

English Supplement

Al-Muntada

of the Iraqi Association

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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 Darra 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 a range 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 deeply worried about this proposal, and may lead to the closure of their services. The recommendation, not to fund 'single groups' will damage 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 community groups and lack of data and research to backup this specific conclusion. It's naive to dismiss the positive contribution of different refugee community groups 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 contradicts 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 community
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 responsibilities for working with asylum seekers and refugees. There is little evidence that mainstream agencies can match the experiences of grass root community groups 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 most appropriate way to integrate asylum seekers and refugees was to provide specialist services.



Hazel Blears MP
Secretary of State
for Communities and
Local Government

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 by House of Lords* led to negative and alarmist headlines. Professor Robert 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 keeping them "Neet" (Not in education, employment or training.) It is true though that since 1997, the numbers of young people who are "Neets" has risen by around one third. But it would be wrong to lay the blame solely at the feet of the immigrant and refugee population.

We encourage meaningful discussion instead of added ammunition to fear headlines and bigotries. It is true that voters feel strongly about immigration and often blame it for a range of ills from drugs to the cost of housing. Some such anxieties are justified; some are not. Local authorities might struggle to cope with an influx of people - schools might find their classes unexpectedly bolstered by children with no command of English. But British people don't need help from foreigners to engage in crime and antisocial behavior. Meanwhile, the xenophobic headlines fuels 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; DH Lawrence and HG Wells advocate eugenics. In fact, nearly two million Britons emigrate between 1871 and 1910 - significantly more than the number of people arriving. Yet in 1905 the government passes 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 Midlands 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 globalisation 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 realism should not be about politics of bigotries. 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. These groups offer valuable and essential data and information. The Lords failure to take testimonies contradicts with the spirit of community cohesion and integration. A further economic benefit - ignored by the Lords committee report - that frequently, migrants by their very readiness to take the risk of abandoning their roots to 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, it is wrong to predict and assume conclusions.

The fact remains that, 'there is no mystery that immigrants go where there are jobs,' said Stephen Castles, 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 dooming 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, or even to stay in Britain for long. They come, they work, some stay, 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 coming to be framed less in terms of a legacy of 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.

Exiled communities, for instance, Iraqis have been coming here since late 1930s. Many of them settled with successful businesses and trades, some with household British brand names. They fled home country persecution and sought sanctuary. It is naive to dismiss the cultural, social and economic contributions which many Diaspora communities have made to this country. Refugee communities are making a significant contribution to this country, and they treat this country as their 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 poverty, lack of 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 terrible 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 its sixth year, the humanitarian situation 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 disastrous 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 by the conflict 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 of the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees which guarantees refugees certain rights. Neither government refers to the Iraqis 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 illegally in Jordan. This causes fear of being deported, and many are afraid to venture out of the house in which they live. Syria did not require Iraqis to have visas for entry 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 resettle elsewhere. 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 consigned to limbo. They are on their own, most living off savings and unable to work legally. Small and relatively poor countries such as 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 expulsion, 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 issues work permits to refugees. Almost all employment is thus illegal and this is affecting all. Many, particularly those in Jordan, are well-educated and hold university degrees. Their main concern is recognition as refugees and the right to work.

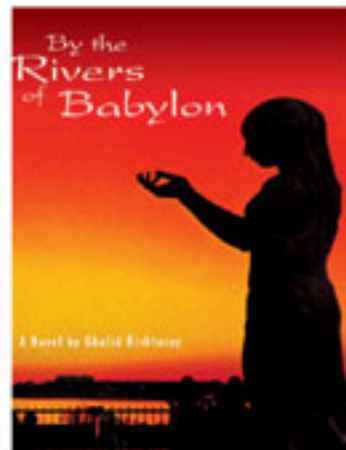
The international community, including UNHCR and other NGOs must co-ordinate a comprehensive program of assistance, as long as the refugees are denied work permits enabling them to earn their living. The other immediate need is for authorities in Syria and Jordan to consider formalising their paperwork, 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.

A year ago, the Iraqi government pledged \$25 million for Iraqi refugees, but only \$17 million of that has been spent. Iraqi government must do more to help refugees. The U.S. administration wants international donors to boost contributions for Iraqi refugees, and is pushing countries in Europe and the Middle East, notably Iraq itself, to fill an expected \$400 million shortfall in funds this year.

This year, UNHCR has issued a regional appeal for \$261 million, but besides the U.S. contribution of \$83 million, the appeal remains largely unfunded. While, the European Union has given up to 120 million dollars to the 2007 appeal of UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

The U.S. has taken a very small numbers of Iraqi refugees. In year 2007, the administration initially indicated it would accept 7,000 but ultimately took only 1,608. Since 1st October 2007, U.S. accepted another 1,876 Iraqis. Even translators who worked for the U.S. Embassy and military, and have received death threats are having an incredibly difficult time obtaining visas for the country they risked their lives to aid.

The United States should be leading an international effort to resolve this issue, and should be admitting more refugees. Iraq's government should use some its surplus oil revenues to pay for refugee care in host countries. Yet, there is a wall of silence when it comes to aiding Iraqi refugees.



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 lost. 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 harrowing 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 prospect of Arab Jewish understanding and the need for peace between Israel and the Arab states. Khalid Kishtainy's abundant humanity and ironic perspective, however, allows the reader to understand the consequences of a shaming moment in this seemingly endless conflict which few non-fiction accounts ever manage to convey.

By the Rivers of Babylon
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Iraqi Association launches Koutaiba Al-Janabi's book, Far From Baghdad

Far From Baghdad

Koutaiba 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, Koutaiba sought refuge in Hungary and later moved to London. Due to changes of world politics he is closely attached to his birthplace, Baghdad, to his current place of residence, London, and to Budapest as well. His work carries the mark of the outsider, the exile, the displaced, both in its mood and its subject. Strong compositions, an intimacy between camera and subject and the use of natural light are the hallmark of his powerful images.



Far From Baghdad, a book of photography by Koutaiba Al Janabi was launched in March by Iraqi Association in Hammersmith and Fulham. The book is available at Iraqi Association, price £12 plus P&P.

Koutaiba's photography has been exhibited widely, from a travelling exhibition in Hungary, the Hungarian Photography Museum, Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 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 Train, Transient, No Man's Land, Wasteland and the Ever Restless Man. Koutaiba has also worked on several feature films as Cinematographer, Jiyān, the first Iraqi Kurdistan feature film, Emotional Backgammon, John of Diamonds amongst others. He is currently working on his own debut feature film, set in Hungary, with the support of the Hungarian Motion Picture Fund. Koutaiba lives in Islington, north London with his wife, Hanna, and their two children, Daoud and Aisha.

Britain Denies Iraqi Soccer Star Permit

An Iraqi footballer has been refused a work permit to play in the Premier League. Manager Sven-Goran Eriksson had hoped to bring Nashat Akram, a star of Iraq's Asian Cup-winning team, to play for his Manchester City side. 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 70 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 up his cause. Midfielder Akram, who was born in Hilla city in southern Iraq, currently plays for Al-Ain 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 exercise their discretion and they should use it. This case sends out all the wrong messages." Sven-Goran Eriksson told said: "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 pedigree. He has now returned to the Middle East and we will keep in touch with him. He is somebody who we will maintain an interest in for the long term."



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Media Enquiries during the last three months

Expert perspective: the Iraq



Jabbar Hasan is director of the Iraqi 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 More on: <http://news.uk.msn.com/iraq-invasion-iraqi-association.aspx>

20 March 2008 BBC online more on: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7303519.stm>



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UK Iraqis wait for silver lining

By Claire Heald
 BBC News

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



Teachers Malik and Nawal worry for family left behind in Iraq

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

Iraqi Association services during the 1st. Quarter of 2008

1st Quarter 2008 Iraqi Association Clients	Jan. 08	Feb. 08	March 08	Total
Employment & Training	28	44	21	93
Welfare Advice	165	142	220	527
Healthy Lifestyle Advice	48	39	47	134
Family Reunion	15	18	09	42
Immigration Advice	94	88	77	259
Media Enquiries & Case studies	07	04	14	25
Telephone Advice & Enquiries	170	143	190	503
Regular Volunteers	08	07	08	23
Elderly Service	128	120	118	366
Referral From Agencies	32	28	21	81
Referral To Agencies	44	39	41	124
Education Guidance	66	51	44	161

Profile of users are 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.



Get involved and make a difference
 As well as doing something to benefit people, you could be improving your employment prospects. Volunteers wanted in the following areas:

- Research
- Admin
- Elderly Day Centre
- Youth and Family

Email your C.V. To: info@iraqiassociation.org

Iraqi Association Featured in the Media

Recently, Iraqi Association also featured in the following media: Hammersmith Gazette, Metro, Al Hurra-Satellite TV, Abu Dubai TV C4- More 4, Al Hiwar Satellite TV, London Informer, H&F NEWS, the Independent and the Mirror.



Jabbar Hasan Director Of The Iraqi Community Association In London
 'I THINK all Iraqis were guilty of wishful thinking when they denied the danger of sectarian conflict. We have just seen an act of terrorism timed and planned to spin Iraq into civil war.'

ThirdSector

Charities | Voluntary Organisations | Social Enterprise

Charities complain of exploitation

The Third Sector reported, (Andy Ricketts, Third Sector, 13 February 2008) that a large private sector contractor has been asking refugee and asylum charities to work as its partners without payment. The approach has come from A4e, which is bidding for Home Office contracts for the Refugee Integration and Employment Service. The three-year contracts in 12 regions across the UK are designed to provide help and support to refugees in establishing themselves in this country. A4e, which already has government contracts finding jobs for unemployed people, told the refugee groups in an email that it would welcome their help in supporting service users, it asked "What kind of support do you think you would be able to provide to us? A subsequent email made it clear there would be no money involved. "No payment will be made to your organisation; this is purely a referral partnership," it said. Farrukh Husain, director of the Migrants Resource Centre, which was contacted by A4e, said the move was "gross exploitation of the voluntary sector". He said: "A4e must think the voluntary sector is naive to simply wish to sign up to a relationship that delivers little in return for voluntary organisations and fattens up the profits of A4e." An A4e spokeswoman said that if the organisation was subcontracting it would pay for services. But government guidelines about 'double funding' prevented the firm from paying for some services under the new contracts. Husain responded that double funding was for front-line organisations to worry about. "It would be unethical for us to double count clients, and we do not," he said.

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-refugee groups who were rushing against each other to win the funding of contracts. As mentioned previously, Iraqi Association was one of the frontline groups who had received wired emails 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. Iraqi Association is worried about this spooky development in relation to the integration programmes. This will dilute the quality of the work, and undercut the work of refugee community groups to win funding to deliver the settlement services. It's becoming a cosy club for some organisations to beat the drums of refugee integration. Despite the fact that some of them never experienced working with refugees or had refugee clients before. It's attractive because of its funding nature. BIA must seriously reconsider this ludicrous method of contract awards. A large numbers of the Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) have years of experience and commitment to offer target-led settlement services of their users and community members, but they were excluded. RCOs offers added value, commitment and cost effective operation. Not surprisingly, the gridlock is hitting other European Refugee Fund programme. During the course of our research to obtain an information pack, we sent an email to Procurement manager of Asylum Commercial at BIA. He referred us to another web location <https://homeoffice.bravosolution.com/web/login.shtml> and informed us "Do not contact me directly". We were 'pleased' to find that most of the BIA bids and information packs on refugees and asylum is now available at BravoSolution, a private international e-sourcing company, and a leading international provider of eSourcing solutions. The company's mission says "to generate value by supporting its clients in the improvement of their procurement processes through web-based technologies and services." However, following our registration, we have made several attempts to obtain a pack on the latest refugee integration bids but without success. It is not only hilarious to commercialise the integration of refugees in this way, but the whole concept is designed to attract private sector agencies, or charities with big fundraising investment budgets. This development is wholly unacceptable, it would further lead to exclusion of the most vulnerable groups of people in our society. The whole issue of refugee integration is becoming a spooky market place. Excluding RCOs will not assist the settlement process. We deal with people and not objects, it's both immoral and unethical. Refugees are people who have survived the most appalling experiences, torture, sectarian violence, rape and terror. RCOs and other grass root groups have no choice but to rise up to this challenge.