Proposed cuts undermines integration work

The Department for Communities and Local Government recently published a detailed response to the recommendations made by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, which was chaired by Dara Singh. In June 2007, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion delivered its recommendation to government. The Commission’s report Our Shared Future has already influenced the content of policies across the government. It has changed the tone and nature of the debate around how best to bring people of different backgrounds together in local communities and empower them to shape the decisions which affect them. And many local authorities are already using it to refresh and improve their cohesion strategies.

As feared, the government’s response to Dara Singh’s report, in line with his recommendation, suggests that so-called ‘single groups’ should not receive public funds. The Department for Communities and Local Government published a consultation document which has the following key recommendations to funders:
1. Cohesion is strongest when people from different backgrounds interact with each other.
2. Where funding is used to support a single group only it can create barriers to cohesion.
3. Encourages local authorities to consider how funding can be better used to support greater interaction and suggests that single groups should only be funded when there is a demonstrable case for doing so.

The Consultation process is now underway, with the closing date of 26 May 2008. In the borough of Hammersmith and Fulham many minority ethnic and refugee groups are thereby worried about this proposal, and may lead to the closure of their services. The recommendation, not to fund ‘single groups with the settlement and integration process of refugees locally and nationally. Since the publication of Dara Singh’s report, Our Shared Future, a raft of forums, policies and proposals were introduced by the government. The concern here is the reports conclusion on funding single group communities and lack of data and research to back up their findings. It’s clear that the focus continues to be the over-representation of different refugee communities to the process of integration of their communities. We strongly believe that settlement must come first.

The settlement process requires a robust integration policies, backed up by adequate support and involvement of refugee and migrant community groups. A knee-jerk reaction by the government will not assist the integration process and community cohesion. This response will also contradict government’s own efforts of community cohesion and integration. Our experiences and activities suggests four key areas when it comes to the field of refugee integration and community cohesion. These are:

1. Assist new arrivals and encourage them to involve with the host society;
2. The settlement of refugees;
3. Recognition and supporting of refugee community groups’ contribution;
4. Accessing local services and involvement in mainstream community life.

The integration and community cohesion work was often undertaken in specialist organisations or by workers with specific competences for working with refugees and asylum seekers. There is little evidence that mainstream agencies can match the experiences of grass root communities when it comes to working directly with refugees. Attempts to explain this were related to the perceived lack of experience and expertise by generic workers and suggestions that the authorities need to integrate asylum seekers and refugees was to provide specialist services.

Iraqi Association Comment

Immigration debate must not go awry

The debate over immigration has in recent months rightly risen to prominence as one of the most important issues facing this country. The recent report, the Economic Impact of Immigration, demonstrates the high levels of integration of many of the migrants who have chosen to come to this country. Professor Rowthorn of Cambridge University says that new figures from the Office for National Statistics are further proof that a mass influx of foreigners is keeping our boys and girls out of work, and leading them “Neets” (Not in education, employment or training). It is true that since 1997, the numbers of young people who are “Neets” has risen by around one third. But it would be wrong to say the diurne solely at the feet of the immigrant and refugee population.

We encourage meaningful discussion instead of adding emotive language to the headlines and debates. It is true that votes feel strongly about immigration and of the political parties, the Lib Dems’ ideas of scrapping the points system and implementing new immigration laws is an eye-catching strategy. But British people don’t need help from foreigners to engage in crime and antisocial behavior. Meanwhile, the xenophobic headlines fuel public concern over immigration, only to promote racist agenda. Fueling tension is not new, between 1895 and 1909, Armenians arrive from the Ottoman empire. Newspapers predict a “foreign flood” of seven million refugees “swamping” Britain, D.H Lawrence and HG Wells advocate eugenics. In fact, nearly two million Britons emigrate between 1917 and 1918, of which 1,200,000 from 791,300. Significantly more than the number of people arriving. Yet in 1920 the government passed the Aliens Act, placing restrictions on Britain’s borders for the first time.

While in 1964 race was an election issue, a Conservative MP is re-elected in the Milburn thanks to the slogan: “If you want a nigger for a neighbour vote Labour.” Labour comes to power, and passes the Race Relations Act. When the globalization started to dominate the world, the asylum seeking became a hot topic for many politicians and media headlines. Asylum seekers received many hostile names such as “Bogus” then this has changed to “Scroungers” followed by “Illegal”.

If Britain is to be a cohesive society, its citizens must be able to speak to each other and share the same essential liberal, democratic values. Although immigration is a contentious issue but realists should not be about politics of bigotry. We need to have an efficient and properly managed immigration system, and should be applied on all newcomers regardless of their nationalities.

The Lords report ignored to take testimonies from the immigration stakeholders in this country, neither grass root groups nor frontline agencies which deal with minority ethnic groups of immigrants and refugees. Those groups offer valuable and essential data and information. The Lords report ignored to take testimonies from the spirit of community cohesion and integration. A further economic benefit - ignored by the Lords committee report – that immigrants, by their very readiness to take the risk of settlement and integration, can make a new life, they have shown themselves to be ambitious and energetic, and perhaps entrepreneurs. Therefore, in the absence of valid adequate regular data and quality information misleading to predict and assume conclusions.

The fact remains that, “there is no mystery that immigrants go where there are jobs,” said Stephen Castle, Oxford University’s professor of migration and refugee studies. Europe’s economies need migrants for long-term demographic reasons: across the EU fertility is declining, the indigenous working population is ageing and shrinking, and businesses need migrants in order to grow. The fact is that you can’t have economic prosperity without migrants. There is no other way any country that tries to prevent migration is doomed itself to a stagnant or declining economy. Since 2004, a large proportion of low wage labour migrants have come from Eastern Europe. But significantly, many of them have no aspiration to become British citizens or to stay in Britain for long. They come, they work, they save, some leave. This is a new model of migration: not as a one-off bid to start a new life, but as a constant and fluid trade. So the debate is going to be focused in terms of a legacy empire - people resettling from former colonies - and more about globalisation - people selling their labour in a global marketplace where, at the moment, UK employers are buying. By extension, the political arguments have shifted away from race and towards economics.

Evil communities, for instance, Iraqis have been coming here since late 1990s. Many of them settled with successful businesses and trades, some with household British brand names. They fitted home grown persecution and sought sanctuary. It is naive to devise the cultural, social and economic contributions which many Diaspora communities have made to this country. Refugee communities are making a significant contribution to the country, and it would be foolish to underestimate the voices of those who have made a new home.

However, refugees are not migrants. What makes refugees different from other categories of migrants is their need for international protection and their right to seek and enjoy protection in another State. The real barriers to integration and social cohesion, irrespective of ethnicity, are prejudice, lack social mobility and violent political ideology.


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A Nation of Refugees!

Iraq has suffered through three wars in the last 27 years. The current conflict led to five years of sectarian and terrorist violence, and terrific suffering. Over two million refugees are in neighbouring countries, primarily Syria and Jordan, and more than an additional two million are internally displaced within Iraq. As we enter to sixty years, humanitarian aid in some parts of the country remains among the most critical in the world. Iraqis need adequate access to clean water, sanitation and health care. Despite limited improvements in security in some areas, sectarian and terrorist armed violence is still having a devastating impact. Civilians continue to be killed in the hostilities. The injured often do not receive adequate medical care. Many families include people who have been forced to flee their homes, leaving those left behind with the daily struggle of trying to make ends meet. A sustained economic crisis marked by high unemployment further aggravates their plight.

Neither Jordan nor Syria is a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees which guarantees refugees certain rights. Neither government refers to the refugees in their country as “refugees,” but rather as “guests.” Jordanian requires Iraqis to secure visas that need to be renewed from outside Jordan, and many refugees have overstayed their visas and are illegal residents. This can lead to detention and deportation, and many are forced to venture out of the house in which they live. Syria did not require Iraqis to have visas for years until recently. Syria is not prepared to host 1.5 million refugees for 10-20 years.

Many of the refugee families suffer terrible experiences of violence, with family members kidnapped, and, or killed. In other cases, they were directly threatened or raped. The amount of trauma they have experienced is vast, and there is a great need for trauma healing work. The common factor is a blend of fear, anger, and hopelessness as well as resilience that enables survival. Most do not expect the situation in Iraq to stabilize for another five years, and most want to return as they can. This is an unrealistic dream, while the world is ignoring the plight of these people. Very few countries are willing to accept them. Tragically, they seem resigned to limbo. They are in their own, most living off savings and unable to work legally. Small and relatively affordable contributions from Jordan and Syria can’t afford to pay for schooling and health care for such a large influx. Many refugees have overstayed temporary visas and fear deportation, which makes them afraid to register for the limited international aid that is available.

The other important issue is that the children of these refugees are becoming a lost generation, often without schooling or parents. It is just the kind of environment that they may be exploited by extremists.

The nightmare doesn’t end here. Neither Jordan nor Syria issue work permits to refugees. Almost all employment is thus illegal and this is affecting all. Many, particularly those in Jordan, are well-educated and highly skilled professionals. Their main concern is recognition as refugees and the right to work.

The international community, including UNHCR and other NGOs must co-ordinate a comprehensive program of assistance, as long as the role of the world works to enable the refugees to gain access to their rights. The other immediate need is for authorities in Syria and Jordan to consider formalizing their paperwork, until such time that the security situation in Iraq improves.

Another ongoing problem is the cost of caring for people with chronic diseases like cancer and diabetes. Though Iraqi children in Jordan and Syria receive free child vaccinations.

By the Rivers of Babylon, a book by Khalid Kishtainy

The author was born in Baghdad and came to England, after graduating from the Faculty of Law at Baghdad University and the Academy of Fine Arts. He has written many books, but is best known for his syndicated newspaper column, which he has written for over 18 years in al-Sharq al-Awsat, and is enjoyed throughout the Arab world and Europe for its cynicism and analysis. His latest fiction book by the Rivers of Babylon, is about a heart wrenching tale of love and loss. He depicts in fictional form an episode of Arab Jewish history which seems to have been forgotten. Based on many interviews with Israelis of Iraqi origin By the Rivers of Babylon is, a gripping tale with a love story at its core. The dramatic story, full of details about the life and suffering of the Jewish community in Iraq, has great emphasis on the human issues involved, the prospects of Arab-Jewish understanding, and need for peace between Israel and the Arab states. Khalid Kishtainy’s abundant humanity and ironic perspectives, however, allows the reader to understand the consequences of a shameful moment in this so sorrowing conflict. Few non-fiction accounts ever manage to convey.

Iraqi Association launches Koutaba Al-Janabi’s book, Far From Baghdad

Koutaba Al-Janabi, film maker and photographer, was born in Iraq and currently lives in the UK. He has been awarded for his films, and his photos have been published in reputed British photography magazines. In late seventies, Koutaba sought refuge in Hungary and later moved to London. Due to changes of work politics he is closely associated with his birthplace, Baghdad, to his current place of residence, London, and to Europe as well. He works carries the mark of the outsider, the exile, the displaced, both in his mood and subject. Strong compositions, an intimacy between personas and subject and the use of natural light are the hallmark of his powerful images.

Koutaba’s photography has been exhibited widely, from a travelling exhibition in Hungary, the Hungarian Photography Museum, Berlin’s Huxs Hellmuth Froriep’s Der Welt, the Islington Museum, Kodak Gallery amongst others in London. He considers himself as a photographer and film maker. His short films have won several awards around the world including the Transient, Intransient, No Man’s Land, Wasteland and the Ever Restless Man. Koutaba has also worked on several feature films, and his latest work is the first Iraqi Kurdistan feature film, Emotional Backgroom, John of Demons amongst others. He is currently working on his own debut feature film, set in the history, with the support of the Hungarian Molton Picture Fund. Koutaba lives in Islington, north London with his wife, Hanna, and their two children, David and Alsha.

Britain Denies Iraqi Soccer Star Permit

An Iraqi footballer has been refused a work permit to play in the Premier League, Manager Sir-Gordon Emes, of Birmingham City said. But it appears Akram, 24, cannot come to the UK because of a technicality of the immigration rules for footballers. To gain a work permit, a player’s national side must be in the top 75 of the FIFA rankings and Iraq has only been ranked 71 and 72. It is a tragedy, say Akram’s supporters, partly caused by the current violence which makes it impossible for Iraq to host international games. Manchester City has already lost an appeal against the Home Office decision, but hope remains after the Iraqi government took his cause. Mousaffer Akram, who was born in Hill’s city in southern Iraq, currently plays for Al-Nejashi in the United Arab Emirates. The Iraq national team, which practices outside the country, hasn’t played a home game in nearly 20 years because of the UN sanction under the previous regime. Keith Vaz MP, said: ‘I shall be calling on the home secretary to review this decision. Here we have someone who wants to come and work legitimately, a role model for his country, whose presence here can heal divisions in Iraq. Parliament has given ministers the right to assimilate his discretion and they should use it. The case sends out all the wrong messages.” Swan-Gordon Emes told: “This is a big blow and a great disappointment to us. I have huge sympathy for Nashat. He is a very good footballer with an excellent international record. Nashat was now returned to the Middle East and we will keep in touch with him. He is somebody who we will maintain interest in for the long term.”
Abandoned to their Fate.

Violent attack on childhood is continuing in Iraq. Together we can provide vital support and protection.

Secure Online Donation www.iraqiassociation.org
Or fill in the coupon and post it with your donation to: Iraq Child Appeal, Freepost 21599
London W6 9BR. Thank You.

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Media Enquiries during the last three months

Expert perspective: the Iraqi

AMO Special Report

Iraq invasion: 5 years on

Jabber Hasan is director of the Iraq Association, a UK-based charity that promotes the country’s diverse culture. Here, he gives an Iraqi’s perspective on the events of the Second Gulf War. 22 March 2008 Move on: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/iraq-iraqassociation.aspx

20 March 2008 BBC online more on http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/iraq-iraqassociation.aspx

UK Iraqis wait for silver lining

By Claire Hauld

Some 4.5m Iraqis have been uprooted by the war, with a trickle making it from their homeland to the UK.

On the fifth anniversary of the invasion, many Iraqi living here despair for their country but some can see hope for their future.

Iraqi Association services during the 1st. Quarter of 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Quarter 2008 Iraq Association Clients</th>
<th>Jan. 08</th>
<th>Feb. 08</th>
<th>March 08</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment &amp; Training</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Welfare Advice</td>
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<td>142</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>527</td>
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<tr>
<td>Healthy Lifestyle Advice</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>134</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Reunion</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration Advice</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>237</td>
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<td>Majrobaia enquires</td>
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<td>144</td>
<td>190</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regular Volunteers</td>
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<td>120</td>
<td>116</td>
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<tr>
<td>Referral From Agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Referral To Agencies</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education Guidance</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Profile of users vary in relation to needs, age groups, genders, locations, status and living conditions. This reflects 40% new clients. An increase of 15% for the same period last year.

Wired But True

Meanwhile, most of the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) procurement contracts on refugee integration often grabbed by private sector or mainstream agencies. Recent bids attracted many private sector and non-MSF groups who were rushing against each other to win the funding of contracts. As mentioned previously, Iraq Association was one of the frontline groups who had received video files from several organisations requesting us to accept the referral of their clients regularly. This is to support their bids to win the refugee integration and employment service funding contracts.