there were more Somalis, as a safety measure.

Segregation, or rather the concentration of minorities in particular areas, was a problem in Copenhagen. The ethnic enclaves or ghettos have become a key feature of the public policy debate on integration. They are seen as a threat to cohesion, integration and security, although research finds that people living there respect their neighbours and have positive attitudes towards each other.<sup>26</sup> In Leicester Somalis are concentrated in four main areas, and even within such areas they are concentrated in particular neighbourhoods where they may form up to 20 percent of the residents.

### 5.8 Homelessness

Homelessness was identified as an important and growing problem for Somalis in Copenhagen, Amsterdam and Helsinki. However, the causes differed among the cities. The report on Copenhagen suggests that there is increasing homelessness among Somali men due to family breakdown. The stakeholder interviews with those working with homeless Somalis indicated that there was a link between homelessness and substance abuse, particularly khat. Worryingly, the interviews with key stakeholders in Copenhagen indicated that homelessness was on the rise among young Somalis, including young women. This seems to be due to a range of factors including the cost of housing, as well mental and other health problems. Young people often come from other parts of Denmark but lack the contacts and resources for accommodation in the capital. The report noted the comment of one social worker who said that 60 percent of the beds in one homeless shelter were being taken by Danish-Somalis, of which 15 percent comprised Somali women.

By contrast, homelessness in Amsterdam was largely viewed as a problem facing Somali men whose asylum application had been rejected. Once rejected, asylum seekers are no longer able to stay in the reception centres and are expected to return to Somalia. However, many do not return; they are not eligible for any state support and as a consequence find themselves homeless.

Alongside the homelessness that is recorded for those who are living in temporary accommodation or homeless shelters and for rough sleepers on the street, the London report found examples of hidden homelessness in overcrowded extended-family households, such as households living in the homes of other households. One example

<sup>26</sup> K. Hansen, A. Hansen, H Kalkan and W. Rasmussen (eds), "Om at bo sammen i et multi-etnisk boligområde" (Living together in a multi-ethnic housing neighbourhood), Aarhus University, 2010.

was a sister of a householder, who was living with her family in one room in her sister's house:

We face overcrowding. I live with my sister in her home which has two rooms and one living room. There are a lot of us, in my family there are three of us and in her own family there are three, in total there are six people living in this two-bedroom property. (London)

The link between homelessness among Somalis and mental health was also identified in Oslo. The report referred to one initiative that seeks to address this by providing accommodation for 20 people next to a café and information centre. This approach ensured that those who lived in the building received support and assistance, as many were previously homeless and needed support to be able to live in an apartment.

## 5.9 Key Findings

As with employment, the experience of Somalis in the majority of the cities in this research has been shaped by their arrival as refugees. As a consequence, the majority of Somalis find themselves concentrated in social housing. Again the exceptions to this were London and Leicester.

While the public social housing provided in these cities is generally of good quality, it is not designed for housing large families; as a consequence, overcrowding is a pressing issue for many Somali families. Discrimination in accessing housing restricts the options of where Somalis can live. There is also disquieting evidence in some of the cities of increasing homelessness.

### **Box 5. Good Practice in London: Tower Hamlets Homes**

London provides an example of a successful initiative by a housing provider, Tower Hamlets Homes (THH), in engaging and improving services for Somalis.

THH found that Somali tenants were more likely than others to be in rent arrears. As a consequence THH set up the Somali Tenants Engagement Project. The project's aims included improving access and customer satisfaction among Somali residents as well as reducing inequality of services between different communities.

The project engaged Somalis to find out how to improve services and in response to feedback took a number of measures including the translation of material into Somali, developing Somali "talking leaflets" focusing on supporting those in rent arrears and providing employment opportunities for Somali women. Between April 2011 and March 2012

improvements in service delivery emerging from the project led to a 33 percent increase in customer satisfaction among Somali residents.

#### **Box 6. Good Practice in Oslo: the Housing Project in Grønland**

A housing project in Grønland, a city district where many Somalis live and spend time, was set up in 2012 by the church's City Mission with two-year funding from the City of Oslo and the Norwegian State Housing Bank. The mission is a network of diaconal foundations operating in 10 cities in Norway, working in a range of areas for the inclusion of disadvantaged people in cities and focusing on housing and health.

Ali Muhamed Jama developed the idea for the project, having worked as a social worker in the City of Oslo's municipal services and later Tøyen's District Psychiatric Centre, meeting many homeless East Africans (mostly Somalis) with psychological and psychiatric problems. In his view, the most problematic aspect of treatment was the fact that these people did not have housing and thus had no stability. Since housing them individually was difficult, he decided they needed a place where they could talk and get support. He now works as a social worker on the project with the department head, Cecilie Campos. The mission opened a café, Kafé Saba, an information centre and 20 apartments, mainly for people from East Africa, particularly Somalia. Those who live in the building do not just obtain a stable place to live but also receive individual follow-up and assistance. Many inhabitants were homeless before and need support to live in an apartment. There are also plans to establish a collective for young people as a transitional phase for those who need some structure in life before they move to their own apartment.



## 6. HEALTH CARE

This chapter examines Somali experiences of health and social care. In doing so it recognises that good health (both physical and mental), while important in itself, is a prerequisite to participation in other activities affecting social inclusion. For example, long-term illness has a negative impact on opportunities for economic and social participation and therefore on income and the ability to participate in social and leisure activities. However, as noted in the employment and housing chapters, the different areas can reinforce each other: long-term unemployment and poor or overcrowded housing themselves adversely affect an individual's health.

### 6.1 Levels of Health

Levels of health and wellbeing can be measured by self-reporting surveys in which individuals are asked about their perception of their health, as well as through medical records. The Leicester report anticipated poor health among Somalis in light of the extensive research linking health and poverty and the data on rates of poverty in Somali communities. Yet the reports for Amsterdam, Helsinki and Oslo highlighted national research on the health of different minority groups in which surveys of self-reported levels of health found Somalis to have very good health compared with other minorities in the country. The Amsterdam report also described research on the health of refugees, in which Somalis reported better levels of health than the other refugee groups studied, such as Afghans, Iraqis and Iranians. In Helsinki, research on self-reported levels of health among migrants found that Somali men in particular regarded their health much more positively than the other migrant groups studied, Russians and Kurds. The Oslo report noted a 2005–2006 study of the health status of different immigrant groups which found that Norwegian-Somalis scored best out of 10 groups that were surveyed. The research measured five indicators of health: self-evaluated health, somatic diseases, deterioration in everyday wellbeing due to illness, psychosomatic pains and mental health problems. The Oslo report stated that across all these indicators, Norwegian-Somalis scored positively and Norwegian-Somali men reported fewest health problems of all the 10 groups, and Norwegian-Somali women reported the second-best.<sup>27</sup> It also referred to a study of young Norwegian-Somalis in which they reported better mental health than other immigrant groups. The study found that participants were particularly positive on issues relating to family life: Somalis reported the highest levels of family support and lowest levels of family risk

<sup>27</sup> S. Blom, "Innvandrerens helse 2005/2006" (Immigrant Health 2005/2006), Statistics Norway Report 35/2008, 2008; S. Blom, "Sosiale forskjeller i Innvanderers Helse. Funn Fra Undersøkelsen Levekår Blant Innvandrere 2005/2006" (Social Differences in Immigrants' Health. Findings from the Living Conditions Among Immigrants Research 2005/2006), Statistics Norway Report 47/2010, 2010.

factors.<sup>28</sup> In Sweden in a survey of Somali women, 70 percent said they had good health, the same as the general population.<sup>29</sup>

Such positive self-evaluations of health seem to be at variance with other measures which suggest that the health of Somalis is often much worse than that of other groups. The Amsterdam, Helsinki and Oslo reports point to concerns about the validity of self-reported evaluations of health status; they suggest that Somalis in fact underplay or underestimate their quality of health. While it is not clear why such surveys make Somalis overestimate their health compared with other groups, the need for such caution seems to be borne out by the findings, when the perception of health is compared with other health measures. The report on Helsinki noted Finnish research, which found that Somalis are more likely than other groups to say that they feel they cope with daily activities, but when tests of physical function are carried out Somalis perform the worst of all groups. For example, 39 percent of the Somali women and 11 percent of the men had difficulties walking up and down several flights of stairs. The reports on Amsterdam and Copenhagen revealed concerns among health officials in those cities about the prevalence of tuberculosis in Somali communities.

## 6.2 Mental Health

The difficulties of communicating about mental health make research and reporting in survey data even less reliable. All the city reports highlight some of the mental health problems found in Somali communities. They suggest that the experience of many Somalis as refugees fleeing from civil war has contributed to the prevalence of some mental health problems, in particular post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The Helsinki, London and Leicester reports pointed to studies that have documented high levels of mental health problems among Somali refugees, particularly PTSD and

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<sup>28</sup> B. Oppedal, "Psychosocial Profiles as Mediators of Variation in Internalizing Problems Among Young Immigrants with Origins in Countries of War and Internal Conflicts", *European Journal of Developmental Psychology* 5 (2) (2008), pp. 210–224 (hereafter Oppedal, "Psychosocial Profiles as Mediators").

<sup>29</sup> See [www.mah.se/english/research/Our-research/Centers/Malmo-Institute-for-Studies-of-Migration-Diversity-and-Welfare/Research-at-MIM/Projects/HELMI--Health-Migration-Integration/](http://www.mah.se/english/research/Our-research/Centers/Malmo-Institute-for-Studies-of-Migration-Diversity-and-Welfare/Research-at-MIM/Projects/HELMI--Health-Migration-Integration/) (accessed 11 November 2013).

depression.<sup>30</sup> The Helsinki report cited one survey which reported that the majority of Somali refugees (57 percent) had experienced a traumatic event (often war, or seeing violent death or injury) before their arrival in Finland.<sup>31</sup> The Malmö report found that many Somalis are also tormented by feelings of guilt over family members, particularly children who have been left behind, as well as the violence and insecurity engendered by civil war. The Amsterdam report emphasised the need for greater understanding among health professionals of the health-care needs of refugees.

### 6.3 Use of and Access to Health Care

Before examining some of the barriers to health-care services in more detail, it is worth stressing that across the cities there was general satisfaction with health-care services and positive comments about experiences in doctors' surgeries and hospitals, as illustrated by the comments from focus group participants in Helsinki and Leicester:

The health care in this country is good, Masha Allah. I have had surgery in this country and I am still receiving treatment. I currently use nutrition that costs €1,200 a month, and the social office pays for it ... If the paper from social office demands that the prescription medicine should be changed for a cheaper one, then they change, but if the doctor writes on the prescription that it shouldn't be changed, then they don't change it. Really, health care is excellent here. (Helsinki)

I have an illness that requires ongoing medication and my GP is very helpful. Staff there is respectful and I am given particular care as an elder, which I

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, E. Silveira and S. Ebrahim, "Social determinants of psychiatric morbidity and wellbeing in immigrant elders and whites in East London", *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 13 (11) (1998), pp. 801–812; P. McCrone, K. Bhui, T. Craig, S. Mohamud, N. Warfa, S. Stansfeld, G. Thornicroft and S. Curtis, "Mental Health Needs, Service Use and Costs among Somali Refugees in the UK", *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 111 (5) (2005), pp. 351–357; D. Palmer, "Imperfect prescription: the mental health perceptions, experiences and challenges faced by the Somali Community in the London Borough of Camden and service responses to them", *Primary Care Mental Health* 4(1) (2006), pp. 45–56; Jama Warsame, *Mental Health of the Somali community in Leicester: A Review of health needs and suitable approaches*, Leicester City Primary Care Trust, Directorate of Public Health and Health Improvement, 2008, p. 3, at <http://www.leicestercity.nhs.uk/Library/mh16somalimentalhealthreport.pdf> (accessed October 2013) (hereafter Warsame, *Mental Health of the Somali community in Leicester*).

<sup>31</sup> Anu E. Castaneda, Carla Schubert, Riikka Lehtisalo, Antti Pakaslahti, Tapio Halla, Mulki Mölsä and Jaana Suvisaari, "Traumakokemukset" (Trauma experiences), in Anu Castaneda, S. Rask, P. Koponen, M. Mölsä and S. Koskinen (eds), *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi. Tutkimus venäläis-, suomalais- ja kurditaustaisista Suomessa* (Migrant health and wellbeing. A study of persons of Russian, Somali and Kurdish origin in Finland), National Institute for Health and Welfare, Helsinki, pp. 151–155 (hereafter, Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*).

appreciate. I am happy with their treatment and with the medication they give me. Sometimes they even deliver my medication to my home. (Leicester)

The take-up for mental health services remains very low in Somali communities. The reports suggest that this is due to a combination of factors, including a cultural and religious understanding of mental health different from the approach found in European health-care systems, stigma surrounding mental health, a lack of trust of the system and a lack of knowledge of the services that are available. The Amsterdam report found that a lack of trust in the Dutch care system combined with a fear that the problems will become worse in the unfamiliar Dutch context have led some to respond to mental health problems among young people by sending them to Somalia for trusted and familiar treatments.

In Amsterdam specialists and organisations working in mental health thought there was a need for more Somali intermediaries in order to improve access to (mental) health-care institutions. In Malmö a psychological treatment centre specialising in treatment for PTSD was set up in 2003. However, it did not attract any Somali patients for treatment until a Somali psychologist was appointed. Since then increasing numbers of Somalis, mainly women, have received treatment at the centre. Men are far less likely than women to access psychological support. It is suggested that the increasing dependency on khat may be one way in which older men seek to reduce feelings of anxiety and stress.

In a number of cities, the use of health services by Somalis, particularly preventative care, was raised by participants. In Amsterdam Somalis use health services less than other refugee groups. The Helsinki report referred to research in Finland showing that Somali rates of participation in preventative or screening programmes were much lower than the general population. The Copenhagen report cited research in Denmark that showed Somali women had breast cancer screenings less frequently than other groups.<sup>32</sup> Through the discussions in the focus groups on health, the reports identified some of the main barriers to accessing health-care services among Somalis. The two most prominent are the lack of familiarity with and knowledge of the health-care system, and the difficulties of communication that arise from lack of proficiency in the national language. There were also reports of discrimination and poor treatment from research participants across all the cities.

Language was identified as the most common challenge in accessing appropriate healthcare. The Oslo report highlighted the challenges and difficulties of communication in the context of health care and the diagnosis of illness; it noted that the ways in which people understand and communicate health, signs of illness and measures for improving health often vary greatly across cultures. It emphasises the need

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<sup>32</sup> Linnea Lue Kessing, Marie Norredam, Ann-Britt Kvernrod, Anna Mygind and Maria Kristiansen, "Contextualising migrants' health behaviour – a qualitative study of transnational ties and their implications for participation in mammography screening", *BMC Public Health* 13 (2013), 431, at <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/13/431> (accessed 6 July 2015).

for illness to be explained to people in a way that “they themselves can relate to and understand and which is acceptable in their own social circles”.<sup>33</sup>

A recurring problem was the impact of language and misunderstanding on diagnosis. Some participants felt that they were not taken seriously because they could not speak the language well. One woman in London said that she would take her son to appointments as he spoke good English and in her view, “They pay more respect to those who speak in English.” The language barrier may mean that the symptoms are not fully understood or a consultation takes longer and so the doctors are rushed into making their diagnosis. There were several cases in London and Malmö where serious conditions were only diagnosed as a result of the persistence of patients or the parents of a young child patient seeking a review, a second opinion, or insisting on further tests.

The availability and use of interpreting services were detailed in the Amsterdam, Leicester, London and Oslo reports, but they were patchy. In Amsterdam interpreters are usually available in asylum centres and at hospitals but not in doctors’ surgeries. Similarly, in London interpreting services are available but are under-used, partly because they require advance planning and so are used for hospital rather than family doctors’ appointments. Materials translated into Somali are also under-utilised as older people may not have had formal schooling. Without official interpreters, many older Somalis rely on their children to act as interpreters, as mentioned above. The Oslo report stated that the Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion was seeking to prohibit using children as interpreters. In London and Oslo the discussions also noted that people have problems trusting the interpreting services.

In general participants in the research felt that a key strategy for overcoming communication problems would be employing more Somalis in the health-care sector. However, this needed to go hand in hand with training staff to deal with the diversity of the communities they serve.

In Copenhagen, part of the overall approach to improving access to social and other services among marginalised groups has been the “bridge builders” programme. The bridge builders are individuals who act as a link between vulnerable groups and public service providers; they are individuals from the communities who are trained and employed to provide advice and information; they overcome barriers of language as well as issues of trust. One specific use of bridge builders in health care is the training of health communicators (see box below).

#### **6.4 Female Genital Mutilation**

There has been significant public investment in all the cities in campaigns to challenge and prevent female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM). Somali civil society organisations have been key partners in the campaigns to prevent FGM. In London

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<sup>33</sup> *Somalis in Oslo*, p. 99.

during the period of the research fieldwork, there was a very high-profile newspaper campaign led by the daily newspaper, the *Evening Standard*, focusing on FGM and the need for government action. In the discussions in London and elsewhere there were concerns about the stigmatisation and stereotyping of Somalis that the debate on FGM creates. Most research participants and civil society organisations wanted the work on FGM to focus on the needs of women who have been subjected to FGM; this includes the medical needs of women and complications of childbirth, but should also cover the wider psychological, social and relationship consequences of FGM. The Oslo report cited research in Norway on health workers' lack of knowledge about the complications and impact of FGM on women's health and suggested that training health workers is necessary.

### 6.5 Children's Services and Support for Families

There was a significant relationship between Somali communities and children's welfare services in the cities in the research. In Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Oslo the reports found that many Somalis feared that children would be removed from their families by children's services. They were worried that their traditional norms for disciplining children might lead to scrutiny by social services.

The problem was particularly acute in Oslo. Here, young Somali immigrant children and children of Somali immigrants account for 10 percent and 8 percent respectively of children in contact with child welfare service. As a member of the children and youth unit at a mosque explains:

There is a lot of fear of child welfare services among Somalis. We try to reduce this by spreading information and creating dialogue. Somalis hear a lot about child welfare services from [Somali and other] media; negative reports have created many misunderstandings. Most of those who received concerned messages and are in contact with child welfare services do not talk about that openly. They keep it within their nuclear family and ask us for help when it is almost too late.

In Amsterdam fear of children's welfare services was raised several times in focus group discussions and was exacerbated by a general suspicion of state authorities that has deeper roots in the experience of state institutions and authorities in Somalia. The fear of state agencies meant that Somali families often avoid meetings with children's welfare services, which in turn increases the concern of the agencies and so becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. As the report noted:

When regular meetings with consultation agencies are, for example, avoided by Somali families, suspicion of these families increases and may even result in children being put under the supervision of family guardians.

The research in Copenhagen also found that parents' fear of their children being taken by child welfare services led them to disguise problems and needs – for example,

mental health problems – in the family for as long as possible. Social services workers noted the barrier this fear created for those involved in initiatives for supporting families:

It was rough to start out there, it was in Nørrebro, there were a lot of ethnic parents who had a case open with the council and misunderstandings and conflicts defined the relationship between them. They thought, okay they'll come in and take away our children, the council is out to get us, and then I would have to explain ... a lot of them do refuse to collaborate, because they are scared, and that's when it goes completely wrong, and they are taken away. There haven't been any processes in between, because there hasn't been any communication or bridging.

The research found that when young people – particularly young men – were felt to be going off the rails, or were feared to be getting involved in crime, families responded by sending them on a re-education trip to Somalia. However, in Copenhagen, when such visits extend beyond three months and the young person does not have Danish citizenship, their residence permit may be withdrawn.

Migration changes traditional family dynamics. Traditional models of male parental authority are not effective in the new environment. The socio-economically weak position of migrant Somali men undermines their authority, and unemployment means they lose their authority as the breadwinner. In Oslo, a Somali consultant on child welfare services cases describes his experiences as follows:

Most of the fathers I worked with asked me, "Do you know how to get a job?", when I came to talk about parenting. Many of them used to be somebody in Somalia, but cannot do a lot here in Norway. They lost part of their manhood, have low self-esteem. In most cases, the household finances are the wife's responsibility; it is almost as if they get an allowance, which they use to smoke or chew khat. The mothers have the responsibility to take care of the home. The fathers are only involved when something bad happens, when the police is involved, for example ... They are here because it is best for the kids. But they have nothing to offer them. The only thing they can do is tell them to go to school and get a job.

In Copenhagen research participants suggested that the changing gender dynamics also contributed to an increase in substance abuse among men. They identified older Danish-Somali men as a particularly vulnerable group; compared with women it was believed that they were at greater risk of homelessness, drug abuse and generally becoming lost in the system.

## 6.6 Khat

The consumption, import and supply of khat are prohibited in all the countries covered in these reports; the Netherlands and the UK introduced the prohibition most

recently, in 2012 and 2013 respectively. The use of khat was raised in the context of mental health problems. In Copenhagen, a number of interviewees identified khat addiction as a manifestation of deeper mental health issues, a coping mechanism, and at the same time further exacerbating those problems. In Copenhagen, several interviewees drew a strong link between the use of khat and homelessness:

Especially people with alcohol or khat abuse problems, they're the ones who go through being homeless. There are quite a few, especially here in Copenhagen – it is mostly due to the social problems. There are also some who find it hard to pay rent. Many experience problems with evictions because they didn't make their rent payments within the month. The municipality is unable to do much about it, because there isn't really any free housing here in Copenhagen.

In Leicester, khat was seen as contributing to social and family breakdown as well as mental health disorders. The Oslo report described the lack of evidence on the impact of the use of khat. For example, it is not clear whether khat use is a cause or a symptom of psychological health problems. In Amsterdam, khat was discussed and identified by some participants as creating other social problems including criminality.

In the UK, the prohibition of khat was introduced at the time of the research. Both UK reports found general support for this move; however, there was concern about whether sufficient steps had been taken to support those who were already addicted and would face withdrawal symptoms once the ban was in force and access to khat became impossible.

## 6.7 Key Findings

A fascinating trend found across a number of cities is the tendency of Somalis, in self-reporting surveys, to view themselves as having as much better health (compared with other groups), which seems to be at variance with other measures of health, which suggests that the health of Somalis is often much worse than those of other groups.

A consistent theme was concern about the need for better understanding of and support for mental health issues. It was believed that trauma and stress related to the experiences of civil war and displacement remained untreated. Use of mental health services remains very low, hindered by cultural and religious differences, the stigma of mental health, a lack of trust in the system and a lack of knowledge of the services available.

In general there is satisfaction with the health care that most Somalis receive. However, problems arise due to poor communication and lack of knowledge or understanding of the health-care system.

One of the major concerns across a number of cities was the relationship between the community and child welfare services. More effort is needed to develop the trust required to ensure that young Somalis and their families receive the support they need.



**Box 7. Good Practice in Copenhagen: Health Communicators**

The Copenhagen report described initiatives to overcome barriers and in particular to ensure that new communities, including Somalis, understood the health-care system better. A common thread is the employment and training of Somalis to act as intermediaries in providing advice and information in their communities. Copenhagen municipality has developed the concept of health communicators (*sundhedsformidlere*), as part of its project called Health in Your Language. The health communicators are individuals from minority backgrounds who are trained in health issues, and who give health presentations and conduct workshops for citizens, including Danish-Somalis.

**Box 8. Good Practice in Oslo: Equal Health Services Project**

As a consequence of the high concentration of migrants in the area, Health Services South-East set up the Equal Health Services Project, to strengthen equal and integrated health services for the migrant population in the Oslo area. The project is carried out in collaboration with hospitals in Oslo and other health service providers in Oslo's city districts.

The project aims to increase patients' understanding of and participation in the treatment process; increase knowledge about activities that improve health; and guarantee the mainstreaming of equal health service provision. The project has focused on establishing a course on multicultural health work; improving interpretation services; mapping relevant measures in the Oslo area; setting up radio health programmes in several languages; and various other measures.

A range of reports has been produced on improving interpretation. These reports clearly illustrate that the language most requested for interpretation services is Somali (6,804 out of 31,833 assignments in 2011). They show that the health sector is largely using uncertified interpreters. The reports make various recommendations, including the need for more courses for Somali interpreters. A change in attitude is also required, so that the need for an interpreter is treated like other specialist services and is planned in advance to ensure availability.

## 7. POLICING AND SECURITY

Feelings of safety and security are an important aspect of social inclusion. While Somalis, like others, rely on the police for protection and maintaining order, the relationship between minorities and the police is not always easy. This chapter begins with an exploration of Somali perceptions of crime, safety and policing, and goes on to treat two areas where Somalis feel that they have been targeted unfairly in policing practice: stop and search, in particular of young Somali men; and counter-terrorism legislation and policy.

### 7.1 Perceptions of Crime and Security

Perceptions of crime and security and experiences of policing varied significantly between research participants in all the cities in this research. People's perceptions of crime and security in their area are shaped by different factors, including direct personal experiences of crime and the general local crime rate, which differed across the cities. Finland, for example, has one of the lowest crime rates in Europe. For Somalis in Helsinki this low crime rate contributed to their general sense of safety. Comments from one focus group participant suggested that Somalis in Helsinki were aware of the particularly low crime rates of Finland compared with other European countries:

Finland is better than other European countries in the sense that if someone harms you, they will be caught in the same situation. There is no need to fear attack from someone, Finland is very good when it comes to security; you can go out wherever you want.

Participants in each of the cities were nevertheless able to recall incidents, particularly hate crimes, where they themselves or people they knew were the victims.

### 7.2 Perceptions of Policing

Perceptions of policing among Somalis who arrived in Europe as refugees from Somalia are also informed by their experiences of policing and conflict in Somalia. Here, the reports suggest a paradox. On the one hand, European cities are felt to be relatively safe, particularly compared with Somalia; the police are acknowledged as playing an important role in creating a safe society. In both Helsinki and Leicester the visibility of police on the streets was viewed positively and seen as contributing to a sense of safety. As one participant in Leicester reported:

I appreciate their toughness and how they maintain safety in our neighbourhoods. I smile when I see them arrest anyone causing trouble. They're very visible which makes me feel safe.

At the same time, past experiences of the police as instruments of state repression in Somalia are identified by some Somalis as contributing to a lack of trust in the police. In London, interviewees pointed towards the breakdown of authority and law

enforcement experienced in Somalia as contributing to low levels of trust in the police in London. The comments from a participant in Copenhagen illustrate how this leads to individuals being reluctant to report crimes to the police:

A lot of Somalis when they have problems at home or they have problems within the society, they will not go to the police because they don't trust the police.

This was also noted in the Helsinki, London and Leicester reports. Reports also identified a number of other factors that were relevant to Somalis' low rates of reporting of crime to the police. In Leicester, the interviews indicated that people were reluctant to involve the police in issues which they felt should be settled more informally and were concerned that reporting an incident to the police would lead to it being treated more formally; there also appears to be a desire for community structures to be more involved and have a bigger role. Difficulties in communication due to poor English were seen as a barrier in interactions with police. One participant talked about his "fear of the police" but went on to connect this to concerns about communication:

When they walk past me on the streets I am afraid they might be looking for me, ask me questions that I can't answer. This is primarily due to the fact that I don't speak English and wouldn't understand them. (Leicester)

In Helsinki the low level of reporting of crimes to the police by Somali victims of crime was attributed to a lack of understanding of the criminal justice system and the mechanisms for reporting; others suggested that some crimes were not reported because they were not considered significant by Somalis, who compared them with their experiences in Somalia.

In Leicester, Somali community groups have organised seminars for the local community, and particularly women, at which police officers have provided information on for example the criminal justice system, counterterrorism policing and airport security checks. The willingness of the neighbourhood police officers to hold meetings to provide information on specific incidents that affect the community was also acknowledged as building trust and confidence in the police. The Leicester report highlighted a partnership initiative between an NGO, the Somali Development Service, and the local police to increase engagement by the police with Somali women and Somali mosques. The initiative involved a series of awareness-raising discussions for Somali women in different mosques, and setting up an independent advisory group from the community to advise and support the police on issues concerning the Somali community.

In Leicester, the close relationship developed over time between the local police and the community was also identified as crucial to the positive relations between the city's police and the Somali community. The model of neighbourhood policing has meant that the police have taken significant steps to listen to people in the communities and to discuss the issues that are affecting them. The findings in Copenhagen suggested a

nuanced understanding of policing structures and roles, at least among Somalis involved in civil society organisations. The Copenhagen report noted that participants in the research drew a distinction between their experience of local police officers in their neighbourhood who knew individuals and understood the local community, with whom there was a good relationship, and officers in the national police force who did not understand local communities.

The London report described attempts by the Metropolitan Police Service to develop links with the Somali community. In 2011, the Communities Together Strategic Engagement Team (CTSET) supported the creation of a pan-London Somali Youth Forum, an organisation providing a forum for young British-Somalis. It also has a dedicated Community Engagement Office for the Somali community.

### 7.3 Stop and Search

Perceptions of and encounters with the police differed by age and gender; in particular, young men in all the cities reported the worst experiences of policing, due to their experiences of being stopped and searched by the police. Young Somali men in Amsterdam were commonly stopped and searched by the police and they felt that they were being singled out and discriminated against because of their race and religion:

I have been stopped and searched many times, once I was even put in jail for no reason. I was cycling on a second-hand bike and stopped. The police officer asked me how I got that bike and whether I had a receipt on me. I told him I had the receipt at home. Then I was taken to the police station because I had a big mouth and needed to “cool down”. My parents had to come to show the receipt to the police officer. It was summer holiday and I was imprisoned for four hours. Later they came to apologise, a bike had been stolen and they thought it was the bike I was riding. In that case it really makes you wonder whether you are arrested because you are black.

In Copenhagen stop-and-search was also an issue, especially for young people:

In our neighbourhood the young have problems and the problem is the police. They [the police] will stop at three different spots [in our neighbourhood] and every time our young boys walk past they will be stopped. Their intention is to pressure them and they can't defend themselves.

Those who were stopped and searched and believed that this was based on their ethnicity felt powerless and angry. Others had, perhaps more worryingly, normalised discrimination in their daily life:

I don't mind them body searching us if you're not hiding anything or are carrying anything. And I guess you can say that we've been used to looking different and to being treated differently; that's been throughout the time we've lived in Denmark, that maybe you have had to work harder in some places and maybe would have to be a little bit more ... careful about where you go ... you

also think well, ... eventually it becomes normal behaviour in your head, but sometimes it does test your patience ... at some point you do get sick of it, because I always need to factor in a certain delay if I'm travelling to somewhere and I've had to explain myself and show that I'm not the person who's listed in their database. So that's pretty annoying. (Copenhagen)

The Helsinki report described a migrant health and wellbeing study, which found that 15.3 percent of the Somalis in Finland had experienced discrimination on the part of the police (10.6 percent of women and 19.6 percent of men).<sup>34</sup> In Leicester, the disproportionate use of stop-and-search by police has been raised as an issue by the British Equality and Human Rights Commission. In London stop-and-search was identified as a major cause of undermining the relationship between the police and the Somali community. Young Somalis felt victimised and under surveillance but not protected by the authorities. There was a very strong feeling of mistrust of the police and institutions; research participants felt that the police had judgemental attitudes to Somali youths and negatively stereotyped them. Across the cities, while there were numerous examples of mistreatment and discrimination at the hands of the police, mostly they did not lead to any complaints against the police, indicating a lack of confidence in the complaints systems.

In Amsterdam and Helsinki Somalis reported discrimination not only from the police but also from immigration and border guards:

At airports I am always the one who has to show his passport. Even when I travel with a group of let's say 15 friends, it is always me they pick out. I often say to my Dutch friends, watch out, they will ask me and they say no that cannot be true, but it is always true! And then they are shocked and I think, well, that is my life. (Amsterdam)

There's a lot of racial profiling, whether you have the Finnish passport or not they will always ask you, "Where were you born?" He won't ask you, "Are you Finnish?" He doesn't want to acknowledge you as a Finn, he will point out that you are Somali. (Helsinki)

Experiences of racial and religious profiling by the police, as a key encounter with a state institution, contribute to feelings of alienation and stigmatisation.

#### 7.4 Counter-terrorism and Radicalisation

Since the terrorist attacks of September 2001 in the United States there has been increasing concern about the threat of terrorism inspired by al-Qaeda. Since the bombing of the London transport system in 2005, there has been much disquiet about the role of home-grown terrorism and the violent radicalisation of young people in Europe. The rise of al-Shabaab in Somalia combined with the social exclusion and

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<sup>34</sup> Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*, p. 234.

poverty experienced by many Somalis in the cities covered in this research has meant that police and security services are concerned about the potential risk of radicalisation. This was heightened in 2013 after a Norwegian-Somali was reported to be involved in the terrorist attacks on the Westgate shopping centre in Nairobi.<sup>35</sup> There are reports that the first suspected terrorist offence by an individual in Finland may have involved a Finnish-Somali allegedly involved in funding and recruitment for al-Shabaab. The Finnish Security Intelligence Service regards Somalia as an area of concern, but it is unclear whether this extends to Somalis in Finland.

The assessments of the risk of violent radicalisation among Somalis, while evolving and changing over time, differ across the cities. Somalis have come in for particular attention in Denmark. The report on Copenhagen stated that while in general Danish policies do not identify or focus on specific ethnic groups involved in counter-radicalisation, the Viden – Inklusion – København (Knowledge, Inclusion, Copenhagen (VINK) secretariat, Employment and Integration Administration, produced a *Beredskabsnotat* (memorandum of preparedness) on the Somali community which raised concerns about ethnic and racial profiling, as Danish-Somalis are the only ethnic group to be the subject of an administrative memorandum.<sup>36</sup> The memorandum itself does not consider Danish-Somalis likely to be potential terrorists, and in fact warns against stigmatising the community through an association with terrorism. Nevertheless, participants in the Copenhagen research viewed the singling out of Somalis in this way as discriminatory.

Somalis in London also felt that they were the targets of counterterrorism policing, particularly when they were stopped at the airport. A young British-Somali in the London report described the effect of repeatedly being stopped at the airport as giving him a feeling of being a second-class citizen:

I've got a British passport, am I different from anybody else? Why am I being singled out? And when it keeps happening to you, you start to feel like you're not wanted, that you're a second-class citizen ... that's why some people, it scares a lot of people to actually want to learn about their religion. They fear, you know, if you do grow a beard you're going to get stopped, if you do wear Islamic clothing you're going to be painted with a particular brush, it's difficult.

There are newspaper reports of young British-Somali men being targeted for recruitment by MI5. For instance, a British newspaper, *The Independent*, highlighted the case of five British-Somali men in London who it said had been approached by MI5 to join the force as informers. According to the paper, the men were threatened

<sup>35</sup> See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-24569512> (accessed 6 July 2015).

<sup>36</sup> Copenhagen Municipality, Employment and Integration Administration, "Beredskabsnotat om det somaliske miljø. 02-03-2010" (Preparatory Note on the Somali Community 02-03-2010), 2010.

with being subjected to travel restrictions and being labelled “terrorists” if they did not comply.<sup>37</sup>

### 7.5 Key Findings

Most Somalis feel safe and secure in the cities where they live. The perceptions of policing of those who had previously lived in Somalia were informed by their experience of repression by police and civil conflict. This creates a paradox: the role of the police in maintaining order is appreciated but individuals remain reluctant to report crimes to the police.

Many young Somalis’ chief experience of the police is being stopped and searched. These young people feel that the attention they get from the police discriminates against them, because of their race in the context of stop-and-search and because of their religion in the context of counterterrorism policing. Their key encounter with the racial and religious profiling by the police, a state institution, contributes to their feelings of alienation and stigmatisation.

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<sup>37</sup> Robert Verkaik, “How MI5 Blackmails British Muslims”, *The Independent*, 21 May 2009, at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/exclusive-how-mi5-blackmails-british-muslims-1688618.html> (accessed 6 July 2015).

## 8. CIVIL AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

This chapter concentrates on Somalis' civil and political participation, the latter being one of the chief responsibilities of citizenship in democratic societies. It takes a number of different forms ranging from signing petitions or taking part in demonstrations and protests, through to formal participation in the democratic process by voting or standing for election. The chapter begins by looking at access to citizenship, as this is a prerequisite to political participation in national, and sometimes local, elections. It then examines the levels of and barriers to political participation in the different cities in the series.

### 8.1 Access to Citizenship

National citizenship is a prerequisite for participation in national elections; access to citizenship is therefore essential to facilitate political participation. The security that comes from having citizenship can also contribute to supporting more general civic participation.

Most western European states provide citizenship for refugees who have been settled in the country for a number of years. However, in recognition of their more vulnerable and precarious status, the requirements for citizenship for refugees are often different from those for other types of migrants. For example, the period of settlement in the country may be shorter, there may be a waiver of integration or language tests and a more relaxed approach to dual citizenship. The reports suggest that Somalis have taken up opportunities for acquiring European citizenship. The Helsinki report stated that around 40 percent of Finnish-Somalis have Finnish citizenship. In Malmö, 30 percent of Somalis born in Somalia have Swedish citizenship, and in Stockholm 50 percent. The Amsterdam report noted that most Somalis in the Netherlands have given up Somali citizenship and have opted to have solely Dutch citizenship, even though refugees are entitled to dual nationality. This option may be preferred as it is understood to be easier for individuals in Somalia to secure support from the Dutch government if they are not dual nationals.

The reports identify a number of barriers to accessing citizenship. In Sweden Somalis had difficulties providing the appropriate documentation needed. The impact of this has been noted by the Integration Board, and was perceived by Somali participants in the research in Malmö as an unfair punishment for Somalis for coming from a region where state institutions and infrastructure had collapsed due to civil conflict. As a consequence, some Somalis find themselves limited to gaining a residence permit rather than acquiring citizenship, which in turn limits where they can travel to find work. The time taken to obtain citizenship (eight years) is a source of great frustration for some Somalis. The Oslo report said that rates of naturalisation had fallen after the introduction of language requirements.



## 8.2 Political Participation

Citizenship of the country is a prerequisite to participation (whether as candidates or voters) in national elections in the countries covered in this research; however, participation in local, municipal elections is open to foreign nationals who have lived in the country for a number of years. While the period and type of residency required to qualify vary, this means that many Somalis can participate in local and sometimes national politics. In Amsterdam, London and Leicester, foreign nationals with five years of residency can vote in local elections. In Copenhagen and Oslo three years' residency was required to vote in regional and local elections, while in Helsinki this was even lower at two years.

Levels of participation in the formal electoral process can be gauged through measures such as voter registration, voter turnout, membership of political parties and standing for election for political parties. Overall the research found that Somalis have taken up opportunities to be politically active in those cities where such opportunities exist, particularly locally. The Swedish Integration Board reported as early as 1999 that there were Somali members in regional, municipal and district councils. In Malmö there were two Somalis active in politics at the city level. In Helsinki there were 10 Somali-background candidates in the municipal elections in November 2012, in which one Somali woman from the Green Party, a long-term councillor with the city council, was re-elected. Furthermore, she is the only Somali candidate who has been close to being elected to the national parliament.

In Oslo political participation was highlighted as one of the success stories of Norwegian-Somalis. In the 2011 local elections turnout among Somali-born Norwegians registered to vote was 50.2 percent (46.5 percent for men, 54.1 percent for women). While lower than the turnout for the general population (63.6 percent), this was significantly higher than the voter turnout for immigrants as a whole (42.7 percent). There were 59 candidates of Somali origin standing in city council elections across Norway; and three Norwegian-Somalis were elected to Oslo city council.

In Leicester efforts have been made to increase newly arrived Somalis' participation in elections, which has led to increased turnout. However, the initiative to increase political participation showed that many Somalis were not registered to vote and did not understand the registration process. More surprisingly perhaps, in London there were no Somali councillors in the borough of Tower Hamlets even though this has a much older and more established Somali community, and in Camden there was only one councillor of Somali background elected to the local council. The comments from the London focus group suggested that the longer settlement history and experience of political participation may in fact have contributed to disengagement and disillusionment with the political system.

I did vote in the past a few times, but recently I have become discontent and stop voting because the politicians they were not answering some of the questions, for example the country is in a recession people are going through

difficult times, I didn't feel they did anything about it so what's the point?  
(London)

The disconnection of citizens from the democratic process is of course a challenge for Western democracies for the whole population.

### 8.3 Influencing Change

Citizens have the opportunity to influence change through political mobilisation, advocacy and campaigning on particular issues or through participation in consultation processes. Somalis felt that as a community they were often ignored and their views were not given a fair hearing, so they felt they had little influence on policies in their cities.

Participants pointed to the lack of capacity in Somali civil society as an obstacle to their effectiveness. Many Somali organisations are overwhelmed by the work they have to do in meeting the basic and practical needs of their communities and so do not have the capacity to participate in longer-term strategic policy discussions. The research in Leicester found a strong sense of optimism and hope in the older participants that the younger Somali generation would overcome some of the challenges faced by the first generation:

I don't think the current Somali generation can make much of a difference but my hope lies in our youth who have assimilated into the British society and have educated themselves. As for us, we are more concerned about the issues happening back in Somalia than local issues that might affect us. We have made plenty of effort raising our youth and instilling morals and values in them so my hope is in the youth. They will create the better future all Somalis aspire to.

The diversity of views and divisions within Somali communities was the most frequently cited reason for the difficulties in engaging effectively with policymakers. The point was made by participants in Amsterdam and London:

There are ample opportunities to participate, the problem is ours: we are too divided, we do not fully participate, are too isolated, we are involved in all kinds of issues in Somalia. (Amsterdam)

Nothing can be achieved because you are one person but if the community comes together we can go forward. (London)

In Helsinki a Somali who participated in Finland's Somali Affairs Expert Group acknowledged the challenges faced by policymakers in trying to work with a diverse Somali community:

I never witnessed Somalis making a unified decision! Everyone speaks on his or her behalf ... anyone who tries to speak for Somalis attracts huge criticism from

the Somalis themselves ... Finnish authorities could not be blamed for our lack of cohesion.

In many cases, however, Somalis compared themselves with the more established minority communities, which they considered to be more effective in influencing policymakers. A participant in Copenhagen, for example, compared the Somali community with the Pakistani community, which was seen to be more united, and therefore more effective, in mobilising its political power in elections; they “gather around one candidate and support that candidate. Somalis have many candidates.”

One response to this has been the creation of representative organisations. The Somali community in Helsinki created the Somali League in 1996 as an umbrella organisation for all Somalis in Finland. In the early 1990s, the Dutch government encouraged the creation of a representative body, the Federation of Somali Associations in the Netherlands (FSAN), which has over 50 member organisations. They are recognised by the government and various ministries, including the Ministry for Social Affairs and Employment. The creation of this representative organisation was an important achievement. But nevertheless, stakeholders felt there was limited cooperation and fragmentation in the Somali organisations. Some Somalis who participated in the Amsterdam research questioned whether there should in fact be any attempt to create one single organisation that represents a diverse community:

One organisation for all Somalis, that represents all Somalis in the Netherlands?  
That sounds neither very realistic nor desirable to me, I would detest that.  
(Amsterdam)

There were Somali participants in all the cities in the research who felt that the differences in the Somali community were an asset, an indication of a vibrant and diverse community. They questioned the value of a political framework that required minorities to have a single voice, that viewed diversity as fragmentation and difference as an obstacle to cooperation. A Somali civil society activist identified some of the problems:

There is something I and the others I work with are frustrated over. They often tell us that Somalis are fragmented and it is an argument that goes on over and over again when we ask municipalities and ministries; well, why are we not included in these processes? Why can we not function as advisers? Why can we not be inside, solve and deal with these problems? And the answer is always the same: you are so many, and you cannot agree. And because you cannot agree, we cannot include you. It is very tough. We have tried many times. (Copenhagen)

#### **8.4 Civic Participation**

Increasing ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in western Europe has led to a growing focus in some countries on policies for encouraging civic participation and thus increase integration and cohesion. Such policies were noted in the reports on

Copenhagen and Oslo. In Denmark the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and Integration is committed to ensuring that “all citizens can actively participate in the society and democracy”. The municipality of Copenhagen regards encouraging participation by all sectors of society as crucial to ensuring a vibrant and integrated city. It provides support for organisations that provide social, sport and other orientation activities for youth, children, communities and the wider society. The Oslo report argues that civic participation should refer not only to migrants being “active citizens” in their countries of origin but also to their participation in their countries of residence. It notes Eurofound’s definition of active citizenship as:

people’s capacity to take an active role in public affairs, whether through formal democratic structures, through the press, through public debate, through associations, political parties, trade unions, local clubs and societies or simply through informal networks and mutual aid among neighbours, friends and family.<sup>38</sup>

The Oslo report suggested that the key elements of active citizenship are captured in the Somali concept of *astur*, which includes helping others in society as well as providing norms for behaviour in everyday life.

The research in all the cities revealed that Somalis have a strong and clear desire to participate in civic society. However, it recognised that more action is needed for Somalis to become active participants, as the following comments from Helsinki illustrate:

The person should try to adapt to what is positive about a society, whatever your religion hinders you from is not what is positive, but rather work, education and other things that contribute to your participation in the country, for example if you have an opportunity to participate in politics, to be an individual and independent and not a parasite. To become a taxpayer to participate in all those things, that is how you can feel like you are a citizen.

Translating the desire to participate into reality by overcoming some of the barriers requires action by Somalis, public institutions and the wider society. This includes the effective dissemination of information about the opportunities for participation, awareness of the rights and responsibilities of citizens and the development of the language skills needed for engagement.

## 8.5 The Role and Development of Somali Civil Society Groups

The research found that there were a large number of Somali civil society organisations. The Oslo report noted that in 2008–2009 there were 150 registered Somali organisations in Norway. In Helsinki there were estimated to be 100 Somali

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<sup>38</sup> G. Chanan, “Active Citizenship and Community Involvement: Getting to the Roots”, Eurofound Discussion Paper, Eurofound, Dublin, 1997, p. 1.

civil society organisations and in the Netherlands 160. However, many focus either on development work in Somalia or on integration issues in Europe, although some engage in both. The civil society organisations also differ greatly in terms of size and capacity. The Helsinki report said that only half of the 100 Somali organisations in Finland are fully operational.

The reports highlight examples of emerging and growing organisations that are important actors in the delivery of the chief integration services. In Amsterdam this includes the Somali Association for Amsterdam and Surrounding Area (Somalische Vereniging Amsterdam en Omgeving, SOMVAO), which was established in 1994 and runs activities to support integration, from language and conversation classes to homework supervision and computer classes. In Leicester the Somali Development Service provides information and guidance to the Somali community and other ethnic groups on education, housing, employment, benefits, family problems and rights.

The research in Malmö suggested that the role of the state in the delivery of services and the lack of scope to engage Somali or any other civil society have hindered the development of the civil-society sector, which is confined to cultural associations and not seen as organisations that can support integration through outreach on issues like education, employment and health. The report argued that Somali organisations could operate as bridge builders between the Somali community and the wider Swedish society; however, partnership and cooperation are needed to ensure that Somali organisations provide an opening for Somali integration into Swedish society and not close them off from Swedish society by providing services without the need to interact with the wider society.

The research in Copenhagen, London, Leicester and Oslo emphasised the important role that Somali women are playing in establishing and developing community institutions and organisations. Some younger European-born Somalis also feel that established older organisations do not represent their experiences or views and are either developing their own organisations or their own sections of associations concentrating on youth activities and sports. A number of youth organisations have in particular sought to avoid clan affiliations. In Oslo, a young student discussed her experiences:

I was part of an organisation but decided to withdraw because there were so many clan and internal conflicts. For someone like me who does not know what clan is, it is difficult to take sides. So I decided to withdraw.

## 8.6 Key Findings

Access to citizenship for those who are long-term residents is important for inclusion and integration. Somalis have taken up the opportunities to acquire European citizenship; and many Somalis have taken up opportunities to be politically active, where they exist, particularly locally.

Many Somali civil society organisations have emerged across the different cities. Some participants saw this as a strength reflecting the diversity of voices and views in the Somali community, others felt that greater unity and coordination are needed between different groups, so that Somalis can have a stronger and more influential voice on issues that matter to them. At the city level there are some civil society groups supporting local Somali communities. The challenge is to ensure that the organisations are sustainable and develop as the community grows. They have the potential to be key partners in inclusion and integration.

**Box 9. Good Practice Malmo: Civil Society Training**

In Malmö the city authorities invested in a three-month educational and training programme about Swedish society at Malmö University, which was delivered to 11 Somalis who were to be key community informants. The aim was for these informants to be active in various Somali associations.

## 9. THE MEDIA

Media coverage is crucial for inclusion and belonging. The Oslo report pointed out that even the way in which immigration is discussed publicly affects the processes of inclusion or exclusion and immigrants' sense of belonging. It noted that what it means to be Norwegian is delimited through the use of the terms “immigrant” and “Norwegian” as opposites; the effect is to prevent individuals being both immigrants and Norwegians at the same time. The underlying definition of being Norwegian does not include people who have immigrated to Norway. Furthermore, the children of immigrants are most often incorporated into the category of immigrants as well.

Across all six countries in the OSF research the majority of the general population, particularly people living outside the main urban centres, are unlikely to have direct contact with Somalis, so that their experience of Somalis is significantly shaped by their encounters with their media representation. This chapter looks at the media's representation of Somalis as well as attempts by Somalis to engage with the media.

### 9.1 Negative Media Coverage

A common complaint across the cities is the negativity of coverage of Somali communities in news stories. For example, an analysis of news stories in Amsterdam found that most that featured Somalis were international stories relating to piracy or terrorism, while domestic stories focused on khat, immigration and welfare. The Copenhagen report noted that a scan of the term “Somali” in news reports in 2013 found reports focused on piracy, terror, fraud, assaults, rape, incest, unemployment, the social burden and lack of integration. The Helsinki report referred to a review of the literature on the media coverage of Somalis in Finland, which found that Somalis had become a “symbol for undesirable refugees”, mentioned in connection mainly with crime and conflict. The London report concluded that reporting on Somalis living in the UK was rather negative, as the focus was on asylum seeking, large family size, benefit dependency and reliance on welfare services, religious extremism, terrorism, gangs, crime and FGM. The Malmö report found that Somali concerns about media coverage in Sweden were noted by the Integration Board in 1999, when it reported that Somalis felt that newspapers only highlighted difficulties and problems. It also noted that a series of negative articles drawing attention to some of the problems in Somali communities by the local press in Gothenburg led to small-scale protests by Somalis. The Oslo report described a government report on media coverage of immigration that found that the media in Norway were creating Islamophobia while the everyday lives of immigrants remained invisible.<sup>39</sup> It noted that research on media

<sup>39</sup> Directorate of Integration and Diversity (Integrerings- og mangfoldsdirektoratet, IMDi), *Innvandrere i Norske Medier: Mediaskapt Islamfrykt og Usynlig Hverdagsliv* (Immigrants in the Norwegian Media: Media-created Islamophobia and Invisible Everyday Life), IMDi Annual Report 2009, Oslo, 2010.

coverage confirmed that consistently negative images and stories reappeared about Somalis in Norway.

While most coverage was negative and reproduced stereotypes, there were also examples of more detailed and nuanced pieces that provided a more balanced understanding of Somalis. The Copenhagen report noted that in 2013 there were reports on prejudices against Somalis, the invisible successes of young Danish-Somalis and local media reporting on neighbourhood mothers facilitating integration, as well as cultural events. In Helsinki the coverage of the arrival of Somalis in the 1990s was seen as particularly negative, but there have been improvements in recent years, with positive coverage in 2011 on Somali small businesses in central Helsinki. However, the report stated that while coverage today may be more balanced, an examination of comments left by readers of articles online revealed significant undertones of racist attitudes towards Somalis. The Leicester report described the positive coverage during 2012 of the success of the British-Somali athlete Mo Farah, which referred to his arrival in the UK as a refugee from Somalia. In Sweden, a review of 60 newspaper articles by the Integration Board in 1999 noted that half the stories were positive in character. Furthermore, a review of articles in the local Malmö city newspaper found that almost all articles with some local Malmö connection had a positive touch: Somalis condemn Al Shabaab, Somalis do an important job at the Red Cross, the Minister of Integration visits Somalis in Malmö, a man from Malmö becomes a minister in Somalia, a man helps children with homework, Somalis celebrate their national holiday with a Swedish touch to it. This is also reflected in the comments about local Somali civil society activists in Malmö, who were positive about the overall media coverage, while recognising that the media in general were driven to cover negative stories more than positive ones.

The impact of these images and stories can be felt in the ways in which everyday interactions are shaped, as negative stereotypes are reproduced and reinforced. Research participants in Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Helsinki gave examples of the impact of negative coverage:

In the media, we are being portrayed as pirates, people that are mad ... I once went to a fancy dress party – with pirates as the main theme – and people told me, “You can go like yourself, you do not have to change clothes. (Amsterdam)

Well it is understandable that of course they want to sell, the newspapers they want to sell copies ... It just means that they might generalise about a group which is already weak and fragile, which is unable to defend itself. Then they're pigeonholed; it ruins the work we do as civil society work, and then you're left frustrated. (Copenhagen)

Some days ago the media released a programme that gave a bad picture of the Somalis. People watched it on this premises, I was not here that evening, but some of our youth members watched it and soon after the programme finished, some of them went to the neighbouring gas station for coffee and the people in



the gas station offended the youngsters, because of the programme. Look at the reaction here! There was not even half an hour between the programme and a racially motivated act. (Helsinki)

Media portrayal of Somalis is very bad. People aren't given complete pictures. I met a random person once who as soon as he identified me as a Somali, asked me if I was a pirate. (Leicester)

Somalis are exposed in the media and represented as uncivilized, unintegrated and not taking part in society. We are also given the impression that we are the cause of the fact that we are not part of the society. (Oslo)

Participants generally felt that an individual's ethnic/Somali identity was emphasised in negative stories, so that their behaviour was suggested to be indicative of the wider group they belonged to, while in positive stories the achievement was seen more as the result of individual effort. The Helsinki report noted a heated debate in 2013 in the Finnish media on the circumstances in which the ethnic identity of criminals should be mentioned in news reports. This remains a contested issue, but the reporting of positive stories was also raised. The Helsinki report put this succinctly, by noting that successful Somalis are shown as exceptional cases; the rest of the community is categorised as a problem.

The overall impact is to leave many Somalis distrustful of the mainstream media:

When they see one Somali who does something bad they cast the blame on all Somalis. Every time you read the newspaper you see a black person who does something bad, when you look closer you see it's a Somali. They don't mention how many Somalis work, or how many Somalis benefit the society, they only talk about the negative things. (Helsinki)

A similar point was made by a participant in the Oslo research:

The main rule appears to be simple: when journalists discuss people linked to crimes or other negative circumstances, they turn to terms that indicate that the people in question do not belong to the Norwegian community. But when immigrants are successful, they do not have to have stayed in the country for long before they are promoted to Norwegians.

What participants were looking for was a more balanced picture of Somali communities:

Media stresses only the negative side. What is needed is for the media to be neutral, it is OK that the negative side of the Somali community is mentioned and that is fine with me, because every community has its negative sides. But it is essential that media presents also the positive side of the Somalis. It is not fair to concentrate on the negative side alone. (Helsinki)

As noted in earlier chapters, Somalis are vulnerable to many forms of discrimination and stereotyping, as Somalis, Africans, immigrants, refugees and Muslims.

We [Somalis] are that distinctive, so we are portrayed when it comes to Muslims, you know there's that negativity, and we go under the blanket, when it comes to black, we go under that blanket. Then when it comes to Somalis, we have the piracy and the failed state of Somalia, and we go under that blanket. So it's like negative on top of negative. (London)

A participant in Copenhagen recalled the impact of negative media coverage of Muslims:

You just get so tired of the media at the moment, it's all bad things. I don't watch the news, there is such a large focus on Muslims and it just ends up weighing you down. When I read *BT* it'll say something or the other about Muslims. I just think that there are so many good things about immigrants and Muslims. It might be that someone from Russia does something, but then he's suddenly a Muslim. Everything is just Muslim.

Somalis across the cities pointed to the lack of representation of the diverse stories and experiences of Somalis in the media:

And all these studies conclude: it is not going well with the Somalis in the Netherlands, and again, you hear the same list of deficiencies: school dropouts, use of khat, child abuse, FGM, high dependency on welfare. I do not recognise myself in this picture, nor my family, but when this is labelled as mainstream thinking, it is difficult to avoid. (Amsterdam)

## 9.2 Experiences of Engagement with the Media

In some cities civil society groups and activists have tried to engage with news media to challenge or correct negative stereotypes and provide alternative narratives. The reports indicate a mixed picture; some engagement resulted in a more balanced and nuanced picture. In other cases, the participants felt their views and perspectives were at best ignored or, worse still, they felt they were misrepresented:

If you give a statement, your words will be twisted ... So then there'll be a conflict between you and your community, and you need to shut your mouth or try to explain that this does exist, that this is also an issue. This is the dilemma we deal with as volunteers or as active participants in the public debate. (Copenhagen)

## 9.3 Somali Participation in the Media

Across the cities there were examples of Somalis active as journalists, writers, filmmakers and producers in different media platforms.

The Copenhagen report said that *Etniqua*, a lifestyle ethnically diverse magazine with volunteer staff, has a Danish-Somali editor-in-chief. There was also a Danish-Somali journalist working at the web magazine *Opinionen*, which defines itself as part of the new Danish critical cross-cultural media, independent of political, religious and commercial interests. The Helsinki report highlighted the presence of the journalist Wali Hashi, the screenwriter Khadar Ahmed and the film-maker and columnist Naima Mohamud as examples of young Somali-Finns who were emerging as new voices in the media discourse. The Oslo report stated that some young Norwegian-Somali women were being taken seriously as writers. Ilham Hassan has had a regular contribution in *Morgenbladet*, where she has written pieces on education, local elections and the representation of Africa in the media.

In Leicester the local Somali community has been actively involved in a community radio initiative called EAVA FM for the past five years. Airtime is shared across a number of minority groups of South-east Asian, Indian and African heritage. The programmes include entertainment but also cover health, education, family and social life. The station's Somali programmes provide a platform from which Somali community issues, such as chewing khat or employment, are explored extensively in evening or late-night programmes, with community leaders and members promoting discussion and positive ideas about subjects that affect Somalis both locally and globally. The programme also enables public officials (including elected councillors) or professionals to engage with the community through an interpreter.

In Oslo, young Somali volunteers set up Radio Maqal in 2010. The founders aimed to create an arena for Norwegian-Somalis where they could exchange information, discuss the issues that were important to them and cooperate together. Responding to the negative image of Somalis in the media, they wanted to empower, help integrate and prepare people to encounter Norwegian media. The station has discussed many of the same themes that are discussed in the Norwegian media, but from a more highly tuned perspective. They had listeners calling in and discussing, for example, the misuse of social benefits, which then created an opportunity for dialogue and constructive debate. It is one of several radio stations in the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation's (NRK) multicultural local radio programmes, which broadcast in foreign languages in Norway. NRK provides them with the required courses and training to be able to offer good-quality radio programming.

#### 9.4 Key Findings

In all seven cities the mainstream news media coverage of Somali communities over the past two decades has been largely negative, with a focus on piracy, terrorism and welfare. This has had a deeply corrosive impact on many Somalis and their sense of belonging. They feel that it reinforces negative stereotypes about Somalis that has a real impact on how they are perceived and viewed in their daily interactions.

In more recent years, there have been more complex stories about Somalis that challenge the negative stereotypes. At the same time Somalis themselves have developed

alternative platforms and media through which to ensure that a more diverse range of narratives about Somalis is available.

**Box 10. Good Practice in Copenhagen: CODKA**

A large group of Danish-Somali young people set up a Danish-Somali media platform, CODKA, which is the Somali word for “the voice”. Its mission statement is described on their website as an online media conglomerate consisting of a think-tank, a web magazine, a forum for debate and a professional news agency, all set up by Danish-Somalis. It was launched in 2012 and has been run so far as a countrywide voluntary NGO. Meetings are held to discuss the way forward and the web magazine is organised through Facebook groups. It was established as a response to the very negative portrayal in the media and by politicians of Danish-Somalis, and with the aim of disseminating “both positive and self-critical analysis and stories by Somalis in Denmark to the public”.

The aim of the platform has been described as revealing the forgotten, invisible stories, so that Danish-Somalis can communicate their own stories and versions of the news to politicians, media representatives, commentators and others in order to change the one-sided coverage.

**Box 11. Good Practice in Oslo: The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation's Trainee Project**

Since 2008, NRK has been hosting a trainee project for multicultural journalists. The aim is to increase the number of multicultural editorial employees in the organisation. The first five trainees started their training in January 2008 and completed a six-month period of education in journalism and practical production in the media company. The ninth group of trainees was hired in 2013. The trainee period has now been expanded from six to 10 months. Somalis are one of the target groups of this programme, and several Norwegian-Somalis have applied. In 2010, one of the Norwegian-Somali applicants was granted a trainee position. NRK's goal is to reflect multicultural Norway in its programmes, and one way to achieve this is to recruit and promote journalists with minority backgrounds. Furthermore, NRK wants to train talented journalists itself. Forty trainees have completed their education since the project started. Seventeen of the trainees now have full-time permanent employment at NRK and nine have temporary contracts. In 2009, the project won the Norwegian government's Multicultural Award.

## 10. CONCLUSIONS

The research conducted by At Home in Europe's researchers in seven European cities has created a unique opportunity to compare the experiences of Somali communities, exploring individual perspectives as well as the impact of national and local integration efforts.

The Somali communities in each report form a distinct minority group within a context of highly diverse cities and migrant communities. Most Somali migrants arrived in Europe as refugees in two waves, first in the 1980s and 1990s, and again in the 2000s. The exception is the UK, with its longer historical ties to Somalia; Somali migrants have been settling in the UK since the end of the 19th century. Many Somali refugees have experiences of trauma, displacement and family separation, experiences shared across all the cities studied, with similar consequences

The reports found common ground in many of the sectors studied. Even though younger people, especially those born in Europe, identify with the countries in which they live, a strong sense of Somali identity persists. Language and religion are prime aspects of this feeling of community. The perceptions of the wider society also play a role; participants had experienced prejudice and discrimination in every city studied.

Across both cities and sectors, Somalis encounter similar struggles with language barriers and the lack of information and understanding that stems from being a new arrival. Participants described confusion over schooling options and health-care decisions due to their lack of familiarity with the local system or problems with communication. The reports point to a number of promising initiatives that are developing community resources to ensure that information is accessible to Somalis, and are bridging the gaps in knowledge through mentoring and outreach.

Another common theme is the disparity between men and women. While Somali girls are making tremendous gains and outpacing boys academically in education, notably in the UK and Norway, Somali women face special challenges in the employment sector in all cities, although there is considerable variation in the different countries that bears further study.

More could be done to build trust to ensure real access to services within Somali communities in nearly every city. For example, mental health services are not widely used, although many refugees have been through traumatic experiences. There is also a widespread concern that child welfare services will take children from their parents, rather than work to resolve any problems and keep the family together. Similarly, Somalis are less likely to report being victims of crime, but efforts by the police force specifically to improve relations with Somali communities have seen some success in cities such as London, Copenhagen and Leicester. This is particularly relevant at a time when counter-terrorism measures have led to increased mistrust between police and immigrants.

Across the cities studied, Somali communities are working to realise their influence in the political and civil spheres. Many participants pointed to a lack of unity as a real obstacle, although this internal diversity was also held up as a positive value. Civil organisations are extremely active in all cities, although their focus and capacity vary.

These seven reports portray European Somali communities as dynamic, diverse and highly motivated towards success. Arriving mainly as refugees, Somalis struggle with language barriers and all the disruption connected with leaving a country in turmoil. The research suggests that there is nevertheless a strong commitment to integration in these European cities. The good practices highlighted in the city reports point to the potential for making this process more successful for everyone.

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Minority communities – whether Muslim, migrant or Roma – continue to come under intense scrutiny in Europe today. This complex situation presents Europe with one its greatest challenges: how to ensure equal rights in an environment of rapidly expanding diversity.

At Home in Europe, part of the Open Society Initiative for Europe, Open Society Foundations, is a research and advocacy initiative which works to advance equality and social justice for minority and marginalised groups excluded from the mainstream of civil, political, economic, and, cultural life in Western Europe.

Muslims in EU Cities was the project's first comparative research series which examined the position of Muslims in 11 cities in the European Union. Somalis in European cities follows from the findings emerging from the Muslims in EU Cities reports and offers the experiences and challenges faced by Somalis across seven cities in Europe. The research aims to capture the everyday, lived experiences as well as the type and degree of engagement policymakers have initiated with their Somali and minority constituents.