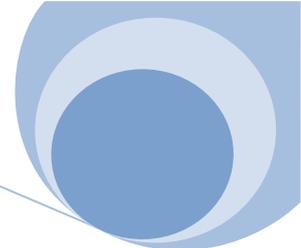
The cover features a decorative design of three overlapping blue circles of varying sizes, arranged vertically. Thin blue lines radiate from the top-left and bottom-right corners of the page, intersecting the circles. The main title is enclosed in a blue rounded rectangular frame.

**The Horn of Africa  
Community in  
Belfast:**

**A Needs Assessment**

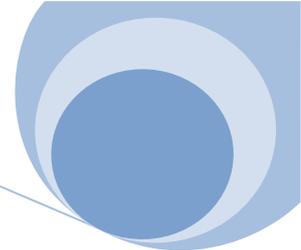
*Dr Orna Young*

**iCR**  
INSTITUTE for CONFLICT RESEARCH



## Contents

Introduction.....	3
1. Personal and Family Circumstances .....	5
2. Employment, Rights and Entitlements .....	8
3. Housing .....	12
4. Health .....	14
5. Life in Belfast.....	16
6. Experience of Discrimination and Prejudice .....	19
7. Conclusions .....	23
• Language.....	23
• Housing .....	23
• Community engagement .....	24
• Women .....	24
• Mental Health .....	25
• Discrimination .....	25



## Introduction

The Institute for Conflict Research and Horn of Africa People's Aid Northern Ireland (HAPANI)<sup>1</sup> have conducted research into the experience of individuals from the Horn of Africa<sup>2</sup> (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan) currently living in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Many of the individuals based here left the Horn of Africa due to the severe humanitarian crisis that has unfolded there over the last number of years. The region experienced the worst drought since 1995, while some specific areas had the worst drought in over half a century. This in tandem with over two decades of conflict in the region has led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of individuals and the division of families.

The impact of this crisis is evidenced in our research with a direct correlation between it and the numbers of those individuals arriving in Northern Ireland in recent years, with 65% of those questioned having arrived between 2010 and 2012. HoA community representatives have presented anecdotal evidence that there is an estimated population of 500 people from the HoA living in the area presently. Due to the changing nature of the demographics of the community, it is impossible to specifically quantify this number from official statistics from relevant agencies. However, the most recent census, due to be published in May this year, may provide some insights into changes in the communal composition of Belfast in last decade.

The purpose of this research is to identify and assess the social and economic needs of this community in adapting and integrating into society in Northern Ireland. Previous research on new communities in Northern Ireland highlighted the issues surrounding a lack of strategic preparation by the government, employers and service providers in meeting the needs and expectations of these communities.<sup>3</sup> In 2007 the Equality Commission's Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland<sup>4</sup> found that despite efforts inequalities inform the lives of new communities in Northern Ireland. These inequalities were identified as follows: education;

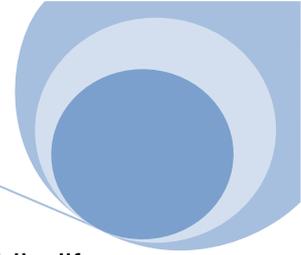
---

<sup>1</sup> HAPANI is a non-governmental organisation and supports people from the region in Northern Ireland

<sup>2</sup> This will be referred to as 'HoA' throughout this research.

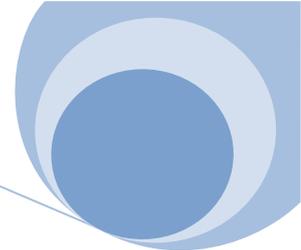
<sup>3</sup> See: A. Martynowicz and N. Jarman. *New Migration, Equality and Integration*. (Equality Commission, Belfast: 2009). Accessed at <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/ICRMigrantworkersJanuary2009.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Accessed at [http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/Keyinequalities\(F\)1107.pdf](http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/Keyinequalities(F)1107.pdf)



employment; health and social care; housing; participation in civic and public life; and prejudice. However, despite a period of five years having passed since these findings were published, this research found that these inequalities and areas were still a central concern for the HoA community in Belfast in the preliminary discussions around the research. We utilised these identified areas to inform the quantitative methodology and structured a questionnaire around the following areas accordingly: the personal and family circumstances of individuals; their experience of discrimination and prejudice; access to health, social and community services; health and lifestyle; information, translation and language; and networking.

The questionnaire was distributed to approximately 100 individuals with a response rate of 55%. ICR and HAPANI also facilitated a series of focus groups in a bid to draw out themes identified in the questionnaires. These focus groups consisted of a mixed group of all ages and both genders, a group of HoA women and another of young HoA men. The groups of women and young men were organised after the initial focus group when it was identified that there were specific issues pertaining to these groups that would benefit from being addressed specifically. Due to language restrictions a HAPANI representative facilitated the group and aided in the necessary translation of the groups' conversations. These translated conversations are employed throughout this research. In addition to this, a further meeting was organised by HAPANI to examine the experiences of hate crime within the HoA community. The minutes of the meeting were recorded and the views aired employed in this research.



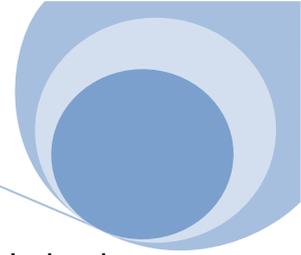
## 1. Personal and Family Circumstances

Of those who responded to the questionnaire 67% were male and 33% were female. The respondents ranged in ages from 15-65 and this was broken down as follows:

Age	% of HoA Community
15-24	16%
24-34	42%
35-44	23%
45-55	13%
55-65	6%

The vast majority of those participating in the quantitative aspect of this research identified Somalia as their country of origin (87%), with Djibouti (4%), Eritrea (4%) and Sudan (5%) also cited. In terms of language the respondents stated that they were proficient in the following languages: Somali (89%); English (33%); Arabic (20%); Amharic (4%); Italian (4%); and French (4%). A question on the status of each participant was also included, and found that the majority were refugees (66%) followed by asylum seekers (24%), residents (6%), UK citizens (4%) and EU Citizens (2%). The participants' religious orientation was also assessed with 95% of those who responded identifying themselves as Muslim, with the remainder (5%) identifying themselves as Christian.

The family situation of those individuals from the HoA currently living in Belfast was also examined in the questionnaire. It found that 62% of respondents had a wife/husband. Of this number, 61% stated that their partner currently resided in their home country, while 30% resided in Northern Ireland and another 9% reside elsewhere. More than half (52%) of those who participated in the questionnaire had children. 50% of these children live in Northern Ireland; 35% in the respondents' home countries; 4% in the rest of the UK; and 12% elsewhere. This is evidence of the fractured reality of family life for those residing in Northern Ireland from the Horn of Africa in that many individuals arrive alone with a view to reunifying with their families at a later date.



The questionnaire also revealed that many individuals based in Northern Ireland have some level of contact with their family in their home country, with 67% of the respondents stating they were in contact, regularly or infrequently (70% of this contact was by telephone). The impact of this was drawn out in the course of the focus groups where individuals emphasised the impact of separation on peoples' abilities to adapt to life in Belfast and Northern Ireland:

*We are different from the western community, when you speak to an African about the definition of the family it means the extended family... We suffer psychologically. We miss our parents, our siblings, our cousins... The family connection ends apart from phone calls, and if you don't have those it's very hard.*

This was echoed by another focus group participant:

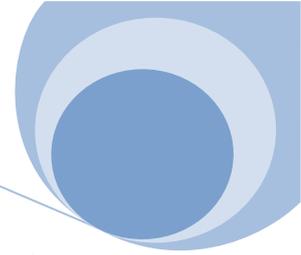
*The understanding of family unity here and in my home country are different. I have a niece and nephew who have not any relatives to support them there, but then the immigration services here say 'no they are not part of your family'.*

Another individual acknowledged that reunification is sometimes impossible due to the financial and personal constraints of being a refugee/asylum seeker:

*Everyone understands the difficulties of families being separated... at the same time you have no capacity to provide them with support if they are in civil war or refugees. Separation is difficult... You cannot provide the needs in terms of education and food... There are so many layers.*

Therefore, while emphasis has been placed on the issue of the separation of families in new communities, particularly in relation to refugees and asylum seekers, the HoA community in Belfast reflect the varying issues underlying the different situations of individuals and families. These were articulated by many as initially being based around the issues of visas, but also that of the socio-economic realities of individuals being based in Northern Ireland while their families are still located in their home countries. One respondent discussed this point at length:

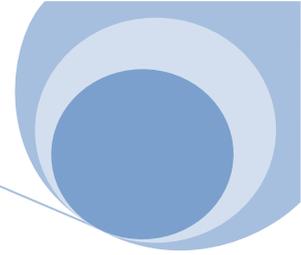
*There is a need when people apply for unification for people to buy a ticket... and they are unemployed. My family have visas but I can't afford a ticket [for them to come to Northern Ireland]. Whenever they [the family] arrive, you need a house and clothing and there is no money.*



These comments contextualise the issues associated with reuniting families in terms of the socio-economic position many of the individuals living in Northern Ireland from the Horn of Africa find themselves in. That is to say that quite often it is not simply an issue of accessing visas for the family members in the home country, but rather once these are attained the realities of supporting that family in Northern Ireland have to be addressed; frequently this is simply not feasible. Another focus group participant articulated the problems associated with reunification at this very practical level:

*Everybody is ok economically in their own country but now we are here and have nothing and cannot reunify our families. We need assistance for when the family arrive... housing and pre-arrangements.*

This point illustrates a lack of strategic and long term planning for new communities in Northern Ireland. There is a clear need for the assessment of individuals' requirements not only in the short term but also in a more comprehensive manner which would facilitate them in their integration into life in Northern Ireland.



## 2. Employment, Rights and Entitlements

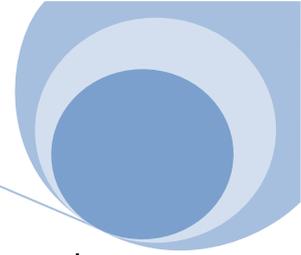
The scale of this socio-economic instability in the community was evidenced throughout the research with 71% stating that they are unemployed. This is attributed to various factors, with 51% citing 'cannot speak English' as a reason they cannot work, as well as 45% of the those who identified themselves as unemployed stating the reason as 'cannot find job'. The impact of the a lack of proficiency in the English language was also articulated in the course of the focus groups, with one young woman expressing this as the central obstacle in her ability to find employment:

*If we try to look for work now there is no point as we don't have the language. The social security office asks us to look for a job and report back... whenever we go there is no way we can look for a job, there is no way of going about it, no support for it.*

In the questionnaires 10% also stated that they were not eligible to work (due to their status) and unemployed as a result. Of those who answered this question, just 2% attributed their lack of employment to discrimination. Reflecting these statistics many focus group participants aired their frustration at not working and not being able to find work due to the various factors cited above. One respondent articulated this viewpoint:

*I don't want [financial] support. I want to be able to provide for myself. We want, as Africans, to have access to employment... We are capable, we are educated and we are willing to contribute to the economy, we don't want to be a burden.*

The impact of the lack of employment on families and children is a central theme. This was related to the system of benefits and the individuals' rights and entitlements. 62% of the respondents receive jobseeker's allowance/unemployment benefit; 23% housing benefit; 19% child benefit; 17% child tax credit; 2% working tax credit; and 2% maternity allowance. None of the respondents received disability living allowance (DLA). A quarter (25%) of the participants in the questionnaire did not receive any benefits (10% of which because they are ineligible).



One participant articulated the position that those who find part-time work are in, noting that they are often effectively “better off” by remaining on benefits because they may lose them altogether when working limited hours:

*If I speak personally, I am able and wanting to work. If I work more than 16 hours a week, I phone the benefit office and they will tell me my benefits are suspended and the next day the housing benefit is suspended... When I can no longer live on just 16 hours of work per week, I have to wait a month and a half for benefit to be reinstated.*

The frustration with the benefits system in this regard was closely related to a feeling of a lack of opportunities and training for those from the HoA living in Northern Ireland. Many emphasised the motivation behind their moving to Northern Ireland as a basis for their need for support:

*There's a difference between a refugee and an immigrant, that's not understood. They move here with nothing, not of their own free will.*

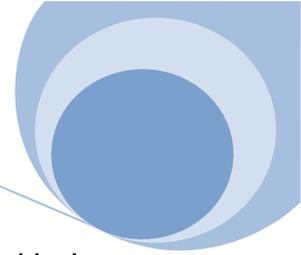
Similarly, many of the female focus group participants voiced issues around childcare, which they felt were also impeding their ability to find employment. One woman voiced her belief that any individuals/organisations providing the childcare would also have to be proficient in the languages of the HoA children given that many of them have just arrived in Northern Ireland:

*If I find a job, I have a problem with childcare... We need to get someone to speak the same language...*

This illustrates how the issue of a lack of English language skills permeates all age groups of the community.

There was particular concern among younger respondents (particularly young males), where the focus on a need for training and skills was a focal point of discussions:

*The other issue is that we have a lack of orientation and opportunities in terms of training, education and employment. For example some of us have ideas for business but have no support. We want to change our situation. We have very little information about how to access finance for this.*



However, it must be acknowledged that many of the young people involved with the qualitative aspect of this research are currently attending college to build their language skills. While this is undoubtedly a positive finding, the reality is that these courses constitute on average fifteen hours a week for the individuals attending them. One of the young people talked about the impact of this limited time in education on him and other young people:

*We only have access to limited time to education... 3 hours a day. Whenever I go to get support from organisations for this, I have to go back so many times back and forward. On the mainland this is streamlined, and you apply for a scholarship and then the money is there. It's humiliating having to keep asking for money.*

He emphasised that he did not blame the charitable organisations involved in distributing the financing of his education, but rather saw it as a wider problem of a lack of preparation or strategy for dealing with migrants in Northern Ireland. This, he believed, was not the case in the wider UK context, where there are established processes and mechanisms for accommodating the financing of migrant education. It is important to note the language the individual employed to describe it as 'humiliating'; this reflects many of the feelings articulated by those who participated in the research to their experience of accessing their entitled benefits and education since their arrival in Northern Ireland.

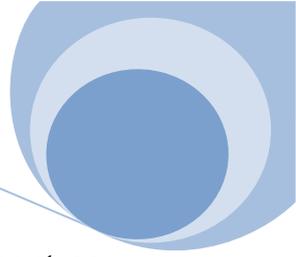
Similarly, others felt that their experience and/or qualifications in their home country were not recognised here and subsequently were unable to find employment. One female participant described her situation in the following terms:

*When I came here I tried because I had experience as a care assistant, and I tried to apply some of that and I did some interviews. I didn't succeed, and they said I didn't have experience in this country and if you don't have an NVQ it's very hard.*

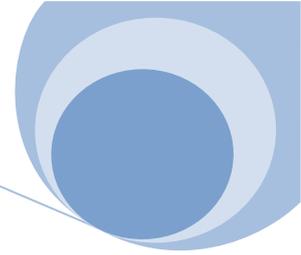
The focus on education was not only emphasised as a basis for finding employment but was also related to issues surrounding integration, as by gaining proficiency in the English language the HoA community will gain the ability and confidence to build relations with local communities. One respondent put it in the following terms:

*If there is no employment there can be no integration.*

## **The Horn of Africa Community in Belfast: A Needs Assessment**



The emphasis on education as a mechanism by which to achieve employment as well as integration indicates how much of a priority this is for the HoA community in Belfast.



### 3. Housing

The issue of the nature of housing arrangements for those arriving in Northern Ireland from the HoA was also raised, particularly in relation to the living conditions the individuals found themselves in. The majority (60%) of respondents stated that they live in rented accommodation, with 31% living in a house/flat from a private landlord; 17% in a house/flat rented from the Housing Executive; and 12% in a house/flat from a housing association. The most notable finding for this particular question was the stark statistic that 19% of those who answered this question viewed themselves as 'homeless', with 11% of respondents living in a dorm/hostel; 4% staying with family; 2% living in Bed & Breakfast; and the remaining 6% stating 'other'. When drawing this point out further in the focus groups, it was found that this did not necessarily mean that the 19% did not have regular housing, rather it was found that many did not feel their accommodation was permanent and/or they were being currently housed with friends/family with a view to finding alternative housing.

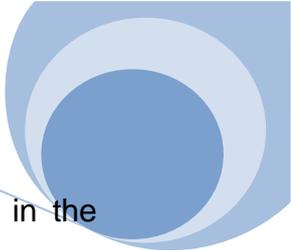
In the focus groups the issue of accommodation was drawn out with particular focus on the issues relating to private rentals in terms of their affordability and the conditions individuals and families find themselves living in. One woman described it in the following terms:

*When you have a private landlord... once you get a flat and there's something wrong, for example a lady we know she had a problem with heating and she called him and they didn't come, they don't care. Once they see you're foreign they just take your rent without caring for the house.*

This was a common theme throughout the focus groups with many individuals describing a lack of care for houses that were rented from private landlords; issues such as heating, damp and safety were all referenced. This was attributed to the fact that many of those renting from private landlords were unable to articulate their problems and relied on one or two translators in their community to resolve them. Similarly, the issue of individuals arriving in Northern Ireland without family support was related to problems of acquiring housing in the region in the first instance:

*When a person arrives here as a refugee, and we want to rent a private (house) they want a guarantor and I'm new here and I can't fulfil this and this is a big problem.*

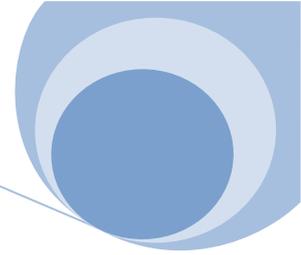
## The Horn of Africa Community in Belfast: A Needs Assessment



This theme of a problem with private rental accommodation was repeated in the difficulty of individuals from the HoA in getting Housing Executive accommodation with only 17% of those who completed the questionnaire describing their living arrangement as 'house/flat rented from the Housing Executive'. One woman described the disconnection she felt from the process of getting Housing Executive accommodation due to language constraints:

*The public Housing Executive, I have been three years in the queue and they say your points are low and now they say I'm not on the system and I have no way of communicating with them about the issue.*

The impact of a lack of stable and affordable housing was a key determinant on the quality of life for those participating in this research. This related to wider feelings of disconnection and inhibits opportunities for increased integration with wider society in Northern Ireland.



### 4. Health

The specific health needs of the HoA community in Belfast were addressed in the questionnaire. We found that 40% of the participants did not view themselves as having any of the conditions listed in the questionnaire, and over 90% of those who answered the question described their physical health as 'satisfactory', 'good' or 'very good'. The accessibility of services for the community was also assessed in the quantitative aspect of this research; this was with particular attention to health services. The following results indicate the numbers who knew how to access the named services: family planning (14%); health visitor (10%); sexual health services (5%); breast screening (8%); domestic violence (5); and adult education (25%).

The issue of gender was not emphasised in the questionnaire but rather was a central theme on a discussion of health and well-being in the focus groups. Many of the female participants felt unable to articulate their need for specific care to a GP, due to language constraints. One woman articulated this:

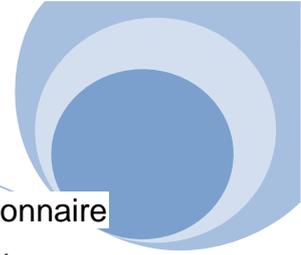
*My GP doesn't have face to face interpreter so we rely on the phone and there are gender issues, and we need to train female interpreters so we can share more...*

The lack of understanding of and the provision for the differing cultural practices HoA women are subject to meant that many women felt unable to attend a GP:

*The ladies support each other. I work with health visitors to visit women and translate, but it [translation service] needs to be developed...*

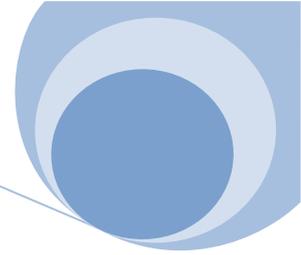
This has huge ramifications not only for the women in question but also their children, given the prevalence of a large number of single mothers in the HoA community in Belfast. The apparent provision of wider health services in Northern Ireland was described positively with all the questionnaire respondents that had availed of hospital services describing their experience of hospitals in the region as either 'good' or 'satisfactory'. Similarly of those who had utilised maternity services, 100% described their experiences as either 'good' or 'satisfactory'.

## The Horn of Africa Community in Belfast: A Needs Assessment



The lack of exercise among the community was also telling from the questionnaire which found that over 90% of the respondents never attend a gym and 86% never play any kind of sport. 55% indicated that they regularly go for walks but this was attributed in the focus groups to a lack of resources for alternative forms of transport rather than mindfulness of health and wellbeing in the focus groups.

However, there were striking findings on the issue of mental health in the HoA community. 47% of those questioned stated that they suffered with stress in the last twelve months; 31% with depression; and 25% with post-traumatic stress. This was attributed to financial worries and unemployment (46% and 49%, respectively) as well as missing family in their home country (58%). Only 5% of those who answered the question indicated that they had availed assistance from medical or mental health services as a result. Although raised in the focus groups as an area of concern, the issue of mental health, well-being and how they are addressed was not the concern of the respondents. Rather the focus of the discussion was placed on their causalities; unemployment, financial hardship and separation from family.



### 5. Life in Belfast

The questionnaires assessed the social outlets for the HoA community in Belfast. It found that 73% of those who participated in the questionnaire considered attending a mosque as an integral part of their social life, while 80% of those who responded stayed at home to socialise. Other areas to socialise were 'cafes and restaurants' (30%), while only 3% attended pubs/clubs and leisure centres. Reflecting these statistics, there was much discussion in the focus groups on the need for specific social outlets for the community in Belfast. Many focus group participants envisaged this as a hub for the community as well as a means by which to aid the community in feeling more connected and visible. Focus group participants articulated this aspiration:

*We have a community but it's not visible, and we feel like we're fragmented and have no place we can meet and experience our culture together.*

This was also with a view to aiding the community in terms of education and support. It was also a key concern for those with children in the focus groups, who felt that they should have a venue in which their children could access information and education on their culture. One woman expressed this need:

*Our priority now is to look for a centre to come together and socialise and at the same time get our children to learn about their culture and language...*

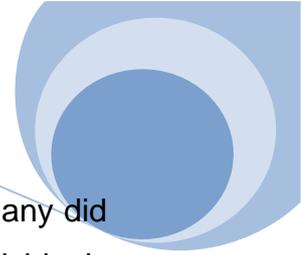
Another group which described their life in Belfast were young males, who articulated a need for access to sport and recreational facilities:

*The main concern for me is to get sport and leisure facilities... We want to play with local clubs and integrate through sport... All the leisure activities require money and we don't have that so we can't do any of them.*

Another young male supported this viewpoint:

*The youth have no facilities or sport activities... Our youth have less opportunities than the locals and sport is one area that the communities could integrate*

The key point here is that many of HoA individuals are very limited in their social outlets and as a result a means by which to socialise together and indeed with the wider population in Belfast.



A broader issue of support in terms of community was also evoked in that many did not feel that there were sufficient structures in place at present to facilitate individuals from the community in reporting incidents of prejudice or discrimination. It was felt that a dedicated community centre would aid this. Similarly, it was felt that this could be one avenue that would lead to greater cooperation between the HoA and the relevant authorities:

*The numbers of this community are growing and we need a place where we can speak the same language and report any issues... We can report anyone suspicious in our community and help the state agencies- a place we can come together and support each other.*

In terms of community involvement it was found that 73% of those who responded did not have any involvement with community/support groups in Belfast. This effective dislocation from the wider community was a key concern for one focus group participant who employed the example of similar communities in the wider UK context to illustrate his concerns in relation to young people from the HoA:

*These children are a new layer of this society... for example the refugees that arrive in the last 20 years there are so many problems in the big cities and here they are very small and it is very preventable... after 18 they could go to gangs and radicalism... If we support the children and educate them there won't be these problems... After school programmes, education, sports and support are all so important.*

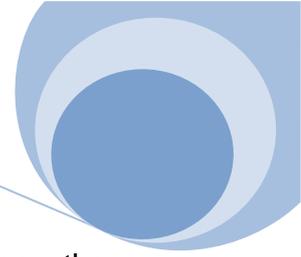
The discussion on community services led onto discussions on the issue of visibility of the community, more generally. The sense of disconnection from wider society and the political realm meant that many of the focus group participants felt disempowered and ultimately neglected in their needs as a community. One focus group participant articulated this:

*We are here and we want to be part of society, we need a connection and visibility.*

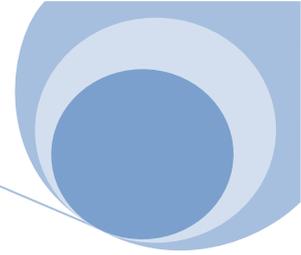
A key point in this discussion was that group participants felt there was a lack of political representation and engagement with the HoA community, and viewed this as a key inhibitor of integration:

*We are part of the society here, but we feel a disconnection – we don't get to meet with political reps... There is a gap there. We want to be part of society as this will make integration easier from the bottom to the top*

## **The Horn of Africa Community in Belfast: A Needs Assessment**



This reveals the importance of multi-levelled community engagement between the HoA and community and political actors in Northern Ireland. This will give the HoA community (and indeed other new communities) a mechanism by which to address issues impacting on their lives in Northern Ireland.



## 6. Experience of Discrimination and Prejudice

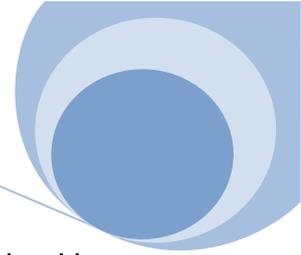
The quantitative aspect of this research indicated that the majority of participants felt that they had not been the subject of discrimination and prejudice in Northern Ireland. Indeed, 48% of the respondents described themselves as feeling welcome in Northern Ireland. The questionnaire included specific questions on varying forms of discrimination and prejudice and asked “Since coming to Northern Ireland have you experienced any of the following: (a) verbal abuse; (b) being ignored excluded; (c) discriminated against; (d) harassment; (e) physical assault; (f) damage to your car; and (g) damage to your house/home”. The results found that the most prevalent form of discrimination and prejudice is verbal abuse with 25% of those who answered having experienced it. This was followed by harassment at 17%; discrimination at 14%; damage to your house/home at 12%; damage to your car at 10%; and being ignored and physical assault both at 9%.

However, in the course of the focus groups it became evident that while the results of the questionnaire presented findings whereby the minority of individuals from the HoA had experienced these forms of discrimination and prejudice, the focus groups suggested a markedly different experience for the participants. That is to say that the discrepancy between the quantitative and qualitative findings of this research reveals an apparent lack of willingness to identify or ‘name’ events that are motivated by discrimination and prejudice. This tacit culture of tolerance or acceptance of prejudice and discrimination on the part of the HoA community was drawn out in the course of the focus groups. This was evidenced in the view articulated by the vast majority of women from the HoA who viewed their traditional dress as causing problems for them in terms of employment:

*I try to find a job in this country but it's very hard to find a job due to our dress code and I feel a lot of our employers are not comfortable with the way we dress.*

This was also the experience of other women who believed they were treated differently in their day to day life as a result of how they dressed, and in many cases were the subject of verbal abuse:

*When I go shopping and people are driving their cars they open their windows and shout abuse.*



At the meeting with the HoA community to discuss hate crime which was organised by HAPANI, speakers were keen to affirm that those responsible for hate crimes should not be seen as representative of the 'host' community. In the focus groups many of the individuals who recounted their experiences of such abuse were emphatic that it was the minority of people in Northern Ireland that behaved in such a hostile manner to them and much of the verbal abuse was attributed to group bravado or alcohol:

*Sometimes groups of people throw eggs at us and shout abuse when they are drunk...*

However, for some this has escalated to a point that they feel there are areas they simply cannot live in. Indeed, one participant explained how they had been 'put out' of an area:

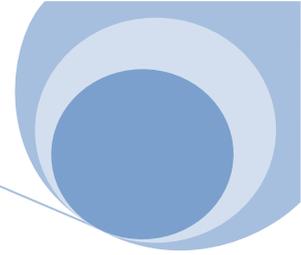
*We got a threat from our neighbours saying if we stay there, they would kill us.*

*...there are some areas that are not safe for us. In one area my friend was told to leave, they smashed her windows. We came here to be safe, you know, we came from Somalia...*

The focus group participants related this to wider discussions on the role of the Housing Executive in the experience of individuals and their experience of living in Belfast. Many felt that the Housing Executive were reluctant to move on incidents relating to prejudice, discrimination and racism and that this meant that many of the respondents felt compelled to continue to live with them as a 'normal' aspect of life in parts of Belfast. One participant articulated this:

*The Housing Executive are basically telling me I have to face it as they will only move me if I am physically attacked or in danger...*

The quantitative aspect of this research found that 67% of those who answered the question on physical abuse had reported an incident to the PSNI, while 8% had reported it to a solicitor or local support group. In the focus groups, some participants articulated the importance of reporting such incidents to the relevant authorities in a bid to prevent it happening again in the future:



*I was going to the mosque and some drunk people shout at me and I just ignore them and go to the mosque. Most of us choose to ignore it but if we do this it will only get worse...*

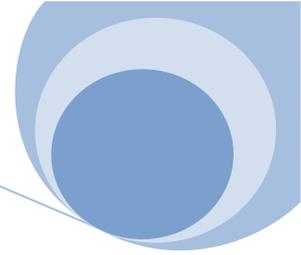
At the HAPANI meeting on hate crime, a police officer accepted that many felt that the police did not take such complaints seriously. He indicated the issues relating to securing prosecutions for hate crime: the victim often cannot identify those who have abused or assaulted them. A number of focus group participants outlined their views on how they felt they were perceived in terms of being African Muslims and how this affects their lives in Northern Ireland. One male participant described an incident where the police came to his house and questioned him. He lives in a house with a number of young men who also have no family with them in Northern Ireland:

*Last Thursday night the police entered our premises... the police did not have a court order or warrant. They rang the door and came in the house... They showed their badges... I expect the police to have a warrant if they want to come in the house. They were plain clothed. I cannot say they were even real police... They interviewed me for half an hour... In my view it wasn't legal the way they dealt with me... They asked me was I Muslim, do I go to the mosque... they asked what people congregate and pray at the mosque and the numbers... and what discussions are in the mosque and are there any people encouraging holy war or Jihad.*

He viewed this as effective racial profiling by the authorities and feels that his community is being singled out in the wider UK context:

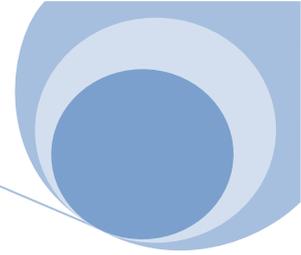
*I thought the questions and the way they came in was wrong. I think this was racially singled out and asking me all these questions because my religion and appearance... That's what happened to us and I feel it was inappropriate and it happens so many people not only me.*

In relation to the PSNI there was a feeling among male participants that they were perceived as a threat and had experiences of being treated accordingly. This narrative of police oppression or victimisation appeared to structure much of what the young males felt about the police and their attitudes to people from the HoA. There was also an apparent wariness to report such occurrences due to the localised dynamics of areas in Belfast, particularly in relation to relations between the PSNI and particular communities in Belfast:



*I approach NICEM and they are very supportive... they encourage me to go to the police. I know there are sensitivities between the locals and the police... I told the police to come in plain clothing as I don't want trouble.*

This apparent acceptance of the status quo in particular areas meant that many felt that by reporting their experience of prejudice and discrimination they were further alienating themselves from the communities in which they live.



### 7. Conclusions

This research found that the following areas require attention in relation to HoA communities in Belfast: discrimination; language; housing; meeting place; women's issues; and mental health provision. These areas, while diverse and wide ranging in their nature, constitute a full picture of the needs and requirements of the HoA community in the region. It is also imperative to note that these areas are also transferable to the needs of alternative minority communities in the wider context of Northern Ireland. The HoA community exemplify the difficulty experienced by small communities in establishing themselves in Northern Ireland without the necessary support mechanisms to facilitate economic independence, education, well-being and ultimately community resilience. The following areas require attention in this context:

- **Language**

The key theme that pervaded this research was the issue of low levels of English language proficiency. This research found that 75% of those questioned described their levels of spoken English as either 'poor', 'very poor' or could not speak it at all. The situation was even starker when we considered the levels of written English. This issue permeated every aspect of life for the individuals concerned, particularly in relation to employment, and as a result economic independence; and access to education and health services. It also became apparent that the lack of proficiency in the English language led many of the respondents to view their social worlds in an insular manner, with much recourse to an intra-communal dependency. This needs to be addressed with formalised language programmes for new migrants. This would not only aid in the ability of HoA migrants to gain independence in terms of employment, training and education which would in turn facilitate integration. This integration must be viewed as constituting a two-way process in that by giving migrant communities access to language courses these migrants will then feel fully able to communicate and in a sense become part of the communities in which they reside.

- **Housing**

The primary issue for housing is the lack of affordability for individuals arriving in Northern Ireland. This also appears to be exacerbated by the unification of families whereby the individual who arrived in Northern Ireland first finds it impossible to



financially support and house their family members. The apparent lack of provision of Housing Executive housing for the community has led to a reliance on private rentals and haphazard living arrangements. Therefore, there needs to be a more strategic analysis of the housing needs of those migrants arriving, as well as of those who are already placed in Northern Ireland. This needs to consider the individual requirements of each case, particularly in relation to whether the person has arrived on their own, or if there is also a family to consider. The issue of housing also needs to be addressed in the context of wider integration, given that the continuation of temporary living arrangements serves to inhibit the community in their ability to integrate.

- **Community engagement**

There appears to be a disconnect between the political realm and realities of life for the community in Belfast. To forge a sense of belonging for the community it is imperative that a greater emphasis be placed on their connection to political actors and agitation for their rights and responsibilities. This may be viewed as beneficial for the HoA community but also for the wider community in Belfast as it will help to dispel the myth that Belfast, and indeed Northern Ireland, operates exclusively on a 'two-community' framework. In more practical terms, there needs to be more contact between the relevant bodies and the HoA community. This may be seen in terms of housing, education and health with a view to incorporating their particular needs into how these services are structured and delivered. Similarly, a dedicated meeting place/premises would provide the community with a sense of self-sufficiency with a view to providing advice and support in the initial stages of arriving in Belfast. This space would also provide a 'safe space' for the community to meet and would constitute a central hub for increasing community resilience and confidence.

- **Women**

This research found that there are needs that are exclusive to the female HoA population in Belfast. This was particularly evident in relation to health requirements and the need for culturally sensitive services (such as female interpreters in doctors' surgeries and female health visitors). Similarly, the issue of child care was also subject to cultural sensitivities and language barriers, which many women felt was impeding their ability to seek employment. This issues need to be addressed in a

culturally sensitive manner which engages with new communities in a terms that allows them to gain confidence in their new setting.

- **Mental Health**

The impact of the experience of conflict, displacement and migration on mental health was a striking finding in this research. This was expressed in terms of anxiety, depression, stress and post-traumatic stress. However, the low uptake of mental health services indicated previously suggests there is much work to do around this area in the HoA community. This needs to be addressed as a central concern for the health and well-being of the community.

- **Discrimination**

As discussed, the methodological approach employed in this research revealed a disconnect between how the HoA community are willing to perceive their treatment and the realities of their experience of discrimination and prejudice. Dealing with this issue will require a multi-levelled approach. That is to say there needs to be awareness raised in the HoA community itself about the need to report such incidents to the relevant authorities. Similarly, the perception and actions of the police in relation to acting on such incidents needs to be that of zero tolerance, with a view to gaining the confidence of new communities such as the HoA community, as well as an indication of the seriousness of such actions.

*For further information please contact:*

*Dr Orna Young  
Institute for Conflict Research  
North City Business Centre  
2 Duncairn Gardens  
Belfast BT15 2GG*

*Tel: +44 (0)28 9074 2682  
Email: [orna@conflictresearch.org.uk](mailto:orna@conflictresearch.org.uk)*