



# The Bangladeshi Muslim Community in England

## **Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities**



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# 1 Executive Summary

## 1.1 Introduction and context

This report is one of thirteen reports on England's Muslim ethnic communities commissioned by the Cohesion Directorate of Communities and Local Government in order to understand the diversity of England's Muslim population and to help enhance its engagement and partnership with Muslim civil society.

The primary goal of the research was to detail the main population and community locations, identify denominations and religious practices, and identify the strengths of links with the country of origin. An overarching objective for the project was to identify how government could best engage and work in partnership with specific communities.

For many of these communities there was little pre-existing research specific to the community, although because of the way in which ethnicity is recorded in official surveys there is relatively more research available for the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities than there are for the other communities included in this study. Hence the research was expanded to include other areas such as identity, language use, socio economic situations, and intra-community dynamics. Since the country and migration contexts are important, these are also briefly detailed.

The relatively limited scope of this study in relation to individual communities means that there is still a great deal more research needed in order to establish comprehensive knowledge and understanding. This study provides first insights into the communities rather than offering firm conclusions, and hence should be understood as a starting rather than an endpoint in getting to know the different communities covered by the research.

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

This report focuses on the Bangladeshi community in England and as such those interviewed and involved in focus groups were based in England. However, some of the existing research and data on the community refers to England; England and Wales; Great Britain; and the United Kingdom. Thus the report refers to whichever of these is the most relevant in the context.

## 1.2 Migration and England's Bangladeshi Muslim population

The first Bengali<sup>1</sup> Muslims in Britain arrived around 1850 although significant migration did not occur until a hundred years later.<sup>2</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, economic hardship in East Pakistan coupled with labour shortages in the UK saw an influx of migrant Bengali workers, most of whom settled in Tower Hamlets as well as in Birmingham. During the war for independence in 1971, a further wave of mostly male Sylhetis migrated to London for work and to escape political instability. There was a rapid expansion in the population through family reunification beginning in the late 1960s. This peaked in the 1970s and continued at reduced levels during the 1980s. Students and skilled migrants currently form the majority of Bangladeshis arriving in the UK, and a substantial proportion of these new migrants are from non-Sylhet areas.

The Bangladeshi population in the UK has grown rapidly, from 6,000 in 1961 to 162,835 in 1991, and is now estimated to be over double that figure. According to the 2001 Census, there were 275,395 Bangladeshis living in England of which 254,704 reported their religion as Muslim, 17 per cent of England's Muslim population.<sup>3</sup> The Bangladeshi Muslim community is the most concentrated and ethnically segregated Muslim community in England with 24 per cent of the total Bangladeshi Muslim population living in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and a further 19 per cent of the total population living in surrounding boroughs.

## 1.3 Employment and education

Bangladeshis in England experience disproportionately high rates of unemployment. Bangladeshi women have the lowest level of participation in the formal labour market of any major ethnic group in the UK. Bangladeshi men and women are under-represented in the labour market and unemployment and economic inactivity rates are significantly above the national average. There are evident disparities between Bangladeshi males and females and the rest of the population across all indicators particularly in the employment and inactivity rate for Bangladeshi females. Self-employment is a popular route out of unemployment for a large section of the community. Bangladeshi households are much more likely to be reliant on earnings from self employment than other ethnic groups.

<sup>1</sup> The use of the term Bengali here refers to the whole of the population of the pre-1947 state of Bengal. After the Partition of India, the eastern part of the state became East Pakistan, and the population of the region, East Pakistani. The term Bangladeshi refers to the population of the independent nation of Bangladesh, created when the former East Pakistan gained independence from Pakistan in 1971. Ninety-eight per cent of people in Bangladesh are Bengali but there are also significant numbers still in India as well as in the diaspora.

<sup>2</sup> The establishment of the Indian Terminus of the P&O shipping company in Calcutta in 1842 led to the employment of large numbers of Bengali Lascars or seamen, and many Bengali Lascars joined the British Navy during World War II. Some of these seamen began to settle in London's East End from the 1850s onwards.

<sup>3</sup> Census 2001, Standard table S104.

While there are still many problems facing the community, there is a sense of optimism, particularly amongst the younger generation that the social and economic situation of the community has improved significantly over the past decade or so. Data on economic and educational outcomes among the population supports this optimism.

## 1.4 Identity, religion and language

There is a marked generational difference in people's views about identity and belonging with respect to national affiliations. Older people have stronger attachments to Bangladesh than the second and third generation, whilst most young people define themselves as British Bangladeshis with multiple or hyphenated identities. Cultural and historical factors play a large role in how many, particularly older people, view their identity and for many religious practices and customs are interpreted and lived through a Bengali historical and cultural lens.

People who lived through the movements for nationalism and democracy maintain strong secular and nationalist values linked to the 1971 Liberation War (*Muktojudho*) against Pakistan. Some younger Bangladeshis, however, view these as outdated and are more inclined to identify themselves as Muslims first and foremost. These young people are also more likely to see themselves as part of a larger, more 'homogenous' Muslim community rather than as Bangladeshi Muslims.

In England, 92 per cent of Bangladeshis classify themselves as Muslim.<sup>4</sup> The majority of the community are Sunni Muslims who follow the Hanafi School and respondents noted that there is a small number who follow the Shafi School. It was also noted that not all Bangladeshis are strongly religious or followers of any particular school of thought. Within the Hanafi school of thought there are various ideological sub-groupings including the Barelvis, Tabligh Jamaat and Sufis, but these distinctions are often not clear-cut. For younger Bangladeshis, new forms of religious expression and identities reflect the emergence of hybrid identities that fuse differing practices of Islam, Bangladeshi culture and British identities. There are a large number of mosques catering for the community in London, Birmingham and Oldham, the most prominent of which is the East London Mosque.

The main language spoken in the UK is Sylheti, which some consider to be a dialect of Bengali, while others claim that it is a separate language.<sup>5</sup> However, the proportion of the population speaking it as a first language in the UK is decreasing as a younger generation is growing up more familiar with English than its mother tongue.

<sup>4</sup> Census 2001, S104.

<sup>5</sup> According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Bangla is spoken by over 98 per cent of the population, suggesting that in Bangladesh the status of Sylheti is that of a Bengali dialect.



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

As with most other migrant communities, there are some tensions between the first and second/third generations. The older generation are more concerned about retaining their cultural heritage, whereas younger people want to focus on their life and circumstances in Britain. As a consequence of different interests and perspectives there is a considerable degree of intergenerational conflict caused by a lack of comprehension and communication problems that make interactions between the generations difficult. However many older people do accept that there is a completely different way of thinking and behaving amongst the young due to the different circumstances each generation has lived through.

Educational attainment and access to professional employment are the key issues that concern the community with regards to young people. Despite progress, youth unemployment remains a pressing problem and is seen as one of the key factors contributing to growing problems of alienation, drug use and criminality. Schools, youth centres, colleges and community organisations are all seen as important in influencing young people, but many are critical of the approaches such institutions take. Mosques and some other civil society organisations have had some success in reaching young audiences with programmes that are tailored for young people but there is a widespread recognition that more needs to be done to address the problems young people face.

The roles and expectations of Bangladeshi women are slowly changing. Amongst the first generation of Bangladeshis, there were huge differences between the genders, and very clearly defined roles. Whereas the older generation of women accepted that their place was in the home, young women think differently. Whilst many are still controlled by a patriarchal system and confined to their homes, there are definite changes underway. More women are going in to employment and participating in public life within the community, but services and facilities for women still remain limited, and community organisations continue to be largely male dominated.

## 1.6 Cohesion and integration

The majority of people, particularly young ones, see themselves as British and as well integrated. Most also express a desire for greater integration but feel that factors outside their control hinder the process. Segregated housing and schooling were highlighted as key amongst these. The process is also seen to be hampered by widespread racism and Islamophobia in wider society, to which the government's 'anti-terror' laws are perceived as contributing significantly. There is also a widespread view that debates about integration and cohesion are essentially about assimilation, and about the host community imposing its norms and values on migrant communities.

## 1.7 Media and links with country of origin

The portrayal of Muslims in the British media is a cause for great anger and the key cause for complaint. Apart from the overriding concern about the portrayal of Muslims in the media, there are also frustrations that the rich history and culture of Bangladesh and Bengalis is of little interest, and hence there is very limited coverage about the Bengali community except when there is a cyclone or a natural disaster.

The community is well served by a wide range of written and broadcast media, with satellite TV being the most popular. Newspapers remain popular with the older generation, though young Bengalis have also launched a number of London based papers and magazines for a younger audience. As with most communities, the internet is a more popular medium with the younger generation than with older people.

The community maintains strong ties with Bangladesh through travel, remittances, trade and commerce, cultural ties and politics. These are stronger with the older generation and whilst many young British Bangladeshis still value Bangladesh as the country of their roots and heritage; few are willing to invest, send money regularly, or stay in the country for a long term.

## 1.8 Civil society and civic engagement

The early community organisations established in the 1960s were largely secular and involved either in political activities to support the war for Liberation, or in providing welfare services, immigration advice, legal assistance and social and cultural amenities for new immigrants. According to Eade and Garbin (2006) this began to change during the late 1970s, and that whilst strong political ties with Bangladesh continued, community mobilisation in the East End took on new forms in response to endemic harassment and racism and due to the struggle for local community resources. Eade and Garbin note that by the end of the 1980s, many of the second generation activists entered the Labour Party and sought to break into local administrative and political institutions<sup>6</sup>. Since the 1990s, funding is claimed to have declined for secular Bangladeshi community organisations, but increased for religious organisations.

There are now a significant number of Bangladeshi organisations that reflect diverse interests, ranging from political, generational, health and social welfare, to social and cultural activities. However, provision for women remains limited; study respondents highlighted the pressing need for organisations that can enforce the rights of women and deal with issues relating to abuse, domestic violence, forced marriages and immigration issues. There are a number of mosques engaged in partnerships with local authorities to carry out social welfare programmes, including the largest mosque in Tower Hamlets, the East London Mosque.

<sup>6</sup> John Eade & David Garbin. Competing visions of identity and space: Bangladeshi Muslims in Britain. *Contemporary South Asia* 15(2), (June 2006) 181-193.

Mosques are seen by many as community hubs, but whilst there are a lot of expectations for them to provide a range of services to the community, many local mosques are very small and do not have the resources to meet community needs. Many people also have reservations about whether or not they are the most appropriate institutions to deliver such services due to barriers to participation faced by women and young people.

Family is seen as the most important influencing body that is at the heart of everything. Men in general are seen as key influencers who dominate in community affairs, unlike women who are often subjugated by men. Other people prominent include GPs, teachers, youth and community workers, elected members and business associations. The media, religious organisations, Imams and renowned Islamic scholars also have a large influence.

Whilst there has traditionally been strong engagement with local authorities, especially in East London, respondents suggested that there is a growing reluctance amongst many to co-operate with local and central government. The main cause for this appears to be mistrust of the government's recent policies towards Muslims, coupled with the perceived failure of public authorities to address the poverty and socio economic disadvantages faced by the community. The lack of Bangladeshi Muslim representation in higher ranks in different public institutions is also believed to lead to a lack of representation of community interests.

The lack of funding and funding sources is the single most pressing issue hampering civil society infrastructure and capacity building. Additionally, language barriers, poor communication and management skills, and a lack of understanding about funding mechanisms, mean that many organisations are unable to fully express their needs or present their organisations well to funders.

**Specific recommendations arising from community respondents include:**

- Strategies to tackle the educational underachievement of children, including a more thoughtful citizenship curriculum in schools, and pastoral provision that is relevant to the particular identities and experiences of Bengali Muslim children
- The provision of facilities and resources for those wanting to train to join the clergy and become Imams and clergymen so that people will not need to go abroad to train, or have to bring in Imams from abroad
- Improved educational provision for women and opportunities for employment training, as well as better healthcare and support services for women facing domestic violence
- Direct funding for the establishment of women's support organisations rather than provision of services through religious organisations or male run community organisations
- Services to deal with increasing family breakdown and a rising number of single parent families

- Employment training for many who were reliant upon factory and other unskilled labour who have become redundant, and for those who were educated in Bangladesh and find it hard to find jobs in Britain
- Local and central government strategies to combat institutional racism and discrimination and racism in the media
- Better funding and encouragement of inter-faith activities.

**Other recommendations**

- Detailed research into the experiences, needs and aspirations of young Bangladeshi women
- Further comparative research across the Muslim diaspora communities into the shared and specific issues affecting young men.

## 2 Introduction

Communities and Local Government recognises that there is a need to enhance its understanding and knowledge of the diverse Muslim ethnic populations in England, particularly relating to some of the specific smaller communities of African, Middle Eastern and other Asian countries of origin. As such, Communities and Local Government commissioned The Change Institute (CI) to deliver the research project 'Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities' (UMEC). The thirteen ethnic Muslim communities that the Cohesion Directorate was seeking more information about were those originating from:

- Afghanistan
- Algeria
- Bangladesh
- Egypt
- India
- Iran
- Iraq
- Morocco
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- Saudi Arabia
- Somalia
- Turkey.

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

### 2.1 Objectives of the research

There were four objectives for the research:

- *Mapping*: Develop population maps for each ethnic community outlining the spread of the population and identification of high density clusters
- *Identification of denominations and pathways*: Collect information on the grassroots institutions/key individuals working with ethnic communities and the breakdown of these ethnic communities by denomination/sect/clan

- *Identifying strength of links and capacity of ethnic communities:*  
Collect information on the strength of links between each ethnic community and country of origin (including influential institutions/individuals/media channels/religious influences). Also to collect information on the relative strengths and weaknesses of civil society infrastructure for each ethnic community, highlighting where capacities need to be developed
- *Identifying how government can best engage with ethnic communities:*  
Develop recommendations on the ways in which Communities and Local Government can best engage with and understand Muslim ethnic communities in England, including recommendations on avenues of communications and delivery to these communities.

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

1. Where are the key ethnic groups of the Muslim population located?
2. What are the latest estimated sizes and demographic make-up of the key ethnic communities?
3. Which denominations and/or other internal groupings do these ethnic groups belong to?
4. How can Communities and Local Government best engage with them?
5. What are the strength of links between the ethnic communities and country of origin?
6. How developed is the level of social infrastructure for each group?

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

## 2.2 Report structure

The report is structured to address the key research questions set out previously. Sections 6 and 7 are primarily based on quantitative secondary data. Sections 7 to 12 draw primarily on the qualitative research corroborated by secondary sources where these are available. Finally, Section 13 draws together specific recommendations arising from the research.

### 3 Methodology

The research questions represented a broad area of inquiry and analysis. While quantitative data about the size, location and other demographic features of the priority communities was a key research need, the study primarily focused on enabling the Communities and Local Government to ‘know’ these communities in depth.

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

PHASE	ACTIVITY	METHOD
1	Population mapping	Review of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing literature</li> <li>National data sources</li> <li>Local data sources and consultations with local authorities, other public bodies and community representatives. These were conducted to cover all thirteen communities in this study.</li> </ul>
2	Qualitative data collection	Community interviews (205 total, 21 with Bangladeshi community). Focus groups (30 total, two with Bangladeshi community and four with Muslim youth from all ethnic backgrounds).

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

#### 3.1 Project phases

##### Phase 1: Population mapping

The first phase consisted of collecting mainly secondary quantitative data but also some primary data about locations of Muslim ethnic populations and known civil society organisations. The main method for data collection on population characteristics was through a comprehensive review of a broad range of secondary data sources, including the Census, Annual Population Survey, output of migration and population think tanks and academic research centres. This initial literature review assisted in developing a detailed picture of data currently available in the public domain, and in identifying key gaps in the existing knowledge base. It also helped in identifying key locations for each diaspora to be targeted in the community research which followed as well as identifying key stakeholders and community respondents.

Robust and up-to-date population data is difficult to obtain outside of the 2001 Census although the ONS has also provided population predictions by local authority areas for 2005. This informs some of the population figures quoted in this study, but they are not available by religion so the 2001 Census figures are used wherever statistics are used with respect to religious identity of the Bangladeshi population in England. It should also be noted that unlike other studies in this series, the data on Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani populations is based on 'ethnicity' rather than country of birth statistics because of the categories for ethnicity collection in official surveys. This means that unless stated statistics for the Bangladeshi population include all 'ethnic' Bangladeshis irrespective of the country they were born in.

In relation to Bangladeshis, there is a considerable amount of quantitative data since the ethnicity is included in most official surveys as well as some specific qualitative studies, although these are limited given the size of the population. To place some of the qualitative information in context we reviewed the findings from the Communities and Local Government's *Citizenship Survey* (2005 and 2007) and the report *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society* (2007) as well as statistics from the Labour Market Survey and qualitative and quantitative insights from additional academic and policy literature.

## **Phase 2: Qualitative data collection**

Qualitative data collection has been undertaken primarily through 21 one-to-one interviews with key respondents ('those who might be expected to know') and two focus groups with individuals from the Bangladeshi community. This phase of the research was carried out between April and July 2008.

### **3.1.1 In-depth interviews**

The interviews assisted in developing an overview of national and local contexts: the make-up of diaspora communities, key issues concerning violent extremism including perceptions, experiences and activities, current initiatives in place to counter this and existing civil society structures and development needs. The interviews also assisted in identification of further key contacts for the one-to-one and focus group research and covered a range of topics including:

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



The full topic guide is located in the technical report. The majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face and some by telephone where necessary.

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

Interviews for the Bangladeshi community research were conducted by a researcher from the Bangladeshi community. The researcher was already familiar with many of the civil society organisations in the Bangladeshi community. This added legitimacy to the process of enquiry that was critical in opening up discussion and enabled us to gather rich and sometimes controversial data.

### 3.1.2 Profile of Respondents

Twenty-one interviews were conducted with leaders and representatives from the Bangladeshi community. Participants included representatives from nine community organisations, two education workers, one imam, two local council workers, one student society representative, two representatives from women's organisations and two Bangladeshi youth workers. Eleven of the respondents were female, ten male. Fourteen were based in London with the remaining interviews conducted in Birmingham, Bradford, Coventry, Kent, Leicester, Luton and Oldham. Three respondents were in the range 20-29 years, twelve in the age range 30-39 years, four in the range 40-50 years and one in the 50+ age range.

### 3.1.3 Quality control

A quality control process was used by the Change Institute (CI) to ensure consistency and quality across each community. This involved:

- *Piloting*: Each community researcher was required to carry out two/three pilot interviews in each community to refine approaches and questions where necessary. This included a detailed discussion with each researcher following the pilot interviews, with expert adviser involvement where necessary, as well as a review of the interview field notes to ensure that relevant data was being picked up by researchers
- Each community researcher was assigned to a member of the core research team who reviewed field notes on an ongoing basis, and regular internal team meetings were held to share findings and ensure consistency across the project.

### 3.1.4 Discussion groups

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

Focus groups were designed to include a mix of participants from different community networks and different occupational backgrounds who might be expected to hold a wide range of views. Participants were recruited by the core research team through local community organisations and CI networks.

One male and one female focus group was conducted which were attended by individuals over 35 years of age. The focus groups were conducted in East London in July 2008.

		Location	Born in the UK	Born outside of the UK	Age range
Group (Female)	1	London	2	4	35+
Group (Male)	2	London	1	6	35+

Groups were facilitated by CI directors and analysts, with additional support from community researchers. Full translation services were not required, but community researchers assisted with any language difficulties where necessary.

In addition to the two focus groups for each community, four youth focus groups were conducted in London, Birmingham and Bradford with youth from a range of ethnic backgrounds. The findings of these focus groups are discussed in the summary report.

This report uses selective quotes from the interviews and focus groups to illustrate key recurring themes and issues arising during the qualitative data collection. Where necessary they have been carefully edited for ease of reading, or understanding what was meant.

## 3.2 Analysis of data

Data analysis involved generating understandable patterns by comparing what different respondents/focus groups said about specific themes or questions. The central question was whether the data and information and the range of views expressed led to the same conclusions. Findings were validated by triangulation of all data and information collected in both project phases so far as possible, and by critical internal reflection and review within the CI team.

The analytical process involved reviewing field notes to develop emerging themes in line with the analytical framework, which was done in collaboration with the field researchers; regular internal meetings to discuss findings from all communities; dedicated internal workshops on the communities to finalise analysis; reviews from expert advisers; feedback from ‘community reviewers’ and a formal peer review process.

Intercultural understanding of responses and non-responses was also essential in considerations of the data generated. A set of commonly held assumptions and understandings in any cultural group may mean that some things are simply left unsaid – because they are commonly understood in the group and do not require articulation. In addition literal translation or interpretation may simply misrepresent or miss the significance of what is being articulated. In this context in particular there will often be a distinction between what is said, and might be noted or recorded, and what is meant. In looking for meaning, silences and body language were often as important as what was said. A good example of potential misinterpretation that came up many times was body language indicating discomfort and unwillingness to pursue a particular line of enquiry.

Finally, and most importantly, we were *reflexive* in our approach, critically reflecting on the role and influence that our own research intervention may be having on key respondents and focus groups, using critical judgment and being conscious of the need to interpret with integrity in relation to what we were seeing and hearing.

### 3.3 Limitations of the research

Data analysis represents both general and particular challenges in the current social and political context, as well as specific challenges in relation to some of these communities. These include:

- The sample sizes for each community were relatively small and respondents were not intended to be a representative sample of the relevant communities
- Because the interviews were not based on a random sample, the study does not claim to provide an analysis of the Bangladeshi population as a whole, nor was this the intention of the study. We have analysed views and comments in the context of existing data, knowledge of the current political and social context for these communities, and the comments of other respondents
- Many aspects of the topic guide were designed to identify the key needs and challenges facing the community.<sup>7</sup> Hence the research tended to generate data on problem areas and challenges, particularly in focus group discussions when respondents felt they had limited time to ensure that their voices got heard. This may not reflect many of the positive and optimistic views of respondents. However, respondents were often aware that the discussions may come across

<sup>7</sup> The topic guide is included in the Technical Report, available from Communities and Local Government.

as negative in tone, and were quick to try and balance this by highlighting perceived positive aspects of both their communities and their lives in the UK. We have endeavoured to set out the 'best' story (in terms of explanatory power) in the context of what is already known about why some of our respondents might express negative feelings

- In the current context, the politicisation of the research field meant that all respondents were conscious of being part of a community under public and government scrutiny. Respondents were made aware of the purposes of the research through a 'showcard' that explained the research as well as possible uses of the research.<sup>8</sup> They were informed that this research would potentially be used to inform a publication that would enter the public domain and would cover aspects such as religion, intra-community dynamics and links with country of origin. A climate of some scepticism within Muslim communities, discrimination, both real and perceived, and awareness of government interest in 'what is happening' on the ground, meant that respondents were often sceptical about the use of the information that they were providing. Many will have had agendas (for positive as well as negative reasons) when asked about issues for their communities, which may have influenced their responses (eg representing their community as having few or no problems, or conversely, as having many or major needs and/or issues with public authorities)
- This also created a number of practical difficulties in research terms, including difficulties in getting interviews with particular types of respondents, hesitancy and caution in some responses, and a closing off of some lines of questioning in relation to religion, identity and differences
- The researchers' analytical response to these difficulties was to be critically attuned to who was speaking, their location in the community, the interests that they may have, and to judge their comments in the light of this context. Researchers were aware that there are dynamic and charged debates and movement taking place within these communities on a whole range of issues ranging from religion, its expression and orientation in the context of being Muslim minorities living in a non-Muslim society, to negotiations about roles, responsibilities, duties, gender relations, and relationships with country of origin. This awareness underpinned the analysis of the data and the conclusions drawn from responses received.

For all these reasons, the research should be viewed as a 'snapshot' in time rather than reflective of the full complexity or range of issues, challenges and changes taking place in these communities (eg intergenerational relationships, gender roles, perceptions of ethnic and religious identity, changing attitudes among the young (both in liberal and more radical directions) and the levels of integration or tensions within and across communities). We are conscious of the dynamism and the rapid changes taking place in some communities, both positive and negative.

<sup>8</sup> The showcard is included in the Technical Report, available from Communities and Local Government.

## 4 Country Profile and History



Bangladesh has a population of about 140 million and is one of the most densely populated countries of the world. The majority of its population (about 88 per cent) is Muslim, and over 98 per cent of its people speak Bengali (Bangla) which is the national and official language of the Republic. Bangladesh is an active participant in a number of international and regional forums, particularly in the UN, the Commonwealth and the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC).<sup>9</sup>

Once known as 'Sonar Bangla', or the Golden Bengal, the area which is now Bangladesh has a rich history influenced by the repeated influx of numerous cultures and peoples. After the succession of many Hindu and Buddhist dynasties, it came under Muslim rule between 1201 to 1757 and witnessed the gradual expansion of Islam in the region during this period.<sup>10</sup> Since then, Islam has played a critical role in the region's history and politics.

In 1757, following the defeat of the sovereign ruler, Nawab Sirajuddaula at the battle of Plessey, it came under British rule as part of the British Indian provinces of Bengal and Assam. The borders of present day Bangladesh were created with the 1947 partition of India along religious lines, when the territory, then known as East Pakistan, became part of the newly formed Pakistan. The partition resulted in one of the largest movements of people in history. East Pakistan was separated from West Pakistan by 1,600 kilometres of Indian territory. Conflict soon arose between East and West Pakistan over accusations of discriminatory practises against Bengalis and the dominance of West Pakistan in the government and the army, as well as over questions about the primacy of Urdu as the state language. This was promoted by Pakistan's central leaders and the Urdu-speaking intellectuals of West Pakistan, but was strongly resisted by Bengalis from the outset. Given that the Bengalis of East Pakistan constituted a majority (an estimated 54 per cent) of Pakistan's entire population, they demanded that Bangla be made one of the state languages.

The Bengali Language Movement known as *Bhasa Andolon* began in 1948 when Urdu was ordained as the sole national language by the government of Pakistan. The movement reached its peak in a demonstration in February 1952. Many non-communal and progressive organisations joined what turned into a mass movement, resulting in the designation of Bengali as one of two official state languages of Pakistan by the General Assembly in 1956. As a tribute to the Language Movement, and in recognition of the rights of linguistic minorities worldwide, February 21 was declared as International Mother Tongue Day by UNESCO in 2000.

While acknowledging a shared Muslim identity with West Pakistan, continuing inequalities between the two parts of the country fuelled a growing Bengali nationalism and calls for greater autonomy. The movement for political autonomy grew stronger after the success of the United Front alliance in the 1954 East Bengal Legislative Assembly elections, a core member of which was the Awami League (AL)

<sup>9</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics: [www.bbs.gov.bd](http://www.bbs.gov.bd)

<sup>10</sup> M. Morshed Khan (1994), *Bangladesh towards 21st Century*, Ministry of Information, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In Pakistan's first general election in 1970,<sup>11</sup> the AL gained an overwhelming victory in East Pakistan, and an overall majority in the all-Pakistan National Assembly. However, the result was unacceptable to West Pakistan and led to President Yahya Khan postponing the opening of the National Assembly and blocking Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from taking up office. As a result, East Pakistan proclaimed itself as the independent state of Bangladesh in March 1971 and a bloody civil war ensued. Estimates vary considerably but according to some sources, up to three million people are thought to have died during a nine-month period of violence and famine, and a further ten million East Pakistani refugees fled to India. West Pakistani forces in East Pakistan eventually surrendered in December 1971 after India intervened on the side of the Bangladeshi liberation movement. In 1972 the Republic of Bangladesh was proclaimed under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family were assassinated in a military coup in August 1975 and Major-General Zia ur-Rahman became chief martial-law administrator in 1976. He was elected president in 1977 after his Bangladesh Nationalist Party won a parliamentary majority. Bangladesh's new rulers sought legitimacy by turning to religious parties. Zia ur-Rahman's government removed secularism and socialism from the constitution and declared Islam the state religion. According to Hussain (2006), an attempt to revive religion as an instrument of re-definition of the national identity has played a central role in re-shaping transnational identities of people from Bangladeshi, and the effects of this process continue to influence the country to this day.<sup>12</sup>

Zia ur-Rahman was assassinated in 1981, and the civilian administration was overthrown in March 1982 by Lt-Gen Muhammad Hussain Ershad. Martial law was imposed and political activity was banned. Gradually a broad opposition coalition, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy, developed. Ershad was elected president in a direct election in October 1986 and martial law was lifted the following month. However, following another period of martial law, Ershad resigned in 1990 and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party returned to power under the leadership of Begum Khaleda Zia in 1991.

The Awami League led by Sheika Hasina Wazed, the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, gained power in 1996. Wazed remained prime minister until the Bangladesh Nationalist Party was re-elected in 2001 in coalition with the Islamist *Jamaat-e-Islami*, which at the time of Bangladesh's liberation war in 1971 had fought to maintain the country as a province of Pakistan. Begum Khaleda Zia once again took over as prime minister but her administration was dogged by charges of corruption and violence, and in January 2007 the military once more imposed a state of emergency. Dr Fakhrudden Ahmed, the former governor of Bangladesh's Central Bank, then headed a caretaker government until the election of the Sheika Hasina Wazed and the Awami League in the 2008 elections.

<sup>11</sup> Whilst there had been some provincial assembly and presidential elections, the first general election was held in 1970.

<sup>12</sup> Hussain, D (2006), *Bangladeshis in east London: from secular politics to Islam*, Open Democracy. Source: [www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-protest/bangladeshi\\_3715.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-protest/bangladeshi_3715.jsp)

Situated in the world's largest delta, the country is vulnerable to regular floods and cyclones which have periodically left millions of people dead or homeless. Following the election of the Awami League in 1970 a catastrophic cyclone (*Bhola*) caused the deaths of up to half a million Bangladeshis. Bangladesh has also been subject to major flooding in 1987, 1988, 1998 and 2007, the latter is estimated to have affected over ten million Bangladeshis. It remains high on the Least Developed Country list; 40 per cent of the population remains below the poverty line, and in 2007 it had a per capita GDP of only US\$482.<sup>13</sup> Bangladesh also has one of the lowest levels of domestic and foreign investment in Asia, a significant factor determining the rate of growth.<sup>14</sup>

However, according to the UK Department for International Development, Bangladesh has made strong economic progress over the past 15 years with growth remaining positive since the 1980s and currently achieving rates of around 6 per cent.<sup>15</sup> There is also a strong trade and investment relationship between the UK and Bangladesh with the UK remaining the largest foreign investor in the country, with over £2billion investment projects to date.<sup>16</sup> In turn, the UK is one of the largest markets for exports from Bangladesh, with garments and textile constituting almost 80 per cent of total exports. Almost 10 per cent of Bangladesh's world-wide exports go to the UK.<sup>17</sup> Development is another area of major engagement with Bangladesh, with the UK bilateral aid programme in Bangladesh totalling £129million in 2007-08.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Asian Development Bank (2008) *Asian Development Outlook 2008*. [www.adb.org/Documents/Books/ADO/2008/BAN.pdf](http://www.adb.org/Documents/Books/ADO/2008/BAN.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Department for International Development Bangladesh (2008) *The Road to Prosperity through Growth, Jobs and Skills*. [www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/dis\\_job.pdf](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/dis_job.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> UK Trade and Investment, 'Country Profile: Bangladesh': [www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk/](http://www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk/)

<sup>17</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 'Country Profile: Bangladesh', [www.fco.gov.uk/](http://www.fco.gov.uk/)

<sup>18</sup> Department for International Development (2008) *Statistics on International Development 2008*. [www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/sid2008/FINAL-SID-2008.pdf](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/sid2008/FINAL-SID-2008.pdf)



## 5 Migration History and Trends

The Bangladeshi diaspora is dispersed worldwide, although the overwhelming majority of emigrants reside in the UK and the USA.<sup>19</sup> The earliest Bengali migrants to England were sailors (lascars) recruited in India to work on merchant ships for the East India Company and the earliest Bengali Muslim communities settled in port towns and cities.<sup>20</sup> Later, the establishment of the Indian Terminus of the P&O shipping company in Calcutta in 1842 also led to the employment of large numbers of Bengali Lascars or seamen and many Bengali Lascars joined the British Navy during World War II.

Some of these seamen began to settle in London's East End from the 1850s onwards.<sup>21</sup> Evidence of the early settlement of Bengali seamen in London can be seen in the formation of organisations such as the Society for the Protection of Asian Sailors in 1857<sup>22</sup> and later, the Indian Seamen's Welfare League established in 1943. The lascars were accompanied by naval cooks, many of whom came from Sylhet, the north east area of modern day Bangladesh. There are records of Sylhetis working in London restaurants as early as 1873. Arriving in the London Docks, lascars would seek out other Asians with whom to stay, thus setting off the process of chain migration<sup>23</sup> from the Sylheti, Chittagong and Comilla regions that continued with later large scale migrations.<sup>24</sup>

In the 1950s and 1960s, economic hardship in East Pakistan and labour shortages in the UK saw an influx of migrant workers, most of whom settled in Tower Hamlets.<sup>25</sup> During the war for independence in 1971 a further wave of mostly male Sylhetis migrated to London for work and to escape political instability. Sylhetis constitute 95 per cent of Bangladeshis living in Britain, and the majority of them originate from several *thanas* (administrative sub-districts) in Sylhet including Habiganj, Beani Bazar, Maulvi Bazar and Sunamganj. The remaining Bangladeshi migrants come predominantly from the regions of Chittagong and Comilla.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>19</sup> International Organisation for Migration & Ministry for Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment (2004), *Institutionalising Diaspora Linkage the Emigrant Bangladeshis in UK and USA*, London: IOM. p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed history of Bangladeshi migration see Gardner, K., & A. Shuker, "I'm Bengali, I'm Asian and I'm living here": the changing identity of British Bengalis, in Ballard, R (ed) (1994); *Desh Pardesh. The South Asian Presence in Britain*, Hurst and Company, 1994.

<sup>21</sup> [www.portcities.co.uk](http://www.portcities.co.uk)

<sup>22</sup> [www.towerhamlets.gov.uk](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk)

<sup>23</sup> Chain migration refers to the process by which individuals are able to immigrate and gain residence by virtue of kinship links to previous adult immigrants with citizenship status.

<sup>24</sup> Samson, N (2007) 'Speaking of home: Bangladeshi women in London's East End reflect on belonging', *Rising East Online*, University of East London. Issue No. 7, September 2007, p. 11.

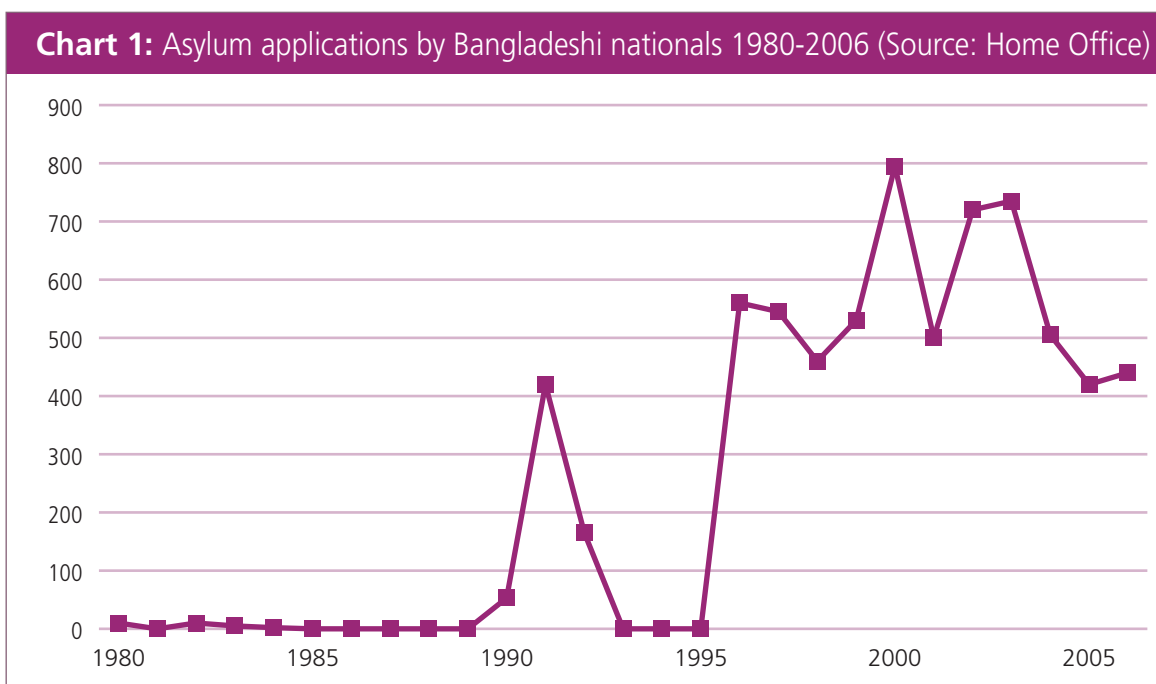
<sup>25</sup> Adams, C. (1987) *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, London: THAP Books.

<sup>26</sup> IOM & Ministry for Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment, 2004.

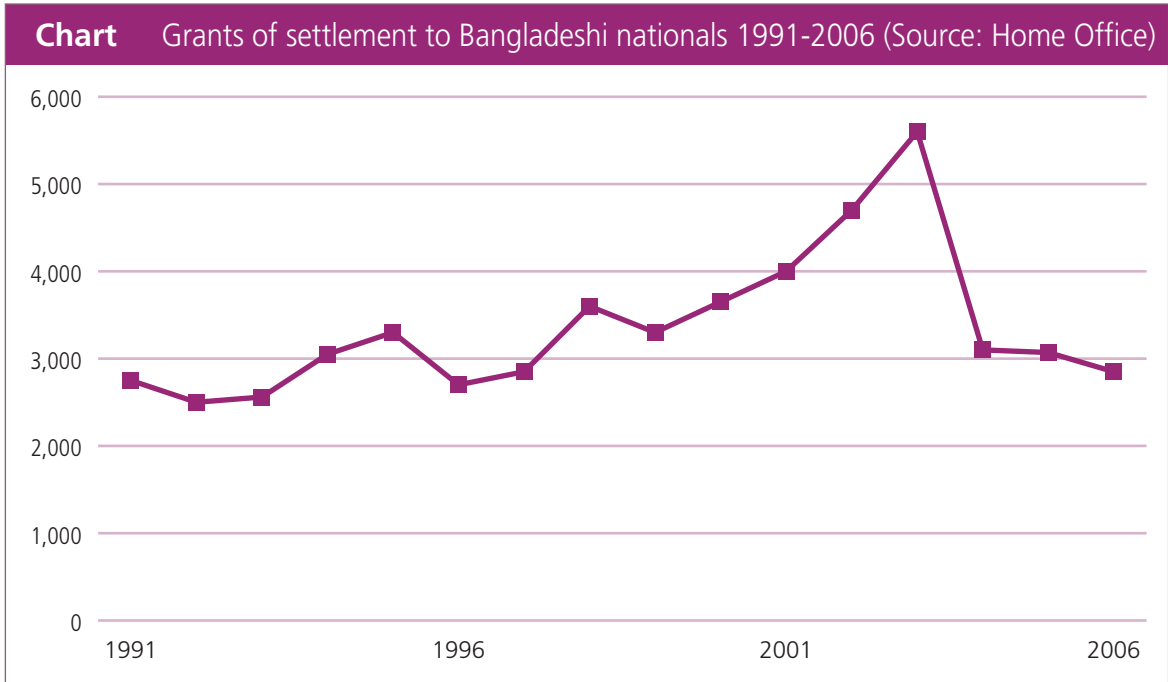
While many of these migrants came with an initial intention of returning, this intention faded for many who were later joined by their families. These first male migrants tended to wait longer than their Pakistani and Indian counterparts before bringing their families to the UK and it was not until the 1970s that there was rapid expansion in the population as wives and dependants joined their husbands in Britain.<sup>27</sup> Family reunification started in the late 1960s, peaked in the 1970s, and continued at reduced levels during the 1980s.

As with other parts of the sub-content, students and skilled migrants currently form the majority of Bangladeshis arriving in the UK and most of these new migrants are from non-Sylhet areas.

Until 1996 asylum applications to Britain had been traditionally low except for the years 1991-92 possibly as a result of the cyclone in April 1991 which killed over 100,000 Bangladeshis. Since then there has been a marked increase as illustrated by Chart 1. However, at a total of 6,221 since 1980, this figure still remains relatively low when compared to grants of settlement, of which 39,680 were granted to Bangladeshis during this same period – see Chart 2.



<sup>27</sup> Commission for Racial Equality (2007), *A guide to ethnic groups in Britain*, online. [www.83.137.212.42/sitearchive/cre/diversity/ethnicity/bangladeshi.html](http://www.83.137.212.42/sitearchive/cre/diversity/ethnicity/bangladeshi.html)



The Bangladeshi community continues to settle permanently in the UK. Between 2000 and 2006 an average of 5,119 Bangladeshi nationals were acquiring British citizenship every year compared to 2,818 a year during the 1990s – see Chart 3. This increase is potentially in anticipation of the changes introduced in the *Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act* of 2002, which amended British nationality legislation including a provision for citizenship ceremonies and a requirement for naturalisation as a British citizen that the applicant has sufficient knowledge about life in the UK.



## 6 Community Demography and Key Locations

Bangladeshi Muslim population  
in England (2001): 254,704<sup>28</sup>

Bangladesh-born Muslim population  
in England (2001): 139,053<sup>29</sup>

Unlike the majority of the other communities in this study, official surveys in England record Bangladeshis as a discrete ethnic group. This means that unlike population figures provided for other communities, the figures for Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani populations include individuals born in Britain and other countries. The Bangladeshi population in the UK has grown rapidly, from 6,000 in 1961 to 162,835 in 1991, and is now estimated to be over double that figure. According to the 2001 Census, there were 275,395 Bangladeshis living in England of which 254,704 reported their religion as Muslim, 17 per cent of England's Muslim population.<sup>30</sup> The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates that in 2005 the Bangladeshi population in England was 324,300, including 166,900 in London.<sup>31</sup>

At the time of the 2001 Census, 56 per cent of Bangladeshis in England were born in Bangladesh.<sup>32</sup> The Bangladeshi population is significantly younger than the overall population on average, with 38 per cent of the Bangladeshi community in the UK aged 16 or under in the 2001 Census compared to the UK average of 20 per cent – see Chart 4. Only three per cent of the population is aged over 65 compared to the UK average of 16 per cent.

<sup>28</sup> Census 2001, Standard table S104.

<sup>29</sup> Census 2001, Commissioned table CO644.

<sup>30</sup> Census 2001, Standard table S104.

<sup>31</sup> Office for National Statistics Population Estimates by Ethnic Group, 2001 – 2005.

<sup>32</sup> 2001 Census.



The Bangladeshi Muslim community is the most concentrated and ethnically segregated Muslim community in England with 43 per cent the population concentrated in only seven London boroughs.<sup>33</sup> Given the size of the population in England, there are few large Bangladeshi communities outside of London apart from Birmingham (19,309), Oldham (9,470), Luton (7,277) and Bradford (4,443). In 2001, 82 per cent of local authority areas had less than 500 Bangladeshi Muslims, and 52 per cent had less than 100.<sup>34</sup> While the Bangladeshi population forms a significant part of the Muslim population in Luton (27 per cent) and Oldham (39 per cent), Bangladeshis in Birmingham (14 per cent), Bradford (6 per cent) and Manchester (9 per cent) form a small percentage of the total Muslim population.

Table 1 shows the Bangladeshi Muslim population figures in 2001 across Government Office regions in England as well as the proportion of the Muslim population that they constitute in each region. While over three-quarters of England's Bangladeshi Muslim population is based in London, West Midlands and the North West, Bangladeshis only comprise over 20 per cent of the total Muslim population in London (24 per cent), East of England (22 per cent) and the North East (21 per cent). Only 5.9 per cent of Muslims in Yorkshire and the Humber and 9.2 per cent of Muslims in the East Midlands are Bangladeshi.

<sup>33</sup> For further analysis and discussion about the ethnic segregation of the Bangladeshi community see Ceri Peach, 'Islam, ethnicity and South Asian religions in the London 2001 census', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 31, No. 3, September 2006, pp. 353-370 and Ceri Peach (1996), 'Does Britain have Ghettos?', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 21:1, 216-235.

<sup>34</sup> 2001 Census, S104.

**Table 1: Regional distribution of Bangladeshi Muslim population 2001**  
(Source: Census 2001, C104)

Region	Bangladeshi population (2001)	Bangladeshi Muslim population (2001)	% of Bangladeshi population that is Muslim	% of total Bangladeshi population in England	% of region's Muslim population (2001)
London	153,893	142,931	93	56.1	23.5
West Midlands	31,402	29,069	93	11.4	13.4
North West	26,003	24,182	93	9.5	11.8
East of England	18,504	16,995	92	6.7	21.5
South East	15,358	14,202	92	5.6	13.1
Yorkshire and the Humber	12,331	11,111	90	4.4	5.9
East Midlands	6,923	6,428	93	2.5	9.2
North East	6,168	5,586	91	2.2	20.7
South West	4,813	4,200	87	1.6	17.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>275,395</b>	<b>254,704</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>16.7%</b>

Table 2 shows the local authorities with the largest Bangladeshi population according to 2005 ONS estimates as well as the proportion of the total local authority population and Muslim population that they comprise based on 2001 Census data.

**Table 2: Local authorities with largest Bangladeshi Muslim populations  
(Source: Census 2001, S104)**

Local authority area	Bangladeshi population	Bangladeshi Muslim population	% of total Bangladeshi population who are Muslim	Bangladeshi Muslims as a % of total local authority Muslim population
Tower Hamlets	65,553	62,059	95	86.9
Newham	21,460	19,857	93	33.5
Birmingham	20,835	19,309	93	13.8
Camden	12,568	11,768	94	51.4
Oldham	9,821	9,470	96	39.4
Luton	7,639	7,277	95	27.0
Hackney	5,969	5,020	84	18.0
City of Westminster	4,999	4,713	94	22.1
Bradford	4,970	4,443	89	5.9
Redbridge	4,226	3,971	94	13.9
Islington	4,232	3,600	85	25.2
Southwark	3,642	3,395	93	20.2
Manchester	3,653	3,341	91	9.3
Enfield	3,523	3,311	94	12.6
Sandwell	3,431	3,280	96	25.1

As the table above shows, the Bangladeshi population in England is heavily concentrated in London and in particular the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. A study on the geography of ethnic Muslim communities in London by Ceri Peach found that the Bangladeshi population is the most geographically concentrated ethnic Muslim community in London.<sup>35</sup> He notes that:

*Bangladeshis seem a totally encapsulated community, with no linguistic or other ties to the Punjabi-Gujarati-Hindi grouping and is isolated despite Islam from its Indian and Pakistani co-religionists.*<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Peach, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

London's East End forms the epicentre of the community, mostly concentrated in Tower Hamlets and the surrounding boroughs of Westminster, Islington, Camden, Hackney, Newham and Southwark. In 2001, 110,412 Bangladeshi Muslims, or 43 per cent of the Bangladeshi Muslim population, inhabited this inner London ring. The Bangladeshi population of Tower Hamlets was estimated at 63,800 in 2005, representing 20 per cent of the England's Bangladeshi population and in 2001 represented 87 per cent of the Muslim population in the borough. Tower Hamlets and Camden (51 per cent) are the only local authority areas where Bangladeshis form the majority of the Muslim population. Bangladeshis also form a significant part of the total Muslim population in Newham (34 per cent).





## 7 Socio economic situation

Bangladeshis in England experience disproportionately high rates of unemployment, are considerably more likely to live in social housing or housing association properties, and have lower education outcomes in secondary and tertiary education compared with many other ethnic groups. A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2007 found that 65 per cent of Bangladeshis are living in poverty, including 70 per cent of Bangladeshi children.<sup>37</sup> A report by the Social Exclusion Unit in 2004, *Tackling Social Exclusion: Taking stock and looking to the future*, reported that as an ethnic group Bangladeshis remain particularly vulnerable to social exclusion and continue to fare worse on a number of key indicators compared to other ethnic groups.<sup>38</sup>

Most respondents spoke about the socio economic deprivation faced by the Bangladeshi community and the impact of this on the community and young people. The words of one respondent sum up the widespread concern shared by other interviewees:

*Bengali people are one of the most deprived communities in the Country, yet when you read racist publications and manifestos of the British National Party you will get the impression that we get 'everything' whilst the whites get nothing! If we get everything, why are we living in some of the worst conditions, why do we live in poverty, why does the education system fail our kids? Why are kids susceptible to drugs?*<sup>39</sup>

However, despite differences in comparison to other ethnic groups, there has been considerable absolute progress in labour market and educational outcomes for Bangladeshi men and women. For example, a report by Communities and Local Government found that from the period 1994-95 to 1996-97 to the period 2003-04 to 2005-06, the proportion of Pakistani and Bangladeshi people living in low income households decreased from 73 per cent in 1994-97 to 57 per cent.<sup>40</sup> The proportion of children living in low income households also fell 20 percentage points for the Pakistani and Bangladeshi group.<sup>41</sup> Bangladeshi children have also overtaken Pakistanis at school, as well as narrowed the gap with Indians.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Guy Palmer and Peter Kenway (2007) *Poverty among ethnic groups: How and why does it differ?* London: JRF. Also see: Lucinda Platt (2007) *Poverty and Ethnicity in the UK*, JRF and Ken Clark and Stephen Drinkwater, *Ethnic Minorities in the Labour Market: Dynamics and Diversity*, JRF.

<sup>38</sup> Social Exclusion Unit (2004) *Tackling Social Exclusion: Taking stock and looking to the future*, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

<sup>39</sup> Bangladeshi community interviewee: male, 30s.

<sup>40</sup> Data obtained from Communities and Local Government, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> 'From Brick Lane to the fast lane', *The Economist*, 2007.

### 7.1.1 Employment

Despite improvements, Bangladeshi men and women are under-represented in the labour market and unemployment and economic inactivity rates are significantly above the national average. Bangladeshi women have the lowest percentage of any major ethnic group in the formal labour market, a fact that has received considerable academic and policy attention.<sup>43</sup> Table 3 shows recent labour market figures for Bangladeshi males and females. There are evident disparities between Bangladeshi males and females and the rest of the population across all indicators, particularly the employment and inactivity rate for Bangladeshi females.

**Table 3: Bangladeshi Male and Female employment, unemployment and economic inactivity rates (percentages), by ethnicity (national average in brackets), Great Britain 2006-07.**

	<b>Employment Rate</b>	<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	<b>Economic Inactivity Rate</b>
Bangladeshi (males)	61% (79%)	16% (6%)	28% (16%)
Bangladeshi (females)	27% (70%)	18% (5%)	65% (26%)

Source: Labour Force Survey, four quarter average, 4th quarter 2006 to 3rd quarter 2007

The distribution of Bangladeshis within the workforce is also significantly different to the total population, particularly for Bangladeshi males. In 2001, 22 per cent of Bangladeshi males were in managerial and professional occupations compared to 42 per cent of all males of working age in employment in England and Wales, and 44 per cent were in semi-routine or routine occupations compared to 24 per cent of all males.<sup>44</sup> While there has been some movement in recent years, respondents stressed that there are still not enough Bengali professionals and hardly any in managerial posts.

Employment rates for women have been gradually rising in all ethnic groups over previous decades, however the employment rate gap between Pakistani and Bangladeshi women and white women has remained static. Many analyses of the differential have often highlighted disparities in educational levels, English language skill and the number or presence of dependent children as the main causes of these disparities.<sup>45</sup> According to the Census, only 19 per cent of young Bangladeshi women aged 25-39 with one or more dependent children were economically active in 2001 compared to 56 per cent with no dependants. For Bangladeshi males in the same age group the percentages are 84 per cent and 86 per cent respectively.

<sup>43</sup> For example see Ceri Peach (2006) 'Muslims in the 2001 Census of England and Wales: Gender and economic disadvantage', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 29:4, 629-655 and Anthony Heath and Dorren McMahon (1997) 'Education and occupational attainments: the impact of ethnic origins', in Valerie Karn (editor), *Ethnicity in the 1991 Census*, Volume 4: *Employment, education and housing among the ethnic minority populations of Britain*, London: Office for National Statistics, The Stationery Office, 91-113.

<sup>44</sup> Office for National Statistics (2006) *Focus on Ethnicity and Religion*, London: ONS.

<sup>45</sup> Communities and Local Government, 2008.

More recent data and research has challenged some of these conclusions. For example research by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in 2007 found that levels of educational attainment and family composition explains only a small part of the employment gap between Pakistani and Bangladeshi women and white women.<sup>46</sup> Qualitative research by the DWP found that in relation to accessing employment opportunities, language barriers and poor health were seen by the female participants as the key barriers.<sup>47</sup> Other challenges mentioned in the research, particularly by younger Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, included facing discrimination when trying to enter specific careers and feeling uncomfortable working in particular sectors or working environments. The report recommended that greater assistance was needed for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women seeking to return to the job market, alongside considerations around flexible working for mothers with young children. Some respondents in this study further stressed that the economic inactivity of Bangladeshi women also partly stems from religious and cultural constraints from within the community that restricts their involvement in education and employment, which corresponds with many academic analyses.<sup>48</sup>

Self-employment is a popular route out of unemployment for a large section of the community. Bangladeshi households are much more likely to be reliant on earnings from self-employment than other ethnic groups.<sup>49</sup> Bangladeshis have successfully revived the garment industry and have created a viable commercial industry consisting of small shops, cafes, restaurants, taxi companies and travel agencies. Today many of the Bangladeshi community are part of the curry industry in Britain, and more than eight out of ten 'Indian' restaurants in the UK are owned by Bangladeshis.<sup>50</sup> Other than the curry business, Bangladeshi businesses also include grocery shops or markets and there are many travel and money exchange services to meet the needs of the community. More entrepreneurs have also become involved in the media. The first Bangladeshi channel, Bangla TV, was established in 1999, and later another channel called Channel S was set up in 2004.

<sup>46</sup> Between 1970 and 2005, when women's family positions were taken into account, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women were still between 27 and 31 percentage points less likely than white women of similar family circumstances to be in employment. Berthoud, R. and Blekesaune, M. (2007) *Persistent employment disadvantage*. Department for Work and Pensions Research Report No 416, London: DWP.

<sup>47</sup> Aston, J., H. Hooker, R. Page, & R. Willison (2007) *Pakistani and Bangladeshi women's attitudes to work and family*, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 458.

<sup>48</sup> For further analysis of religious and cultural constraints on socio economic outcomes of Bangladeshi women see Peach (2006) and Heath and McMahon (1997).

<sup>49</sup> Department of Work and Pensions (2001-02), *Family Resources Survey*.

<sup>50</sup> Audrey Gillan, 'From Bangladesh to Brick Lane', *The Guardian*, 21.6.2002. According to the Curry Club of Great Britain, there are 8,500 Indian restaurants in the UK, of which roughly 7,200 are Bengali.

### 7.1.2 Housing

More than half of the respondents highlighted housing and/or overcrowding as an issue. Factors contributing to this include unaffordable housing and long council waiting lists. Additionally, a lot of new developments have only one or two bedrooms which do not meet the needs of larger extended families. Council housing policies are also seen as racist and contributing to segregated communities. A number of female respondents highlighted the lack of housing provision for women fleeing domestic violence. As well as these external problems, some feel that there are internal cultural pressures that force people to remain in overcrowded houses. Young couples are particularly affected and feel that moving out can often be seen as a rejection of family and community, and carries with it the risk of being disowned by their families.

Bangladeshis are the most highly socially housed ethnic group and are also more likely to experience dissatisfaction with housing arrangements than other ethnic groups. Based on a four year moving average between 2003 and 2007, 55 per cent of Bangladeshis live in council or housing association properties compared to 18 per cent of white residents and 15 per cent of Pakistani residents.<sup>51</sup> This is up from 48 per cent in the 2001 Census. In 2001, 44 per cent of Bangladeshi households were classified as 'overcrowded', the highest among any ethnic group, and considerably higher than the UK average of seven per cent. According to the Census, the average Bangladeshi Muslim household size is 4.6 people, the highest of any ethnic group.

According to the survey of English housing, dissatisfaction with housing among Bangladeshi households increased from 20 per cent to 25 per cent between 2002-03 and 2006-07.<sup>52</sup> Along with black African households (21 per cent), Bangladeshis were the most dissatisfied with housing arrangements in 2006-07. In 2006-07, Bangladeshis also had the lowest levels of owner occupation at 37 per cent. Among all ethnic groups Bangladeshi households are one of the least likely to be headed by a lone parent in Great Britain. In 2001, only 12 per cent of Bangladeshi households were headed by a lone parent compared to 22 per cent of all households in Great Britain<sup>53</sup> and Bangladeshis had the lowest percentage of one-person households in Great Britain among all ethnic groups at nine per cent.

### 7.1.3 Education

Improvements in GCSE results provide positive indications that there will be continued improvements in labour market outcomes for Bangladeshis, and that programmes that have targeted ethnic minority students have produced excellent results.

Bangladeshi pupils saw the greatest improvement among all ethnic groups between 2005 and 2007 in achieving the equivalent of five or more A\*-C GCSEs (including English and mathematics).<sup>54</sup> Between 2003 and 2007 Bangladeshi boys attainment improved by 14 percentage points, and girls by 12 percentage points.<sup>55</sup> Bangladeshi children have now overtaken Pakistanis at school and have narrowed the gap with Indians students, the most successful south Asian group.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Survey of English Housing, four-year moving average, 2003-04 to 2006-07.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Census 2001.*

<sup>54</sup> *National Pupil Database.*

<sup>55</sup> *National Pupil Database.*

<sup>56</sup> *The Economist, 2007.*

However, despite their good GCSE performance, Bangladeshi students are less likely on average to stay on in school after the age of 16 than Pakistanis. Furthermore, a respondent who worked as a senior Education Officer in a local education authority in the north of England stressed that improvements are not uniform across the country. While students' progress in Tower Hamlets has been remarkable, the baseline for measuring improvements in other parts of the country still lags considerably below national average attainment levels. He suggested that educational strategies adopted by individual schools and educational authorities in different parts of the country can have a significant impact on educational outcomes for children.

Bangladeshi students are also showing improvement in further education outcomes. According to the Learning and Skills Council, success rates for Bangladeshi Learning Skills Council-funded learners in further education has increased from 71 per cent in 2004-05 to 74 per cent in 2006-07.<sup>57</sup> In 2005-06 32 per cent of Bangladeshi females and 29 per cent of Bangladeshi males were entering higher education by age 19.<sup>58</sup> However, according to some respondents, despite the fact that girls are doing increasingly well at school, many are still being prevented from entering higher education due to parental and family restrictions. Eighty-eight per cent of Bangladeshi males aged 25 to 39 with degree or equivalent qualifications are economically active compared to 84 per cent of all Muslim males in the same age group in England and Wales.<sup>59</sup> However, proportionately fewer Bangladeshis with first class degrees enter into the top three occupational groups than any other ethnic group.<sup>60</sup>

While there has been considerable focus on educational outcomes for different ethnic groups in England, some research indicates that it is not a useful explanatory variable of analysis. For example, *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society* (2007) highlighted findings from the Department of Children Schools and Families-funded Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE)<sup>61</sup> longitudinal study which showed that although ethnicity has an impact on children's attainment, this is not as strong as other background factors, such as mother's highest qualification level, family socio economic status, low income, birth weight and home learning environment. This is corroborated to some extent by a few respondents, who suggested that educational achievement data does not highlight class differentials in outcomes. In contrast to the majority of Bangladeshi children, those of a still small but growing middle class of Bangladeshis across the country are believed to be achieving educational outcomes on par with Indian pupils.

<sup>57</sup> Department for Innovation, University and Skills (2008) *An Analysis of the Relationship Between Prior Attainment and Young Participation by Gender, Socio economic Class and Ethnicity*, London: DIUS.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> ONS, 2006.

<sup>60</sup> Conners, H, Tyers, C, Modood, T, and Hillage, J, *Why the Difference? A Closer Look at Higher Education Minority Ethnic Students and Graduates*, Research Report 552, Institute of Employment Studies, 2004.

<sup>61</sup> The EPPE 3-11 project is a major longitudinal study funded by DCSF. It builds on the work of the earlier Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project (1996-2003) which investigated the impact of preschool provision on a national sample of young children in England between the ages of three and seven years. EPPE 3-11 is following the same sample of around 2,500 children to age eleven, the end of Key Stage 2.

Respondents in primary research conducted for this study reported that problems with education provision are amongst the most pressing concerns within the community. The majority of respondents felt that the education system is not geared to cater for the needs of Bangladeshi or Muslim children, and that it actively suppresses the potential and aspirations of Bangladeshi pupils. Examples provided include individuals being discouraged by teachers from going to University to pursue professional studies such as Law. Education provision is also felt to not cater for the non-academic needs of Bangladeshi pupils, ie the emotional and identity issues they have to face in terms of being Bangladeshi, British and Muslim. The lack of parental involvement is another problem and as most children know more about the education system than their parents, they are able to get very little guidance and support from their parents.

## 8 Key characteristics

### 8.1 Identity

While the primary research in this study was limited, a number of themes did emerge that supported much of the previous research that has been undertaken with Asian and Bangladeshi communities in the UK, particularly with British-born Bangladeshis. For example, research by Modood et al found that second generation Asians adopt hybrid identities such as ‘British-Bangladeshi’ to show and express the two aspects of their culture.<sup>62</sup> This hybrid identity appears to persist in the community although there are obvious differences between different generations – these intergenerational dynamics are discussed in more detail in Section 9.1.

Respondents in this study noted that there is a marked generational difference in people’s views about identity and belonging with respect to national affiliations. Not surprisingly, older people who grew up in Bangladesh have stronger roots and psychological attachments to Bangladesh than Britain, and are more likely to maintain family and financial ties with their country of origin. The second generation, on the other hand, who have been born and brought up in Britain does not have as strong a link, and most of the younger respondents defined their identity as British Bangladeshis.

Linked to this sense of British identity is a greater sense of entitlement among young people who think of Britain as their home. One young respondent explained that whereas older people came as economic migrants who believed that they would one day return to Bangladesh, young people see themselves as citizens with a political and civic identity who contribute and belong here. She stressed that unlike their parents, young people are not prepared to play the role of *grateful guests in Britain*.<sup>63</sup>

The young respondents stated that they have multiple identities that they are quite comfortable with, and which they do not feel any need to debate. According to some of these respondents, there needs to be an understanding and acceptance by authorities and wider society that people can have more than one identity, rather than putting pressure on minorities to assimilate into an imposed brand of Britishness. As one female interviewee explained:

*The question assumes that there are debates taking place. Bangladeshis accept that we are British people ethnically from Bangladesh. We accept a hyphenated identity and therefore do not need to debate about our identity. The idea that there is a clash of civilisation and conflict between identities is socially constructed and designed to fuel racism – that is the real problem and that should be the real debate.*<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Tariq Modood, Richard Berthoud, Jane Lakey, James Nazroo, Patten Smith, Satnam Virdee and Sharon Beishon (1997) *Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage – Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities*, London: Policy Studies Institute.

<sup>63</sup> Bangladeshi community interviewee: female, 20s.

<sup>64</sup> Bangladeshi community interviewee: male, 20s.

However, there are others who do struggle with their different identities and these can cause confusion for some young people. In the words of another young male respondent:

*Most of us do not know who we are and where we belong. When we visit Bangladesh people call us Londoners and think we are English, whilst in England we are not accepted by the English. I support England when it comes to sports, but then you get white English people shouting out racist slogans so I feel confused. There is an identity crises because we do not know enough about our roots and past and at the same time, we suffer from racism and a lack of acceptance. It is this lack of identity that can drive people to extremism, which makes them feel worthy and gives them an identity.<sup>65</sup>*

Whilst most of the respondents thought that the majority of Bangladeshis in Britain remain closely attuned to their religious identity, some suggested that cultural and historical factors play a greater role in how many, particularly older people, view their identity. They suggest that this identity is strongly linked to their cultural heritage, their nationality of origin, and affinities with the politics and political parties of Bangladesh. Hence, for this group of Bangladeshis, religious practices and customs are interpreted and lived through a Bengali historical and cultural lens, rather than through an overt faith orientation that has its roots embedded in the teachings of the Qur'an, Sunnah and Hadith.

Some people who lived through the movements for nationalism and democracy maintain strong political values alongside Islam, which are predicated on a set of core principles enshrined in official Bangladeshi state policy.<sup>66</sup> Eade and Garbin (2005) note that for many other Bangladeshis in Britain, values such as secularism, nationalism, socialism and democracy, linked to the Liberation War (*Muktojudho*) against Pakistan, are core values in defining a cultural/political project in Britain.<sup>67</sup> According to Garbin (2005), the *Shaheed Minar*,<sup>68</sup> which commemorates the martyrs (*shaheed*) of the Language Movement of 1952, is of "symbolic importance" for these British Bangladeshis in addition to celebrations marking the Bengali New Year and the Independence Movement of 1971.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Bangladeshi community interviewee: male, 20s.

<sup>66</sup> 'The principles of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah, nationalism, democracy and socialism meaning economic and social justice constitute the fundamental principles of state policy.' Source: Statistical Pocket Book Bangladesh, 2007; Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics: [www.bbs.gov.bd](http://www.bbs.gov.bd)

<sup>67</sup> Dr David Garbin, 'Bangladeshi diaspora in the UK: some observations on socio-cultural dynamics, religious trends and transnational politics', presented at the SOAS Conference on Human Rights and Bangladesh, June 2005.

<sup>68</sup> The Shaheed Minar is a national monument located in Dhaka, capital of Bangladesh, raised in commemoration of those killed during the Language Movement demonstrations of 1952.

<sup>69</sup> Garbin, 2005.



Recent research undertaken by Hussein (2007) suggests however that growing numbers of people, predominantly young Bangladeshis are beginning to view the nationalist and secularist interests of the older generation as outdated and out of touch.<sup>70</sup> Many are believed to be in the process of questioning their identity, their sense of belonging and 'returning' to their religion. Research by the University of Surrey based on field work in 2005-06 found that young Bangladeshis often prioritise their Muslim identity with their Bangladeshi identity secondary to this, while Englishness was seen by respondents in the study to be associated with 'whiteness'.<sup>71</sup> Respondents agreed that increasing numbers of young Bangladeshis identify themselves as Muslims first and foremost and consider this to be an integral part of their identity. Additionally, the Bengali cultural aspect of their identity is not as salient to them as it was for the older generation and they are now more likely to see themselves as part of a larger, more 'homogenous' Muslim community.

A study by Barrett *et al* contended that the growth of Islamic beliefs and sense of brotherhood has flourished in the context of alienation and multiple pressures from different cultures, as well as being formed and embedded within the process of global capitalism, production, trade, consumption, mobility and dislocation/relocation.<sup>72</sup> However, some respondents suggested that the socio economic marginalisation of Bangladeshis is fuelling an internal solidarity within the community which is contributing to a growing polarisation between identifying with mainstream British culture and their Muslim identity. Consequently, religion has become the primary vehicle through which the fight against real or perceived discrimination is being conducted. This new identity is hence both a reaction to, and a defence against, the experience of poverty and racism.

## 8.2 Religion

Islam is the official state religion of Bangladesh with Muslims constituting 88 per cent of the population. Minority faith communities include Hindus who comprise nearly 10 per cent of the population, and others such as Buddhists and Christians who make up the remaining two per cent.<sup>73</sup> In England, 92 per cent of Bangladeshis classify themselves as Muslim. However, it was stressed by a number of respondents that levels of religious adherence varied within the community and some are not followers of any particular school of thought.

<sup>70</sup> Hussain, D (2007) 'Globalization, God and Galloway: The Islamization of Bangladeshi Communities in London' in *Journal of Creative Communications*, 2:1, 189-218.

<sup>71</sup> Martyn Barrett; John Eade; Marco Cinnirella; and David Garbin (2006) *David, New ethnicities among British Bangladeshi and mixed-heritage youth*. Published reports from the Department of Psychology. Paper 2.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2007) 'Bangladesh Census results at a glance'. [www.bbs.gov.bd](http://www.bbs.gov.bd).

Respondents point to a diverse and varied religious landscape that incorporates many different schools of thought. The consensus however is that the majority, approximately 85 per cent, of the community are Sunni followers of the Hanafi school, and it was mentioned by respondents that a small number of Bangladeshis follow the Shafi school. Within the Hanafi school of thought there are various ideological sub-groupings including the Barelvis, Deobandis, Tablighi Jamaat and Sufis, but these distinctions are often not clear-cut. For example, there are Barelvis who subscribe to the Fultoli<sup>74</sup> or the Tablighi Jamaat,<sup>75</sup> and Salafis who are involved with the Jamaat-e-Islami.<sup>76</sup> Sufis also cuts across both Barelvi and Deobandi groupings and overlap and as such add an extra layer in many cases rather than separate identities. A number of respondents suggested that Sufism is widely practised within the community. Some expressed a view that Bangladeshis subscribe to a 'softer' version of Islam, which was spread and mediated mainly through the Sufi tradition and is associated with the culture of Bengal. In the words of one respondent: *Ours is a 'folk religion' that has Bengali culture closely intertwined with it.*<sup>77</sup>

Respondents were divided in their views about whether or not these religious groupings and denominations influence social, political and civic relations within the Bangladeshi community. It was secular groups and individuals who initially informed politics, social and civic relationships within the Bangladeshi community. However, now religion and religious organisations are seen to be engaging and contributing more to the political, social and civic realms of society, but respondents differed in their opinions about the extent of their political impact. Some did not think that they inform community politics much at all; whilst others thought that the Tablighi Jamaat, Deobandi and Barelvis have considerable influence on politics and that some mosques are closely affiliated to the agendas of political parties in Bangladesh.

<sup>74</sup> Barelvi movement named after Islamic scholar Allamah Abdul Latif Chowdhury from Fultoli, Sylhet.

<sup>75</sup> The Tablighi Jamaat was founded in India in the 1920s by Maulana Muhammed Ilyas Kandhalawi with the aim of renewing Muslim society that was seen to be in danger of losing its identity to the majority Hindu culture. Maulana Kandhalawi was a prominent member of the Deobandi movement and the Jamaat is often closely associated with it. However it stressed that whilst it has maintained some association with Deobandi it is a separate movement.

<sup>76</sup> The Jamaat-e-Islami was founded in India in 1941 by Syed Abul Ala Maududi and is currently the largest Islamist political party in Bangladesh. It strongly opposed the 1971 secession from Pakistan, and was subsequently banned after the creation of the new Republic. It resumed political activities in Bangladesh after the 1975 coup that brought Major General Zia Ur-Rehman to power.

<sup>77</sup> Bangladeshi community interviewee: male, 40s.

### 8.2.1 Places of worship

The most significant mapping of Bangladeshi mosques and religious movements has been conducted by David Garbin from the University of Surrey.<sup>78</sup> Garbin notes that religious practice has evolved from small prayer rooms in council flats and private premises to the construction and conversion of larger facilities during the 1980s and afterwards. This included the East London Mosque and a number of synagogues and community halls which were turned into mosques.

**Table 4: Main Bangladeshi community religious trends and Mosques in London, Birmingham and Oldham (Source: Garbin, 2005).**

Orientation	London	Birmingham	Oldham
<i>Jamaat-e-Islami</i>	<i>Jamitul Ummah</i> on Bigland Street	<i>Dawat'ul Islam</i> (Green Lane, Small Heath)	Werneth Mosque
<i>Tabligh Jamatt</i>	<i>Markazi Masjid</i> on Christian Street	Finch Road Mosque, Shah Jalal Mosque (Lozells), <i>Madina Masjid</i> (Saltley)	<i>Al-Khazra Markazi Mosque</i> (Chadderton, Cold Hurst)
<i>Barelvi</i>	London <i>Jamme Masjid</i> on Brick Lane ( <i>Futoli</i> )	Wills Street Mosque ( <i>Futoli</i> , Lozells), Sha Jalal Mosque ( <i>Futoli</i> , Aston), Albert Road Mosque ( <i>Futoli</i> , Handsworth), Witton Road Mosque ( <i>Futoli</i> , Aston)	<i>Al Jalaliah Madrassah</i> ( <i>Futoli</i> , Chadderton), Glodwick Mosque ( <i>Futoli</i> ), Coppice Mosque ( <i>Futoli</i> )

While many of these mosques may have a majority of Bangladeshi attendees or on the mosque committee, most mosques are not ethnically homogenous. A few respondents explained that culturally orientated mosques were changing and accommodating more ethnically diverse Muslims, such as the East London Mosque, Regents Park Mosque in London, Redbridge Mosque in London, Loughborough Mosque in Leicester and the Northampton Mosque. However, this is not always the case as one respondent explained:

*Ethnicity does play a part and this is partly because the community needs of the Bangladeshis are different say to the Pakistanis. Mosques serve the needs of the community and each community has its own specific needs that need to be dealt with. So if a mosque exists and is mainly run by Bengali people, it is the Bengali people who will attend. Likewise, if a mosque is run by Pakistanis then it will be attended by Pakistanis and so on.*<sup>79</sup>

While attendees can be of different community and ethnic backgrounds, it does not necessarily follow that there is much mixing between worshippers. In some mosques, worship by different communities may be organised at different times or days of attendance.

<sup>78</sup> Garbin, 2005.

<sup>79</sup> Bangladeshi community interviewee: male, 50s.

Language also plays a large role although this is reported to be waning because the younger generation of Muslims that have been born here share a common language and as such Mosques are starting to become increasingly welcoming to diverse communities.

There has been much media commentary and recent publications highlighting the role of Hizb-ut-Tahrir in attracting young Muslims as members and supporters of a radical political programme based on Islamic principles and as the 'vanguard' of a worldwide Islamic revolution. They are seen as particularly active on campuses in further and higher education institutions, including in East London. However, research by Garbin (2005) suggests that the Hizb-ut-Tahrir activists have had little apparent success in propagating its ideology to the Bangladeshi community in London.<sup>80</sup>

It has been suggested by commentators that second and third generation Bangladeshis, who were born and have grown up in Britain, use and comprehend Islam in ways that do not always align to the understanding provided by Imams and other religious leaders who have come to the UK as migrants or refugees.<sup>81</sup> Currently in the UK there are few Bengali Imams who were born and educated here. The call for British-born Bengali Imams to be educated in the UK is not an isolated one. There are diverse communities of Muslims currently discussing this issue, in some cases schools are already educating British Imams, whilst in others young British Imams are now practicing across the country.

Existing research has also focused on the conflicts between secular and religious factions in the Bangladeshi community.<sup>82</sup> Eade and Garbin use the example of religious and secular struggles surrounding the *Baishaki Mela* and the *Shaheed Minar* to illustrate the tensions between differing groups within the community and the struggle for the appropriate use of community space. They describe how the *Baishaki Mela* was introduced to Brick Lane in 1998 and presented as a cultural event to reflect the distinctiveness of an ethnic/cultural 'community' in Britain based on a secular nationalist Bengali heritage and how its interpretation was challenged by leaders from the East London Mosque and affiliated organisations, who criticised the event as lacking in morality.<sup>83</sup> Eade and Garbin also detail how the erection of the *Shaheed Minars* in London and Oldham created a point of tension between Islamists and secularists.<sup>84</sup> Tension between secularists and Islamists during the visits by Maulana Delwar Hussain Saydee,<sup>85</sup> a (non-Sylheti) *Jamaat-e-Islami* MP in Bangladesh are further used by Eade and Garbin to highlight these divisions.<sup>86</sup>

However, while these tensions can obviously erupt from time to time, it has been stressed by some community representatives that the community is in reality not as strongly divided along religious and secular lines as academic research suggests.

<sup>80</sup> Garbin, 2005.

<sup>81</sup> Hussain, 2007.

<sup>82</sup> Eade and Garbin, 2002 and 2006 and Garbin 2005.

<sup>83</sup> John Eade and David Garbin, 'Competing Visions of Identity and Space: Bangladeshi Muslims in Britain', *Contemporary South Asia*, Volume 15, Number 2, June 2006, pp. 181-193.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> In Tower Hamlets, violence erupted around the East London Mosque where Saydee was delivering a speech in 2001.

<sup>86</sup> Garbin, 2005.

## 8.3 Language

The state language Bangla (Bengali) is spoken by about 95 per cent of the population in Bangladesh.<sup>87</sup> English is also widely used in commerce and administration.<sup>88</sup>

The main language spoken in the UK is Sylheti, which some consider to be a dialect of Bengali due to the many similarities between the two, whilst others suggest that it is distinct language due to significant differences between them.<sup>89</sup> In the past it had its own script but now uses the standard Bengali script.

There is limited data on languages spoken in the community and most data relies on small sample sizes and often draws what could be argued is a false distinction between Sylheti and Bengali. The Health Survey for England in 1999 found that 54 per cent of Bangladeshis aged 16 and over used Bengali as their main language, followed by Sylheti (25 per cent) and English (20 per cent).<sup>90</sup> An International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Mapping Study in 2006 found that Bengali was the preferred language for receiving communication closely followed by Sylheti and then English.<sup>91</sup> Because Sylheti does not have a written form Bengali is the preferred medium for newspapers and leaflets, however Bengali (53 per cent) also had a small edge over Sylheti (50 per cent) as the preferred language for receiving communication via television and radio.<sup>92</sup> According to a Greater London Authority report, 90 per cent of Bangladeshi Londoners do not use English as the main form of communication in the household.<sup>93</sup> However, this is likely to be changing, with a younger generation who is more familiar with English as their primary language.

A distinguishing feature of the community is its ongoing promotion of the rich literary and music traditions of Bengal and Bengali language and culture. This tradition encompasses many renowned novelists, film makers, musicians and poets, the latter also contributing greatly to the musical canon of the region, most notably, poets such as Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Jibananda Das and Shamsur Rehman. The national anthems of both India and Bangladesh are Tagore compositions in Bengali. The Bangladeshi diaspora in the UK has also made a significant contribution across a range of art forms, including Joy Bangla in popular music, Akram Khan in contemporary dance and the novelist Monica Ali. A number of respondents suggested that whilst some Muslim conservatives within and outside the Bangladeshi community may condemn art and music,<sup>94</sup> these can be an important vehicle for involving young Bangladeshis and challenging fundamentalism.

<sup>87</sup> Home Office (2006) *Country Origin of Information Bangladesh*.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Bangla is spoken by over 98 per cent of the population, suggesting that in Bangladesh the status of Sylheti is that of a Bengali dialect.

<sup>90</sup> Department of Health (1999) *Health Survey for England – The Health of Minority Ethnic Groups*, London: DoH.

<sup>91</sup> International Organisation for Migration (2006) *Mapping Study – Bangladeshi Community*, London: IOM.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Data Management and Analysis Group (2006) *A Profile of Londoners by Language – An analysis of Labour Force Survey data on first language*, London: Greater London Authority.

<sup>94</sup> In a recent incident at Rajshahi University campus in western Bangladesh, the Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami threatened to 'burn alive' what they call 'anti-Islam cultural activists in the university' for staging a play, alleging that it had defamed Prophet Mohammed. [www.sindhtoday.net/south-asia/](http://www.sindhtoday.net/south-asia/)

## 9 Intra-community Dynamics

### 9.1 Intergenerational issues

As with most other migrant communities, there are reported tensions between the first and second and third generations based on different cultural understandings. However, these dynamics are often more nuanced than a simple generational clash and the idea that young Bangladeshis are 'caught between cultures' simplifies the complexity of their experiences. For example, a study by Mac an Ghail and Haywood on young Bangladeshis in Newcastle found that young Bangladeshis had a sophisticated understanding of their own identity identifying positively, while at times critically, with Bangladeshi culture, they presented an empathetic assessment of their parents' demands upon them.<sup>95</sup> Importantly the authors note that:

*As we stress throughout this study, we need to listen to young people's own understandings; they are not reducible to their choosing either the traditional or Western ways. Rather, they suggest a more 'messy' reality, marked by internal (generational) tensions, complexity and ambiguity. In fact, the young people's accounts revealed a full range of emotions: pleasure, fear, pain, confusion, ambition and hope. Most importantly, their focus suggested that issues of transitions rather than traditions were the most important questions that they and their parents face on a day-to-day basis.<sup>96</sup>*

From interviews with Bangladeshi community respondents in the UMEC study it was clear that the relationship is indeed multifaceted and not reducible simply to a cultural/generational clash. The older generation is more concerned about retaining its cultural heritage, whereas the younger people suggest that they do not necessarily want to retain this cultural identity but want to focus on their life and circumstances in Britain. Research by Eade and Garbin notes that the first generation maintained a strong attachment with their ancestral villages in Bangladesh, through regular visits, the improvement of their family properties, and the regular sending of remittances.<sup>97</sup> Development organisations, known generically as Jonokollan Shomittee, formalised this development assistance during the 1980s to set up educational and religious facilities in Sylhet.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Mairtin Mac an Ghail and Chris Haywood (2005) *Young Bangladeshi people's experience of transition to adulthood*, London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Also for academic work on intergenerational perspectives see Deborah Phillips, C. Davis and P. Ratcliffe (2007) British Asian narratives of urban space, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 32:2, 217 – 234.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Eade and Garbin, 2002.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

By contrast, Eade and Garbin (2002) note that British-born Bangladeshis are more concerned about their own future in the UK and more likely to focus on issues related to discrimination, including Islamophobia and social exclusion.<sup>99</sup>

As a consequence of different interests and perspectives there is a considerable degree of intergenerational conflict, with both accusing the other of not showing enough respect. This conflict is believed to centre to a large extent on the changing aspirations of young women with respect to education, social participation, marriage choices and lifestyles. Most respondents referred to the tensions caused by changing gender roles and the conflict these can create within families. In the words of one respondent:

*There are role expectations with regards to people's gender and this expectation conflicts with the expectations of the mainstream or majority population. The older generation have the outdated view that women belong in the homes, whereas the younger generation feel differently and think differently.<sup>100</sup>*

Most respondents spoke about a lack of comprehension on both sides and communication problems that make interactions between the generations difficult. Older people are perceived by the young as too steeped in the culture of Bangladesh, which they try and impose on their children. In their view, parents are trying to teach their children values that they brought with them from Bangladesh, which can conflict with what young people experience in wider society. This comment by a young male interviewee illustrates a widely held view amongst the majority of respondents:

*There is not much communication between the older and younger generation. Relationships are different between the two generations. The older generation brings with them a lot of cultural baggage and there is not much interaction between the older people and the younger people. What this reflects is that the older generation of people have brought with them their ways of doing things and bringing up children as they did in Bangladesh. Also parents are teaching their values to children whilst the wider world is imposing western values – so there is a conflict between the two.<sup>101</sup>*

According to a few respondents, the concept of Izzat (honour and respect) is very important within the community. Respect for the elderly is a fundamental value and when young people do not comply with the older generation's values and ways of doing things this is interpreted as disobedience and as dishonouring the family. This in turn has further serious impacts on issues such as marriage, the education of women, and the withdrawal of extended family support for those who do not conform.

<sup>99</sup> Eade and Garbin, 2002.

<sup>100</sup> Bangladeshi community respondent: female, 20s.

<sup>101</sup> Bangladeshi community respondent: male, 20s.

However, some older respondents indicated that things are changing, and that many older people do accept that there is a completely different way of thinking and behaving amongst the young due to the different circumstances each generation has lived through:

*My generation of people did not have the opportunity to learn English or receive all the support that young people have these days – there were no educational opportunities when we migrated to Britain. These young people are born and bred here in England and are entitled to an education that is compulsory. This affects the way they see life and the choices they make.<sup>102</sup>*

## 9.2 Young people

Educational attainment and access to professional employment are the key issues that concern the community with regards to young people. A respondent working in education highlighted the lack of role models for young people in relation to the professions due to the lack of education and concentration of the first generation in restaurants and other low skilled jobs. He stressed, however, that the older generation is now really encouraging young people to move into high skilled professional areas with positive results. Despite progress, youth unemployment remains a pressing problem and is seen as one of the key factors contributing to growing problems of alienation, drug use and criminality. Drug use and abuse by young people have become a significant issue in the community and this situation is perceived as getting steadily worse.

In order to combat these problems, respondents spoke of the need for more opportunities for young people, such as sports and recreational activities and supplementary education. There is a strong feeling that youth services need to engage with young people more and that youth centres need to provide more culturally sensitive services in order to enhance their participation, especially that of young women.

Respondents reported that there are not any specific youth organisations and not many established community organisations that reach out to the young people. One respondent noted that young people perceive existing community institutions as being for people of their parent's age. Young people stressed that there is no particular place in which they meet and interact. Interaction takes place in many different places and between many different groups of people. The spaces that allow young people to socialise and share their film, music, educational and other interests include the internet, workplaces, youth clubs, parks, streets, schools and colleges, tube stations, family events or the cinema. There are also gang issues in some areas and members meet in different places depending on their place of residence and area of influence.

<sup>102</sup> Bangladeshi community interviewee: male, 50s.



Schools, youth centres, colleges and community organisations are all seen as important in influencing young people. However, people are critical of the approaches such institutions take, which are seen as more about focusing on their own agendas and funding remits than community needs, or only focussing on one aspect of an individual's problems rather than offering any holistic care and support. Education was cited as an example, whereby the focus is purely on meeting education needs, but for help with any emotional and family issues individuals need to go to different specialists for help.

Some respondents suggested that a few mosques and some civil society organisations have had limited success in reaching young audiences with programmes that are tailored for young people. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was cited by a few respondents as being involved in some work in this area, however its influence and membership is not seen to be significant amongst either young or older Bangladeshis outside London. There is a widespread recognition that more needs to be done to engage young people and that existing projects need to be expanded. Those individuals and organisations that are trying to develop and guide young people towards a more hopeful future stressed that there are many obstacles and forces which they feel work against them, the most pressing being limited resources and facilities.

### 9.3 Women

When Bangladeshi women first arrived in England few sought employment opportunities outside the home and few of them learned English. Most were therefore reliant on family and close friends for their social networks and financial support and their lives were lived mostly within the confines of their local Bangladeshi community and through their transnational links with their families in Bangladesh.<sup>103</sup> Existing research on Bangladeshi women in London found that for most of this first generation of women, religion was critical to their identity and in creating meaning and continuity in their day-to-day lives.<sup>104</sup> It also found that from the 1990s onwards racism in Britain began to differentiate South Asians by their religion rather than as previously by country or language, which is thought to have had an effect of further strengthening women's religiously based identities.<sup>105</sup>

One of the recurring themes in interviews and focus groups was the slowly changing roles and expectations of Bengali women. Amongst the first generation of Bangladeshis, there were huge differences between the genders and very clearly defined roles. Men went to work, while the women stayed at home. A common complaint from male respondents in the study was that women want to be like men rather than adhering to their conventional roles. Whereas the older generation of women accepted that their place was in the home, the younger generation think differently and find such views outdated. However, some women respondents were

<sup>103</sup> Samson, 2007.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

quite outspoken in their views about what they described as the continuing oppression of women in the community, using terms such as servitude and male tyranny to describe the powerlessness that many women still face. This comment by one of the respondents is typical:

*Bangladeshi women are culturally oppressed. Women are seldom heard or seen. There are not enough women's organisations otherwise women would be empowered and be visible in society. Patriarchy and tyranny exists in the community and this is largely why women are oppressed.*<sup>106</sup>

Whilst many women are undoubtedly still controlled by a patriarchal system and confined to their homes, there are definite changes underway.

As mentioned in section 7.1.1, Bangladeshi women have the lowest level of participation in the formal labour market of any major ethnic group in the UK. However, as noted in section 7.1.3, girls are beginning to perform better than boys in education and employment in some areas and more women are getting involved in the wider community. There is also more mixing between the genders. However, respondents stressed that these changes are not yet significant enough and that once young girls are married they still become subject to male control and expectations that limit their freedom and mobility as well as their chances to participate in wider society.

The issue of domestic violence was raised by a significant number of female respondents, along with the lack of adequate and culturally sensitive provision for women fleeing violence. Unable to speak English and unfamiliar with the British culture, they felt that many women feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in mainstream refuges. Those working with women in these circumstances raised the issue of lack of funding for safe places for women to meet and one community worker interviewed spoke of having to counsel women over the phone due to the lack of facilities. These respondents were also critical of the police for not being supportive enough and believe that current laws allow too many guilty men to get away with violence against women.

According to some community workers, women who come from Bangladesh and do not hold British citizenship have no information about their rights or about any sources of help and support. Some are able to access social services but most end up suffering in silence with nowhere to go and often no one to speak to. This is a particularly acute problem in areas outside London where there are much smaller communities. Women end up meeting in each other's homes and relying on other women in their families and community to help them out.

<sup>106</sup> Bangladeshi community interviewee: female, 30s.

Most female respondents spoke of the lack of strong well funded women's organisations, as well as the importance of having organisations run by and for women. According to them, whatever funding reaches the community goes to male organisations and these are unlikely to address the problems and issues that women see as being caused by men in the first place. They stressed that without strong women's organisations, women will not be safe, empowered or helped to become more visible in the public sphere.

## 9.4 Cohesion and integration issues

As the widespread adoption of the term 'British-Bengali' or 'British-Bangladeshi' suggests, the Bangladeshi community has a strong sense of identification with Britain. Furthermore, the Citizenship Survey 2007-08 found that Bangladeshis have a higher than average sense of belonging to the areas and neighbourhoods in which they reside. According to the survey, 34 per cent of the Bangladeshi community report very strong feelings of belonging to their neighbourhood, and 44 per cent have fairly strong feelings of belonging.<sup>107</sup> These figures are equivalent or slightly higher than the national average, which is 34 per cent and 41 per cent respectively.<sup>108</sup> The majority of respondents for this study, and particularly the younger ones, also expressed a strong desire for greater integration. However, the view held by most respondents was that many factors outside their control hinder the process.

Segregated housing and schooling were highlighted as key factors in focus groups which stressed that young people are growing up with very little contact and interaction with white communities. This situation is said to be made worse by what is perceived as endemic racism in areas surrounding the main community in London, where British National Party (BNP) activity is high and which has resulted in the election of BNP councillors in neighbouring boroughs such as Barking and Dagenham. It was suggested that all communities need to understand each other better and that hopefully this could help the BNP and its followers to stop being racist and from deliberately demonising ethnic minority communities. The strength of feeling about the issue of racism was very high amongst all respondents as illustrated by the words of this female interviewee:

*Who are we? Why don't the native English welcome us in this country when we have been living here all our lives and our parents and grandparents have lived here? There is so much racism against us because we are not white and because we are Muslims.*<sup>109</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Communities and Local Government (2008) *Citizenship Survey: 2007-08, (April 2007-March 2008): England & Wales*, London: Communities and Local Government.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Bangladeshi community interviewee: female, 20s.

Beyond racism in and around the local areas where Bengali communities are settled, integration efforts are felt to be hampered by high levels of Islamophobia in the wider community. The government's 'anti-terror' laws are perceived as contributing a great deal towards the problem by fuelling Islamophobia and because these laws are seen as directly discriminatory against Muslims. Some respondents believe that stop-and-search powers have allowed the police greater authority to use racial profiling to target Muslims just because they are Muslims, not because they are guilty of a crime. In the words of one respondent: *We are what the Liberty group has called the Suspect Community*. In contrast to the perception of increased surveillance of the community, many respondents accused the police of doing little to protect mosques from racist attacks.

A number of respondents felt that the debate about integration is essentially one about assimilation and about the majority community imposing its norms and values on migrant communities. There is a strong perception that the government is hypocritical in calling this country diverse and multicultural on the one hand but expecting minorities to follow a prescribed set of norms and values it defines as British. The following comment is reflective of these views:

*What needs to be noted is that we have our norms and values, and these should be respected and not regarded as inferior to the English set of norms and values. We should be recognised by the mainstream culture and accepted by them rather than being perceived as something alien and foreign. It really does not matter how much we do, it never is enough and we are never fully accepted.*<sup>110</sup>

## 9.5 Politics

The affiliation of many older generation Bangladeshis with nationalist political parties like the Awami League has been highlighted earlier. The majority of this generation were also staunch Labour Party supporters and some became actively involved in local politics as elected members. High profile politicians from the community include Baroness Paula Uddin, and Rushanara Ali of the Young Foundation has recently been selected as Labour Party candidate for Bethnal Green and Bow for the next general election. Despite the long and traditional involvement with the Labour Party, many, particularly young people, are turning away from the Party because of its perceived anti-Muslim domestic and foreign policies. George Galloway's Respect Party has a great deal of support from this constituency and is seen to be more understanding and sympathetic towards the issues and concerns of Muslim communities. Twelve Respect councillors, headed by Abjol Miah, were initially elected in Tower Hamlets, but four have since left the party to become Independents and one has returned to Labour.

<sup>110</sup> Bangladeshi community interviewee: female, 30s.

## 9.6 Community strengths

Despite the many problems described by respondents, they also highlighted many key strengths within the community which include:

- It is a large community and hence has a significant political voice and representation, in Tower Hamlets at least
- A growing number of third generation young people are university graduates and working within professional and corporate jobs who are able to combine an active participation in British society whilst being able to maintain their religious and cultural traditions
- It is a hardworking and enterprising community with thriving businesses and a large youth population that can further contribute to the development of the community
- There is little fanaticism or fundamentalism in the community and young Bangladeshis have on the whole steered clear of extremism despite their anger about attacks on their Muslim identity
- There is a strong creative and cultural infrastructure in the community including a thriving literature, music, film and media and festival scene.

# 10 Media

## 10.1 Perceptions of the media

*If I were a non-Muslim, getting all my information from the media, I would think that Muslims were some kind of beasts, and it would be hard to think positively about Muslims. Stories are fabricated, exaggerated, embellished. The media is losing its reputation. It demonises groups and is certainly not a source of honest information.<sup>111</sup>*

This is typical of the strength of views expressed by the majority of respondents about the British media. The portrayal of Muslims in the media is a cause for great anger and the key cause for complaint. Almost all the respondents believed that there is a lot of anti-Muslim bias in the media and that it focuses on a small problematic minority while completely ignoring the majority who are in fact apolitical and law abiding. The following comments exemplify the perceptions of people in the community with regards to the media:

*The British media makes it sound as if the whole Muslim community is rife with extremism – this is so far from the truth. The media must have an interest in manufacturing terrorism.<sup>112</sup>*

Or:

*Recently there has been lots of coverage on Muslims and Islam and the media has decided to focus on the small number of bad people. They do not focus on the good majority who are in fact apolitical. Tabloids sensationalise everything whereas the broadsheets tend to be right wing and by and large they hold anti-Islamic sentiments and views.<sup>113</sup>*

The media is blamed for creating a huge barrier between Muslims and non-Muslims by constantly conveying falsehoods regarding Muslims and Islam. Most people believe that the government should control the media more to make it more just and accountable:

*I can't believe the media can be so free to produce all the rubbish that it does produce. Allowing such a persecution of Muslims via the media shows the discrimination that we have to endure from the government. The government really could not care less about Muslims, yet all this rubbish about 'engaging' with Muslims is taking place. It is such a shame that the media has to treat us like this and get away with it.<sup>114</sup>*

<sup>111</sup> Bangladeshi community interviewee: female, 30s.

<sup>112</sup> Bangladeshi community interviewee: female, 30s.

<sup>113</sup> Bangladeshi community interviewee: female, 30s.

<sup>114</sup> Bangladeshi community interviewee: male, 20s.

Apart from the overriding concern about the portrayal of Muslims in the media, some respondents also complained that the rich history and culture of Bangladesh and Bengalis does not concern the British; hence there is very limited coverage about the Bengali community except when there is a cyclone or a natural disaster.

## 10.2 Media consumption

There are a significant number of newspapers, television and radio stations accessible and widely consumed by the community. There are six Bengali news weeklies in the UK: *Janamat*, *Natun Din*, *Shurma*, *Potrika*, *Sylheter Dak*, and *Euro-Bangla*. Daily papers include *Dainik Bangladesh* and *Daily Itekaf*. While papers and tabloids are mainly used by the older generation, young Bangladeshis have begun publishing *Bangla Mirror*, which is the first English language weekly in the Bangladeshi community. It targets second and third generation Brit-Bangladeshis. Other papers published by young Bengalis are *London Bangla* and *Muslim Weekly*. Various organisations also have their own publications. Greater Sylhet Welfare Council for example publishes an annual souvenir, the *Shurmar Dak*.<sup>115</sup>

An IOM study in 2006 which mapped the media consumption of the Bangladeshi community found that *Janamat* (64 per cent), *Shurma* (48 per cent) and *Dainik Bangladesh* (39 per cent) were the newspapers that were 'read the most' by respondents from the Bangladeshi community.<sup>116</sup> Only 14 per cent of respondents said that they read British newspapers the most.<sup>117</sup>

TV is considered the most powerful medium. Because there are channels that are available in the Bengali language, it is easier for the older generation to comprehend the content of the media and understand world events. Satellite channels include *S Channel*, *Sylhet TV*, *ATN*, and *Bangla TV*. According to a survey published by the Independent TV Commission, '*Bangla TV*' was recognised as one of the two most successful ethnic language TV channels broadcasting to the UK market. In operation since 1998, by July 2002 it surpassed the 10,000 subscription mark and is the only channel that produces its programme in the UK.

There is a Bengali radio channel named *Betar Bangla* and *Sunrise Radio* has a daily one-hour slot for Bengalis.<sup>118</sup> Also quite popular amongst the Bengali community in East London is the Muslim Community Radio (MCR), run by the London Muslim Centre (LMC) during Ramadam. The IOM mapping report found that *Betar Bangla* and *Sunrise* were the most popular radio stations for Bangladeshi respondents followed by *Subras* (based in the Midlands), BBC4 and BB3.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>115</sup> International Organisation for Migration (IOM) & Ministry for Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment, 2004.

<sup>116</sup> Respondents were able to choose more than one option. IOM, 2006.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

Websites are not considered very popular with older people as they are not very familiar with them. As with most communities, the internet is popular as a medium with the younger generation, but most said that they are not really interested in Bangladeshi websites from abroad. There was only one Bengali specific website mentioned by respondents, *ukbengali.com*, which offers current and political affairs content.

There are also magazines such as *Darpan*, which is published in Birmingham. '*Bangla Women*' is a magazine that highlights the lives of successful young expatriate Bengali women to encourage others to take up careers.



# 11 Links with country of origin

As with other early immigrant communities from the Indian sub continent that arrived in the UK during the post-second World War period, the first significant generation of Bangladeshis assumed that their lives in Britain were temporary and that they would return and settle in Bangladesh after making enough money. Subsequent generations, particularly those born in the UK, however maintain a symbolic connection with Bangladesh, in acknowledgement of it being their 'ancestral home' and a place from where they derive their 'cultural roots'. However, research undertaken by Garbin (2005) suggests that in comparison to older generations, few younger Bangladeshis are likely to maintain such links.<sup>120</sup>

## 11.1 Travel

Out of 58,100 trips to the UK made by individuals using a Bangladeshi passport, 20,600 were made by people returning after a temporary leave of absence.<sup>121</sup> While this number is low compared to the total number of Bangladeshis in the UK, individuals travelling on a British passport will not be registered in these figures.

Kinship is extremely important and as there are many family members, relatives, friends living in Bangladesh, visits are made regularly, especially by first generation Sylhetis. Younger generations are also encouraged to retain a link with the 'motherland', but they feel less connected than their parents and grandparents. In addition to donations through charities following political, economic and environment crises, visits are also undertaken by many people for charitable purposes via development Non-Governmental Organisations active in social reforms and poverty reduction. Marriages/wedding ceremonies are still arranged and held in Bangladesh and many people prefer to be buried in Bangladesh. Young Bangladeshis with drug addictions are also reported to be often sent to Bangladesh by their parents for rehabilitation.<sup>122</sup> Many also go to Bangladesh and attend madrasas to acquire religious knowledge.

Many people in the community have business interests in Bangladesh and have invested in many business ventures including hotels, private property and food import businesses. Some still see investing in property in Bangladesh as a safety net in case the British decide to expel its ethnic minorities as the East African countries did in the 60s and 70s. Others maintain assets in Bangladesh left from their parents. UK based businesses are also active in providing large contributions to alleviate natural disasters.

<sup>120</sup> Garbin, 2005

<sup>121</sup> Home Office figures 2006.

<sup>122</sup> Audrey Gillian, 'From Bangladesh to Brick Lane', *The Guardian*, 21.6.2002.

Whilst the volume of travel to Bangladesh remains large, a recent incident at Zia International Airport in Bangladesh in which Rizwan Hussain, a British barrister and prominent presenter on Islam Channel and Channel 5, was badly beaten up by the authorities has shocked the community in the UK and caused many to be more fearful about travelling to Bangladesh. A number of respondents suggested this is not an isolated case and that many less high profile travellers also face harassment by customs at the airport, which this incident has served to highlight.

## 11.2 Remittances

Data on remittances from the UK to Bangladesh is scarce and often does not include informal remittances.<sup>123</sup> In 2002 it was estimated that formal remittances from the UK to Bangladesh totalled US\$151million.<sup>124</sup>

As a result of this pattern of migration, there are strong links between Bangladeshis in the UK and the Sylhet region, evident in what has been termed a 'highly localised geography of prosperity' due to the level of remittances that have been sent to the region from the UK in addition to investment in property.<sup>125</sup> Remittances are sent to poor relatives in Bangladesh to help them either survive or migrate, as well as for religious purposes (*zakat*). This is mainly done by the older generation and the chances are that this may die out with younger generations.

According to Eade and Garbin (2002)<sup>126</sup> many young British Bangladeshis still value Bangladesh as the country of their roots and heritage, it appears that few of them are willing to invest, send money regularly, or stay in the country for a long time. Previous research quoted by Eade and Garbin (2002) on remittances among Bangladeshis suggests that this practice has decreased sharply, from around 85 per cent sending remittances in the 1960s and 1970s to only 20 per cent in 1995.<sup>127</sup> However, respondents indicated that with the arrival of highly skilled migrants from Bangladesh on temporary work permits, and a growing entrepreneurial class that is investing more in business ventures in Bangladesh, there may be another change currently taking place in the pattern and level of remittances.

Money transfers have also been significantly affected by the liquidation of First Solution Money Transfer, a UK based company widely used by the community to transfer money back to their families in Bangladesh, in 2007. The company went bankrupt owing nearly £2million to individuals, the majority of whom were from the Sylhet region of Bangladesh.

<sup>123</sup> For further discussion and description of remittances please refer to the summary report.

<sup>124</sup> Siddique, 2004.

<sup>125</sup> John Eade and David Garbin (2002) 'Changing Narratives of Violence, Struggle and Resistance: Bangladeshis and the Competition for Resources in the Global City' in *Oxford Development Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2002.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

Many people in the community also have business interests in Bangladesh and have invested in many business ventures including hotels, private property and food import businesses. Some still see investing in property in Bangladesh as a safety net in case the British decide to expel its ethnic minorities as the East African countries did in the 60s and 70s. Others maintain assets in Bangladesh left from their parents. UK based businesses are also active in providing large contributions to alleviate natural disasters.

### 11.3 Political links

Respondents provided limited information on political links with Bangladesh. Previous research on the Bangladeshi community in the UK by Garbin (2006) however notes that:

*Older people maintain strong political links with Bangladesh in the form of support for the Bangladeshi National Party, the Awami League, or the Communist Party. This support includes campaigning before elections in Bangladesh, representing the grievances of 'Non-Resident Bangladeshis' returning to Sylhet, helping first generation migrants to get elected in Bangladesh and developing economic activities or protecting business interests in Bangladesh.*<sup>128</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Garbin, 2006.

## 12 Civil Society

### 12.1 Brief overview

A developmental history of Bangladeshi civil society in London has been documented by John Eade and David Garbin.<sup>129</sup> They describe the shift in the East End from social, legal and cultural oriented service delivery in the 1960s by organisations such as the Bangladeshi Welfare Association, to political mobilisation in response to endemic harassment, racism and the struggle to obtain local community resources. This involved forming alliances with local white activists and challenging the grip of elders on leadership, as well as entering party politics, primarily the Labour party.<sup>130</sup> Struggles against Pakistan through the 1960s also had a great impact on the community in London, where many first generation community leaders were actively engaged in fund raising and campaigning activities in support of the Liberation Movement in East Pakistan.<sup>131</sup>

Many of the activists during this time still occupy important positions in the community and in local authority institutions.<sup>132</sup> Eade and Garbin suggest that since the 1990s, there has been a shift from secular to religious structures in East London and funding is reported to have declined for secular Bangladeshi community organisations and increased for religious organisations such as the East London mosque.<sup>133</sup>

For most of the community organisations interviewed for this study, community care funding, membership fees, 'hand outs' and capital from community fundraising projects were the main sources of finance. Many of the respondents felt that a major hindrance to capacity building and community provision was the lack of funding availability. A few of the respondents raised concerns around funding policies which explicitly omit funding for faith or religious related activities or provision. Barriers to engaging with public authorities included communication problems, community members lacking influence and leadership skills in order to be able to engage and work with local authorities and a perception of not being accepted by 'white' dominated authorities.

<sup>129</sup> See Eade and Garbin, 2002.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

## 12.2 Types of organisations and services they offer

According to Eade and Garbin (2002), the issues of social exclusion and participation in civil society among the Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets have been at the centre of debates since community organisations were first set up. They note that from the start the struggle for economic and cultural resources was linked to anti-racist and anti-discrimination approaches involving both self-defence strategies and alliances with pre-existing structures.<sup>134</sup> There are now a significant number of Bangladeshi organisations that reflect diverse interests, ranging from political, generational, health and social welfare to social and cultural activities. However, most respondents, male and female, agreed that provision for women is very limited and highlighted a need for organisations that can enforce the rights of women and deal with issues relating to abuse, domestic violence, forced marriages and immigration.

### 12.2.1 The role of mosques in civil society

There are a number of mosques engaged in partnerships with local authorities to carry out social welfare programmes, including the largest mosque in Tower Hamlets, the East London Mosque. According to Hussain, what is significant about the work of mosques in this respect is that faith has become legitimised by, or has legitimised itself, by organising welfare facilities.<sup>135</sup> Mosques and religious establishments now offer a wide range of services from personal/matrimonial advice to funeral provisions. Some also offer Arabic and Islamic courses and day events for men, women and children, and charity organisations. However, due to lack of funding, provision is limited. An increasing number of establishments rooted in Islamic principles are believed to be instrumental in responding to 'youth at risk' and preventative work on drugs, gangs, homelessness, and curbing anti-social behaviour.<sup>136</sup> However, some respondents stressed that whilst there is an expectation on Imams to take responsibility for young people and their problems, many do not have the skills or the resources to do this. They also suggested that whilst some of the bigger and national mosques are able to do more social welfare work because of their power, money, resources and status, this is not a general pattern, especially outside London.

Respondents had very contradictory views about the role of mosques and religious organisations in providing social and welfare services. Some respondents thought that they are well placed to do this as they have the ability to engage many sections of society. They felt that such organisations have a positive influence and are necessary, but that they find it difficult to maintain services because local authorities do not understand their work in this field and tend to view them primarily as religious establishments and hence not eligible for public funding. Other commentators have also suggested that the failure to fund such organisations would result in a large number of safety nets, not provided by the state, simply disappearing.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Hussain, 2007, p9.

However, other respondents expressed serious reservations about social and public services provision by religious establishments, particularly with regards to their work with young people and women. This latter group felt that some religious organisations have extremely conservative and reactionary agendas and that they should not be in a position to influence young people. They suggested that alternative ways of reaching young people are essential. Some commentators have also suggested that faith communities should not be used to provide welfare services as this enables the state to retreat from the public sphere, thus creating disengagement between the state and Bengali civil society organisations.<sup>138</sup>

### 12.3 Key organisations

The overriding perception of respondents in this study was that civil society structures in the Bangladeshi community are weaker now than they were in the 1970s as there are now only a few organisations with a broad national reach. The Bangladeshi Welfare Association is an umbrella group which continues to operate in Luton, Bradford, Manchester and Newcastle. The Greater Sylhet Development and Welfare Council (GSDWC) was formed in the 1990s with the aim of developing a common platform for the Sylhetis living in UK. Since its inception, it has provided leadership in nation-wide programmes ranging from campaigns for voting rights to combating racial discrimination. GSDWC has twelve regional committees in England and Ireland. It also has branch offices in four districts in greater Sylhet.<sup>139</sup>

Other generic Muslim organisations include The Muslim Council of Britain, though according to respondents its impact outside London is thought to be limited and Young Muslim Organisation (YMO), which is based in London and is part of the Islamic Forum Europe (IFE). YMO emerged in East London in the 1970s to offer an alternative to the secular Bengali youth movements and now has branches in Birmingham, Bradford, Hyde, London, Luton, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle and Oldham. Eade and Garbin note that in its early days YMO was controlled by the Da'watul Islam and 'strongly influenced' by the Jamaat-e-Islami.<sup>140</sup>

IFE works with other organisations like the YMO and Muslimate UK, a women's organisation, and has branches in most European countries. IFE/YMO offer various services for the Muslim communities, such as seminars, study circles, radio programmes, academic courses and fundraising for community issues.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> IOM & Ministry for Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment, 2004.

<sup>140</sup> Eade and Garbin, 2006.

<sup>141</sup> [www.islamicforumeurope.com](http://www.islamicforumeurope.com)

Some of the other civil society organisations mentioned by respondents as important to the Bangladeshi community in England include:

- **Bangladeshi Caterers Association:** Safeguards, promotes and develops the professional and economic interests and socio-cultural values and standards of living of Bangladeshi caterers and other Bangladeshis concerned in the business of catering in United Kingdom.
- **Bangladeshi Community Association of Bradford:** The organisation provides a number of capacity building programmes for the local community including a resource centre and key referral advice agency. The project also works with statutory and voluntary organisation partners on projects related to health, education, employment, housing, welfare rights and crime.
- **Bangladeshi Youth and Cultural Shomiti (Leicester):** Formed in 1974, Bangladeshi Youth and Cultural Shomiti is situated in Highfields where 70 per cent of the Bangladeshi community in Leicester is based. It provides a range of educational, cultural, social and leisure activities to a wide range of people who live in this area.<sup>142</sup> Its education programme offers a number of accredited language and ICT courses.
- **Bangladeshi Youth Movement:** Based in Tower Hamlets, it originated during the late 1960s as an informal group concerned primarily with drama, camping and football activities. The aims of the organisations are to organise educational, social, recreational and religious activities and facilities of a non-party political nature for the benefit of young people in particular, as well as for the community at large throughout the Tower Hamlet boundary. BYM also promotes training and employment activities and advises the community on welfare rights, housing issues etc.
- **Blyda (London):** A community organisation based in Brick Lane, which offers mentoring programmes to young people, makes provision for young girls and offers programmes and activities to the younger generation of people in reference to employment and education.
- **Brick Lane Business Association (London):** Based in Brick Lane it looks after the business interest of local entrepreneurs and businesses around the vicinity.
- **Council of Mosques (London):** This oversees, and was launched to advocate on behalf of, mosques in East London. The Council of Mosques aims to provide closer networking between the mosques in the area, service providers and faith communities. It also provides support and guidance to mosques on planning, health, child protection, forced marriage, safety and other issues.

- **East London Mosque:** The history of the East London mosque dates back to 1910 with the establishment of the London Mosque Fund. Initially operating from a small room, the Fund purchased three houses in 1940 to convert into a Mosque. The current purpose built site was completed and opened in 1985 and has become a landmark in London's East End. However, congregations soon grew too large for the mosque and in 1999 it acquired adjoining land to build the London Muslim Centre, which was opened in 2004.
- **Greater Manchester Bangladesh Association:** The association was formed in 1971 and operates from Shahjalal mosque. It works to support the local Bangladeshi community to alleviate hardship and promote good citizenship. It works with local authority partners and other voluntary groups in the area. Among its services the association provides ICT training, has full time bilingual link workers and runs a regular youth club utilising in-house and local leisure facilities.
- **Jagonari Women's Education Centre (London):** Based in Whitechapel, the organisation provides women with English classes, training and crèche facilities.
- **Lime House Project (London):** Provides employment training opportunities and support to the community, including women. Other services include immigration advice and welfare support, English language classes and Citizenship rights awareness.
- **London Muslim Centre:** Based at the East London Mosque, the LMC offers grassroots services to meet the needs of the community on both an operational and strategic level. It is seen as promoting engagement with society, tolerance and work with multi-faith groups. The Mosque runs classes in ICT training and English. It also has partnership schemes with the local authority to raise punctuality in school attendance. There is a Junior Muslim Circle (JMC) that provides recreational activities for children. For new converts there are 'new Muslims' classes that provide an understanding of Islamic teachings. In the evenings there is an evening madrasah which provides after school education for children. A women's link provides services for women offering health awareness and lifestyle facilities. Also accommodates the Haya Fitness Club.
- **NAFAS (London):** A drugs organisation that caters for Bangladeshis with drug problems.
- **Nirmul Committee (London):** The Committee has had a central role in creating various "Youth Movement" groups in the 1980s including the Banglatown and Shadinata Trust. The essential objective of the organisation, which was founded in Bangladesh in 1992 by Jahanara Imam (the mother of a 'freedom fighter'), is the rehabilitation of Bangladesh liberation ideals and the trials of Bangladeshi war criminals through an active promotion of Bengali secular nationalism in Bangladesh and abroad.
- **Telco (London):** A community organisation that develops leadership and capacity in the neighbourhoods and workplace. Memberships include churches, mosques and trade unions.



- **The Shadinata/Swadhinata Trust (London):** The Trust addresses issues of intolerance, focusing primarily on education strategies, aiming to encourage cultural awareness among Bengali Muslims and ‘outsiders’.<sup>143</sup> Furthermore, the organisation recognises young Bengali experiences of alienation from mainstream society and the restrictions this poses to their potential contributions to a wider arena.<sup>144</sup> In the place of religion, the Shadinata Trust seeks to give Bengali-Muslims pride in their Bangladeshi heritage.

## 12.4 Key influencers

Family is seen as the most important influencing body that is at the heart of everything. Men in general are seen as key influencers who dominate in community affairs, unlike women who are often subjugated by men.

According to interviewees, what makes other people prominent in the community is their position, their networks and their education and knowledge. These include people such as GPs, teachers, youth workers and community workers.

Religion and religious organisations such as the Islamic Society of Britain, MCB, HT, Dawatul Islam and Islamic Forum Europe are also cited as very important though their level of influence varies across different parts of the country.

Local Imams and renowned scholars have a large influence on people and in particular the younger generations who are British educated. Religious scholars and personalities like Suhaib Webb and Amir Khan are said to have a wide reach among young people but they are not British or locally based.

Political parties influence people as well as elected councillors. Both the Labour Party and Respect have considerable influence in the Bangladeshi community. Baroness Uddin is named as a key influence and ex prime minister Sheikh Hasina has had a big impact on the community when she has visited London.

Community welfare associations such as the Bangladeshi Chambers of Commerce and the Catering Association are also said to have a huge impact on the community.

National and international media such as S channel, Peace TV, Noor TV and celebrities such as rappers, film stars and sports personalities are especially influential with young people.

<sup>143</sup> [www.swadhinata.org.uk/](http://www.swadhinata.org.uk/)

<sup>144</sup> Lamarche, D. (2000), “Feasibility Study” *Shadinata Trust, Creating a Centre for Excellence in Arts, Research and Education* (Shadinata Trust, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Central Stepney Regeneration Team, European Union, European Regional Development Fund, London).

## 12.5 Civic engagement and participation

Whilst there has traditionally been a considerable amount of engagement with local authorities, especially in East London, some interviewees suggested there is a growing reluctance amongst many to co-operate with local and central government. They claim that in the present climate many second and third generation Bengalis feel stigmatised by the government and feel that government is an out-of-reach and stratified institution that allows only a select few into its halls of power. The biggest barrier to engagement appears to be mistrust of the government. This feeling which was expressed by a number of respondents is exemplified in the following comment:

*What needs to be remembered is that the government over 90 per cent of the time has a hidden agenda and so people need to tread carefully. The government does not want to fund Muslim organisations, but at the same time, when they need to 'engage' with the Muslim community they will hypocritically visit mosques etc.*<sup>145</sup>

Moreover, the expectation for mosques to 'look out' for potential Muslim terrorists and 'work' with the government is thought by some to be unacceptable: *The mosque is essentially a place for worship, not MI5.*

Respondents stressed that Bangladeshis are severely disadvantaged and deprived according to most measure of deprivation. They do not see authorities dealing with these issues, so the focus on extremism causes a great deal of anger and frustration in the community. Most felt that money being spent on extremism should be used to supplement existing spending on issues relating to poverty, AIDS, drug abuse and domestic violence.

Government policy on domestic and foreign issues was a recurring cause for concern. Anti-terror laws and foreign policy in the Middle East, the war on Iraq and Afghanistan were highlighted as key issues causing unrest within Muslim communities.

Respondents stressed that unless there is a change in government thinking about these issues, problems and disaffection will continue. The community, in particular the older generation, were traditionally Labour supporters as it was seen as the party that supported ethnic minorities. However, this is changing and many are now supporting the Respect party because of its position on Islamic causes.

Another issue highlighted was a lack of awareness about the role of local/public authorities, what they can offer, and how people can get involved. They are also seen as remote and guilty of failure in connecting with grassroots communities. Some interviewees suggested that there needs to be a stronger political will from national level downwards to engage with these organisations and to work with them on long-term plans and not just small short lived projects. Some expressed the view that as Muslims, they are considered suspect and 'radical' and that local authorities are dominated by white people who do not welcome contact and consultation with them.

<sup>145</sup> Bangladeshi community interviewee: male, mid 30s.

A number of respondents highlighted the lack of Muslim representation in higher ranks in different institutions and suggested that this leads to a lack of representation of community interests. Many elected members from the community are thought to lack the skills and confidence to advocate and push for real change. Some also felt that people become politicians and councillors for their own agendas rather than for the benefit of the community.

Views about the police were generally negative and the police are seen as not wanting to genuinely work with the community but to engage in one-sided 'partnership'. Respondents highlighted the need for more and high ranking Muslim police officers, as well as more Muslims in local and central Government to be involved in direct policy making.

Despite the predominantly negative views expressed in this qualitative study concerning civic engagement and partnerships, it is important to note that they contrast significantly to the findings of the Communities and Local Government's Citizenship Survey,<sup>146</sup> which found that Bangladeshis are more likely than the general population to believe that they have an influence on government decision making. Thirty-six per cent of the respondents from the Bangladeshi community felt that they have an influence on decisions at a national level and 50 per cent felt that they influence the decisions made in their local areas. This figure is higher than the national average, which is 20 per cent and 38 per cent respectively.<sup>147</sup>

## 12.6 Civil society capacity building needs

The lack of funding and funding sources is the single most pressing issue stressed by the majority of respondents. According to them, civil society organisations in the Bangladeshi community are hampered by a lack of knowledge of where to go for funding and how to apply for it. These respondents felt that language barriers, poor communication and management skills and a lack of understanding about funding mechanisms mean that many organisations are unable to fully express their needs or present their organisations well to funders.

While many respondents were aware of small pockets of funding such as the Community Development Funding and Prevent, the money is believed to be tied up exclusively with the preventing extremism agenda, which according to them, does nothing for genuine community development. According to some, there is no political will to engage with community institutions and there is not enough guidance and support from the local authorities to help ethnic minority communities to access funds on the same footing as white organisations.

<sup>146</sup> Approximately 10,000 adults in England and Wales as well as a further sample of 5,000 adults from ethnic minority groups are asked questions surrounding race equality, faith, rights and responsibilities of citizens, feelings about their community and participation in politics. In 2003, there was an additional sample of children and young people from the ages of 8 to 15 and 20 local areas.

<sup>147</sup> Communities and Local Government, 2008.

Many groups feel that their work is not recognised or valued by local and central government. In their view, only groups and organisations that have been in existence for a long time and are well established receive any local authority funding. There is a perception that local authorities do not want to fund new groups and organisations, unless these organisations have political backing and influence in the community. Many survive just on membership fees and self-financing through charity dinners and other events to raise the money.

**Key civil society capacity building needs identified by participants include:**

- Transparent and easily accessible community development funding that is not earmarked for specific government and local authority projects and schemes
- Training in management and communication skills, especially in making funding applications
- Physical space and buildings for education and recreational purposes which can accommodate community events for all ages
- Targeted facilities and resources for women, the elderly and young people
- Direct contact initiated by local and central government representatives to make themselves known to the community so that groups can get to know them and feel comfortable talking to them.

## 13 Conclusions and recommendations

The Bangladeshi community is the smallest of the three South Asian communities in England, but the second largest Muslim community. Just over half of this population is resident in London, and 92 per cent of Bangladeshis in Britain identify themselves as Muslim. Outside of London the main communities are in Birmingham, Bradford, Luton and Oldham.

The Bangladeshi community in England originates from a country that has a rich history and heritage. In recent history, Bangladesh has been fraught by violent conflicts as socialist/nationalist and Islamic traditions have fought for political control, with Islam finally emerging as the state religion. These conflicts in the country of heritage continue to impact on and influence developments in the Bangladesh community in the UK to the present day.

The predominantly socialist/nationalist worldview and ideology common amongst the first generation (at least among males) in the UK and association with local Labour politics is being challenged by a growing attraction to Islamic ideologies among younger generations, as well as the consolidation and strengthening of Islamic traditions among women. Young British Bangladeshis see themselves increasingly as part of a broader Muslim community (ummah), with fewer retaining strong affiliations to their Bengali history and cultural heritage. Many academics see this as a response to racism and discrimination and the poverty and alienation experienced by young Bangladeshis.

The community continues to face high levels of socio economic deprivation, which is most acute in the areas of housing, education and employment, including graduate unemployment. There are particular challenges facing young people and women who are not being catered for, and amongst young people these are judged to be a key factor driving them to embrace a more religious identity than their parents and grandparents generations. In addition to an increasing tendency to identify with a Muslim faith identity, significant issues linked to socio economic deprivation that have emerged within the community, or become more visible, include increasing drug abuse and criminal activity amongst the young.

There are also significant internal tensions within the Bangladeshi community reflecting different responses and strategies to address the social and economic problems facing the community. These tensions are believed to be underpinned, to some extent, by the competition for influence and control between secularists and the growing strength of religious groupings.

Despite continuing social and economic problems, there are signs that the situation of the community is gradually improving along some indicators. Educational attainment is the key area of improvement, and in some areas, Bangladeshi pupils are beginning to outperform Pakistani pupils and achieve results closer to those of Indian pupils who are the highest achieving of the South Asian populations. However, fewer are going into higher education than Pakistanis or Indians. Despite this, the numbers of graduates is increasing and whilst graduate unemployment remains high, increasing numbers of young Bangladeshis are getting into professional and executive positions. These improvements apply to both males and females, and young women are becoming more active in the labour market than previous generations of Bangladeshi women.

The community feels itself to be well integrated, whilst at the same time keen to maintain close links with its cultural heritage and country of origin. Many question the public policy focus on integration, which is seen primarily as a means to force minority communities to assimilate into an abstract notion of Britishness.

Bangladeshis have been actively involved in British politics since the early days of settlement, particularly at the level of local party politics. This involvement is still strong, though many are either moving away from the Labour party or attempting to make the party more responsive to the needs of Bangladeshis and Muslims in general.

Despite this high level of engagement, there is considerable mistrust of government, particularly amongst young people. This is largely fuelled by anger at the media and a perception that government and local authorities have done little to curb this. Many also believe that prevailing racism and hostility within the wider community makes it impossible for Bangladeshis to effectively engage with the government's integration and community cohesion agenda.

## 13.1 Recommendations

Subsequently, many areas were highlighted as community concerns but require further enquiry to draw firm conclusions particularly for a population of this size. As such, these reports should be seen as a starting point in the process of understanding England's diverse Muslim and ethnic minority communities in greater detail.

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

**Specific recommendations arising from interviews with community respondents include:**

- Strategies to tackle the educational underachievement of children, including a more thoughtful citizenship curriculum in schools and pastoral provision that is relevant to the particular identities and experiences of Bengali Muslim children
- The provision of facilities and resources for those wanting to train to join the clergy and become Imams and clergy men so that people will not need to go abroad to train or have to bring in Imams from abroad
- Improved educational provision for women and opportunities for employment training, as well as better healthcare and support services for women facing domestic violence
- Direct funding for the establishment of women’s support organisations rather than provision of services through religious organisations or male run community organisations
- Services to deal with increasing family breakdown and a rising number of single parent families
- Employment training for many who were reliant upon factory and other unskilled labour who have become redundant and for those who were educated in Bangladesh and find it hard to find jobs in Britain
- Local and central government strategies to combat institutional racism and discrimination and racism in the media
- Better funding and encouragement of inter-faith activities.

**Other recommendations:**

- Detailed research into the experiences, needs and aspirations of young Bangladeshi women
- Further comparative research across the Muslim diaspora communities into the shared and specific issues affecting young men.

## 14 Glossary

**AL:** Awami League.

**Barelwi/Barelvi:** Founded in northern India in 1880s, based on the writings of Mawlana Ahmad Reza Khan Barelvi. Barelvis believe themselves to be South Asia's heirs and representatives of the earliest Muslim community. The movement was triggered by the failure of the Indian revolt of 1857 and the subsequent formal colonisation of India by the British, which led to the final dissolution of the Mughal Empire. (Esposito, 2008).

**CI:** The Change Institute.

**Da'watul Islam:** A non-political, purely religious, international propagational movement.

**Deobandi:** Associated with the Indo-Pakistani reformist movement centred in the Dar al-'Ulum of Deoband are known by the name Deobandis. The school at Deoband, a country town some 90 miles northeast of Delhi, was founded in 1867. The goal of the school was to preserve the teachings of the faith in a period of non-Muslim rule and considerable social change by holding Muslims to a standard of correct practice; central to that goal was the creation of a class of formally trained and popularly supported *ulama*. (Esposito, 2008).

**DWP:** Department for Work and Pensions.

**EPPE:** Effective Provision of Pre-School Education.

**Fultoli:** Barelvi-oriented movement led by Abdul Latif Chowdhury (born in the village of Fultoli, Sylhet).<sup>148</sup>

**GDP:** Gross domestic product.

**GSDWC:** The Greater Sylhet Development and Welfare Council.

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

<sup>148</sup> Garbin, 2005.



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

**Hizb-ut-Tahrir:** HBT is an Islamist political party founded in 1953 by Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani, an Islamic jurist of Palestinian origin. Its main goal is the rebirth of the caliphate as the only political structure able to apply Islamic law and to restore glory and prosperity to the *ummah* (community of the believers).

**IFE:** Islamic Forum Europe.

**IOM:** International Organisation for Migration.

**Jamaat-e-Islami:** Pakistani Islamic revivalist party founded by Mawlana Abu al-Ala Mawdudi in 1941 in pre-partition India. The party encourages the reformation of society through education and conversion rather than by coercion. Its political agenda was premised on a program of training the vanguard "Islamic elite" to oversee the revival of Islam on the national level and mobilise the masses using religious symbols and ideals. (Esposito, 2008). It resumed political activities in Bangladesh after the 1975 coup that brought Major General Zia Ur-Rehman to power.

**LMC:** London Muslim Centre.

**MCB:** Muslim Council of Britain.

**MCR:** Muslim Community Radio.

**Muktojudho:** Liberation war.

**SAARC:** South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation.

**Salafis:** Derived from *salaf*, "pious ancestors", a name given to a reform movement led by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh at the turn of the 20th century. Emphasised restoration of Islamic doctrines to pure form, adherence to the *Qu'ran* and Sunnah, rejection of the authority of later interpretations and maintenance of the unity of *ummah*. (Esposito, 2008).

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

**Shaheed Minar:** The Shaheed Minar refers to the national monument representing a national commemoration that was established in remembrance of those killed during the Language Movement demonstrations of 1952. It is located in Dhaka, capital of Bangladesh.

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

**Sunnah:** Customary practice or way of life; "*al-Sunnah*" refers to the approved standard of practice established by Muhammad and early Muslims.

**Tabligh Jamaat:** Indian reform movement founded by Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas in 1927 in Delhi. Popular with villagers and peasants. Called for reform of personal religious practices and defense of Islam and Muslim minority populations. Focused on religious, rather than political, aspects of Islam. (Esposito, 2008).

**Tablighi Jamaat:** The Tablighi Jamaat was founded in India in the 1920s by Maulana Muhammed Ilyas Kandhalawi with the aim of renewing Muslim society that was seen to be in danger of losing its identity to the majority Hindu culture. Maulana Kandhalawi was a prominent member of the Deobandi movement and the Jamaat is often closely associated with it. However it stressed that whilst it has maintained some association with Deobandi, it is a separate movement.

**UN:** United Nations.

**UNESCO:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

**YMO:** Young Muslim Organisation.

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