

Afghan Association of London



Report 2011

**Needs' Assessment of the Afghan Population in
Harrow**

**A research report conducted by the Afghan Association in conjunction with the
Evelyn Oldfield Unit**

By Ludivine Faniel (intern with the AAL)

**(with support from Sarah Menzies, Claudia Santoro, Stefania Raschia, Alessandra
Scipini and Karim Shirin)**

Section 1: Introduction

The Afghan Association of London has been delivering a wide number of services to the Afghan population in the borough of Harrow for over fifteen years. These services have included support such as translation, housing, benefits, immigration advice, advocacy; organisation of events, seminars and different classes such as English classes, mother tongue language, sport activities etc. These services have been very well received by the Afghan population but there are some other service needs which have been identified in this survey.

The goal of this survey was to identify the different needs of the Afghan population in the borough of Harrow with the perspective to improve the Afghan Association services and been run with support from the Evelyn Oldfield Unit (see section 3: Method)

For this survey, a questionnaire was created. 133 Afghan people from the borough of Harrow took part and filled in it. As well, the AAL talked with almost 200 by telephone in order to gather the opinions of other users. This was another instrument to collect feedback used by the organisation. The questions concerned the different needs, wishes and issues that the Afghan community has. In addition, two focus groups (one with women and another one with youth) were run. It was important to ensure that as many members of the community as possible took part.



The second section of this report concerns the situation of the Afghan minority in the UK and the background of the Afghan Association of London. This first description will help the reader to understand the different results of the survey within the context of Afghan migration to London. The second one will help him to understand the different services that the Afghan Association has been offering to the Afghan population.

The third section describes the method of the survey and explains the relationship between the Afghan Association and the Evelyn Oldfield Unit.

The fourth part explains the different results collected in the questionnaires supported by graphs. Thus, the results are easy to see and allow us to have a general view of the issues and needs of Afghan community in the borough of Harrow.

The fifth section describes the findings from the two focus groups, one with women and another one with youth. That is a very interesting part because it's based on a different approach and it gives the possibility to explore the issues more with more depth.

The next section presents the results from a questionnaire and interviews with professionals on the needs and issues that the Afghan community has.

The last part of this report offers an interpretation of the results. Here we explore what these results mean by exploring the answers and trying to prioritise the needs of the Afghan community. We also make a number of suggestions as to how the Afghan Association can respond to these needs and improve the different services that the Afghan Association offers to its population.

Section 2: Situation of the Afghan Minority in UK and Background of the Afghan Association London

It is important to give an outline of the situation that the Afghan minority live in UK in order to better understand the need for the Afghan Association, why it exists and the wider needs of the Afghan population. We have obtained this information from analysis of academic reports available online. NB this was taken from a previous survey done with the Evelyn Oldfield Unit has and run last year entitled “Afghan Association of London- Research into Afghan Communities in London” (2010).

I. Situation of the Afghan minority in UK

Census of Afghans in UK

The Afghan Association received data from the Home Office which estimated that there are 100,000 Afghans living in the UK. These results are probably not that accurate for a number of reasons. Firstly, it doesn't take into account the number of Afghans who have returned home voluntarily. In addition, there has also been a great deal of internal EU migration of by Afghans from the Netherlands to the UK but since they claimed asylum in the Netherlands, this is not registered in UK asylum statistics. Generally, census data is also insufficient for monitoring Afghans since the census and often ethnicity monitoring forms only include options for Asian or Middle Eastern countries of origin rather than specifically for Afghanistan. Therefore it is very hard to get an accurate picture of how many Afghans live in the UK. We hope this changes when the results of the 2011 census will be released.



Locality where Afghan live in UK and London

The 2001 census suggests that the majority of Afghans living in Britain reside in London, more specifically in the West and North-West London boroughs of Brent, Ealing, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Harrow and Barnet. This data from 2001 was supported by community consultations in 2008/9¹.

¹ The Afghan Muslim Community in England: Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities. Communities and Local Government Report, April 2009.

Demography of the Afghan Community in London

According to the Institute of Migration, there have been three waves of migration into the UK: The first flow started in the 1980s following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the second in the 1990s after the collapse of the communist regime and civil war in Afghanistan and the third in late 1990s and early 2000s under the Taliban regime and during the conflict leading up to the overthrow of the Taliban. The Afghan community in the UK is large in number but isn't thought to have a communal structure². Initially in each wave of migration the majority of migrants were male family leaders but the majority were then also followed by their families and this combined with children being born in the UK have combined to mean that there is a mix of ages within the Afghan community in the UK.

Specifics Needs and Issues of the Afghan Community

According to a recent report by the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Afghan Muslim Community is conceived of as facing considerable economic, social, health and welfare problems which are due to a lack of resources within the community as a whole but also due to inadequate and inappropriate support from the local authorities. Afghan refugees in particular have found the language provision particularly problematic. There is rarely an interpreter available, and when they are available language provision is often in the wrong language (Afghanistan has two national languages: Dari and Pashtu).



The general well-being of refugees is particularly worrying since they may experience a variety of problems such as poor sleep, anxiety, loneliness, depression, isolation and anger. As mentioned previously, the stress of seeking asylum means that the heads of families often suffer from depression. Female refugees may also need specialist advice but often have no idea of where or how to find it.

The majority of Afghans in the UK are thought to be professionally qualified but lose social, economic and professional status in exile. Men are engaged in 'lower-class' employment and as a result of this loss of status combined with the migration experience, there are thought to be high

² International Organisation for Migration Mapping Exercise: Afghanistan 2007

levels of undiagnosed depression as well as post-traumatic stress, in particular among males although there is a lack of information about this and there is room for more research in this area³.

Women within the Afghan community are also thought to have more specific needs. It may be difficult for them to have an active role in the community since first generation women may have poor English language skills and may struggle to access English language classes. Although they may be active within refugee community organisations, women rarely take leadership positions in these groups. The culture of silence around private or 'dishonourable' issues may prevent women gaining assistance for issues such as domestic violence, separation or divorce⁴.

There appears to be a broad gap between first generation Afghan migrants and the younger second generation. This gap is thought also to result in tension at times since older generation Afghans may worry about the loss of Afghan culture, whilst younger generation are more concerned with integrating into life in Britain⁵. The younger tend to learn English and gain access to services, and the older generation who may be reluctant to learn English and are, therefore, less likely to integrate⁶.

I. Background of Afghan Association London

The Afghan Association of London was established about fifteen years ago to serve the Afghan community of London. The main roles include providing advice on a wide range of issues and addressing the health needs of the community, as well as running educational projects such as



English classes for adults, sports and leisure activities, after-school mother tongue classes and supplementary schooling, social and cultural events and a women's group.

The reason behind the creation of the Afghan Association of London is that the road to integration into British society is a challenging one, and many immigrants often feel intimidated, isolated and helpless. They may find huge barriers to claiming asylum such as a lack of understanding of the process or limited

English language skills. The Afghan Association seeks to alleviate these problems and provide assistance to asylum seekers and other members of the Afghan community in London. They try to

³ The Afghan Muslim Community in England: Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009.

⁴ Ibid. 2009

⁵ The Afghan Muslim Community in England: Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009.

⁶ International Organisation for Migration Mapping Exercise: Afghanistan 2007

represent the interests of the Afghan community in London, both locally and nationally, to provide a comprehensive advice and referral service for Afghans particularly in the fields of immigration, health, welfare benefits and housing, to promote education amongst the Afghan community.

Section 3: Context of the Survey and Methodology

The AAL wanted to conduct this study and asked the Evelyn Oldfield Unit for support to do this. The Evelyn Oldfield Unit (an organisation in London which works with refugee and migrant groups to improve their services to the community and enabling them to tackle the different issues of the community they serve) worked with the Afghan Association of London last year on setting up and running a survey to assess Afghan needs in the borough.



However, there was a change in staff and the new team was keen to follow up this study with a new set of questions devised to identify the needs, the wishes of activities and problems of the Afghan community in the borough of Harrow and prioritise activities that the group should run. A further goal is to improve the services that the AAL offers to the Afghan community.

The first step was to build a questionnaire. The questions are centred on the life of Afghan community, its relation to AAL and problems it encounters in the borough of Harrow. Some questions concerned specific groups as women, elderly and youth. This questionnaire consisted of 21 questions, some open-answer questions and some close-answer questions (with multiple-choices answer or with single-choice answer).

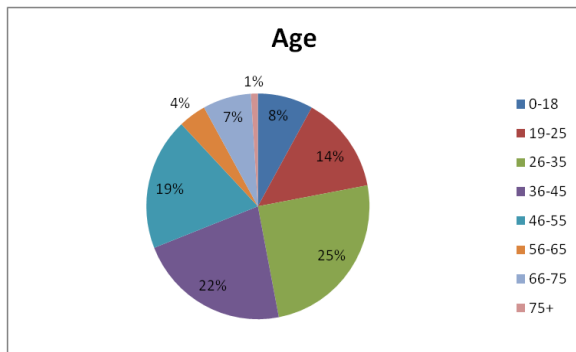
Subsequently, we asked the questionnaires to 133 participants. The only conditions were that they live in the borough of Harrow and they are Afghan.

Then, we inserted all of the data from these questionnaires in an IT program called Survey Monkey. This allowed us to collect the answers faster than we would have done manually.

Following on from this, we ran two focus groups. One concerned the youth and the other one looked at concerns of women. The goal was to have their advice and their feelings on how they live in the borough of Harrow and if they have any specific needs or problems that AAL could tackle. The focus groups also allowed us to explore the issues emerging from the questionnaire.

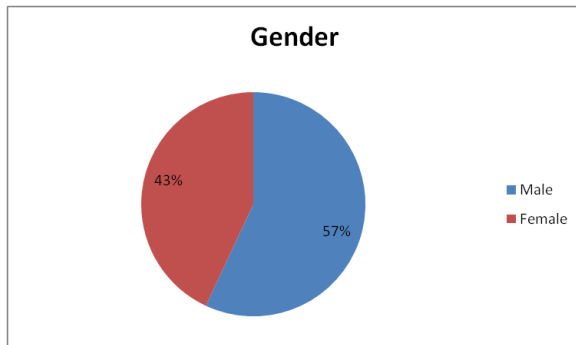
Section 4: Results from the Main Questionnaire

This questionnaire was filled in by a sample of 133 beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the Afghan Association of London (AAL)'s services in the borough of Harrow. We asked 21 questions and this section also presents the results with some representative graphics. These graphs allow us to identify easier the information newly collected regarding the wishes to improve the AAL's services.



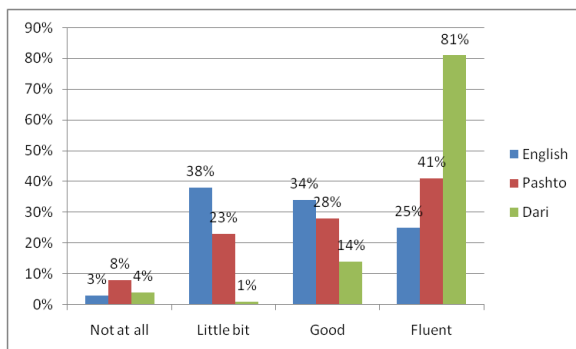
Q1. Age

Of the 133 respondents, the majority of them were between 19 and 55 years old with the highest number in the 26-35 age brackets. We found it difficult to get older people to fill this in. Therefore this study is not representative of the Afghan population (in terms of age range) at large.



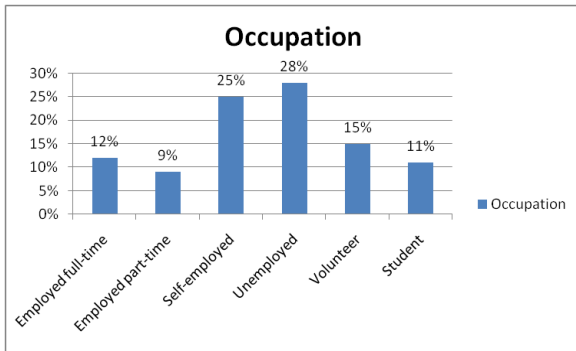
Q2. Gender

For the gender question, we wanted to ensure that male and female had equal representation in the study. As can be seen, there were a higher number of male participants.



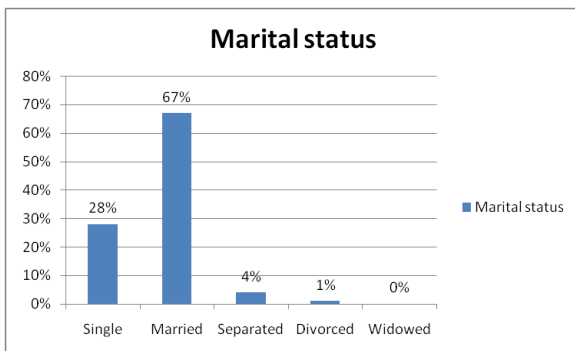
Q3. Speaking language (English, Pashto, Dari)

We were interested to know which language was the most spoken by Afghan people and how well. We compared their English level with the two major languages (Pashto and Dari) in Afghanistan. The Dari language has the highest score in "Fluent speaking" whereas the English has the lowest score. This observation is important and highlights the English language problems that Afghans have in UK.



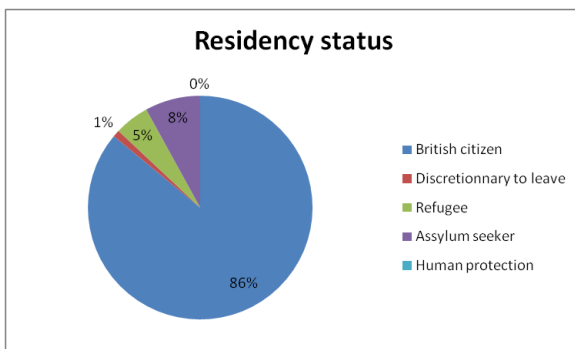
Q4. Occupation

Unemployment is high amongst the participants. However, we were interested to see how significant self-employment was too. Volunteering was also high at 15%. This graph shows that only 21% were in fulltime or part-time employment. In addition for this question, we added an option “Other” and the results show that 10 persons considered themselves to be housewives and 5 retired. It is clear that it is not easy to find a job for Afghan people (perhaps because of lack of English level) in London.



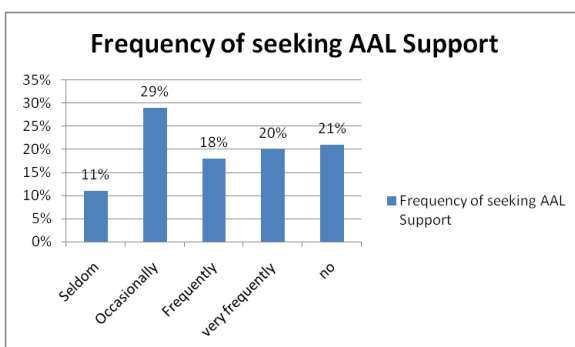
Q5. Marital status

The majority of the respondents are married and we can observe that very few people divorced. There is also a quite high rate of single persons (but we have to take in count that 8% of the interviewees were under 18 years old).



Q6. Residency status

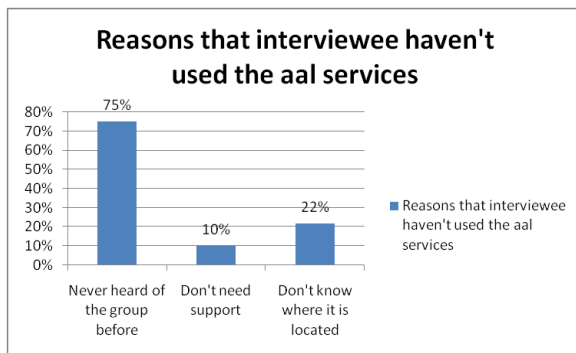
It is clear and interesting to note that the most of the interviewees are British citizens. We add an option “Other” for this question and 24 of the 133 people answered that they were from another European country, demonstrating the high inter-European migration mentioned in the previous research above.



Q7. Frequency of seeking AAL support

Among the respondents, 78% have used at least once the AAL services against 21% who haven't used them at all. In this 78%, the nearly 40% used

the services of the AAL frequently or very frequently.

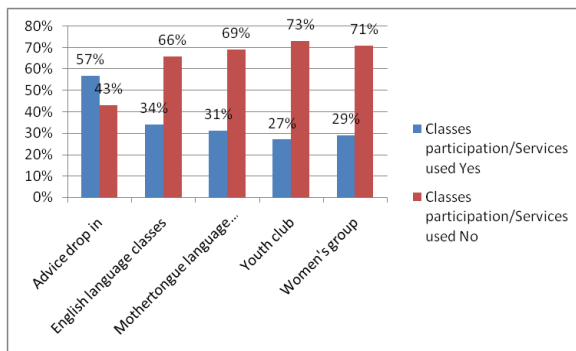


Q8. Reasons that interviewees haven't used the AAL services

(This question was a multiple choice answer)

We asked this question to respondents who have never used the AAL services. It's very interesting to note that it's principally because they have never heard of the group before.

Two people explained us that it was because they had recently arrived in the borough of Harrow.

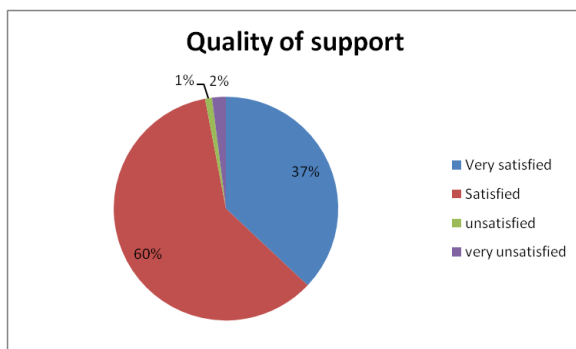


Q9. Class participation / services used

(This question was a multiple choice answer)

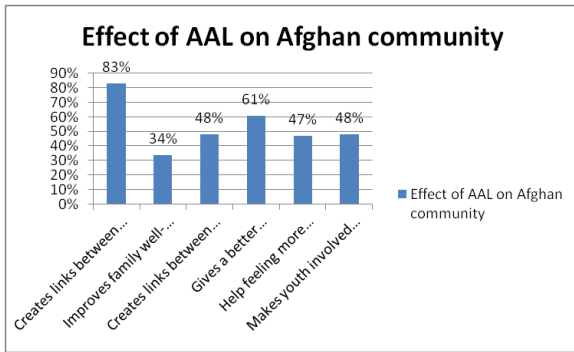
The services the most used by the respondents are the "Advice drop in". This category of services involves advice in helping the clients and their housing, immigration, employment, domestic issues, translations issues. The other services or classes that the AAL offers to its community are used in a quite similar way.

In the category "other," we found 19 ticks for "events" and 4 ticks for "Seminar".



Q10. Satisfaction about services

We can observe that most of the people from the sample which has used the Afghan Association services (97%) are positively satisfied. A very few rate their experience as unsatisfactory.

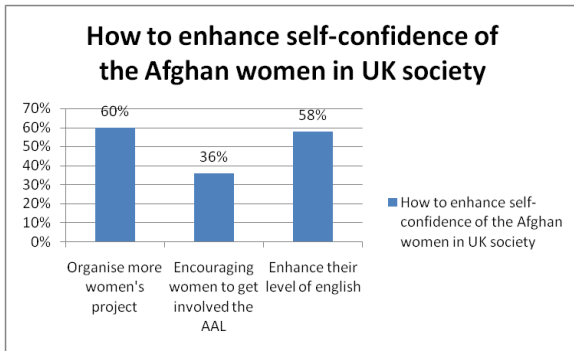


Q11. Effect of AAL on Afghan Community

(This question was a multiple choice)

It is clear that the respondents think that the first role of the AAL is to create links between Afghans. The role of “improving family well-being” also had a significant response rate as did “Creates links between Afghans and wider community”, “Help feeling more settled in UK” and “Makes youth involved in interesting activities”.

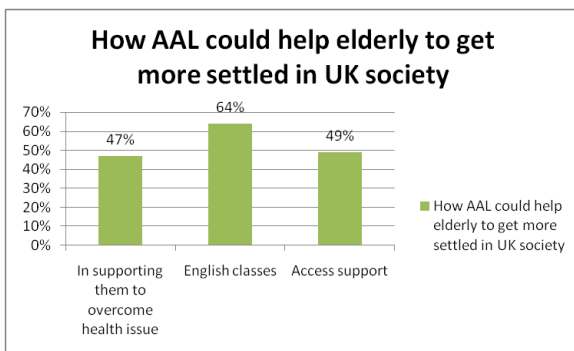
From the category “Other”, we can note that some respondents expressed that it keeps “Good culture in Society”.



Q12. Enhancing self-confidence of the Afghan women in UK Society

(It is a multiple choices answer)

The level of English and the women’s project seem to have drawn the attention of respondents for improving women’s self-confidence. Volunteering with AAL was quite popular (at 36%) but the other two categories are clearly the main choices. In the option “Other”, we can observe that women’s participation in events has been cited further times.

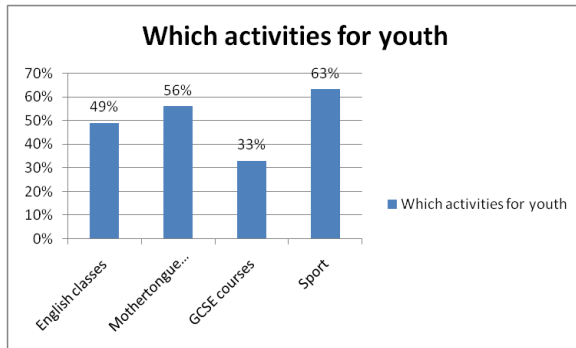


Q13. Helping the elderly to feel settled in UK society

(This question is a multiple choices answer)

One of the problems targeted of elderly is their English level and therefore there was a strong desire to see more English classes designed for the elderly. Supporting the elderly to access support services was also a strong response as was support for older people to overcome their health issues. In the option “Other”, a number of respondents noted that it would be interesting to create more “elderly group get together”.

Afghan Youth



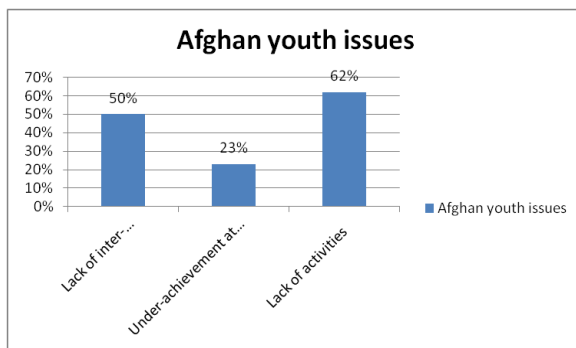
Q14. Activities for youth

(This question is a multiple choices answer)

The interviewees have selected the “Sport activities” as the most important for the youth’s well-being.

Next was “Mother tongue language.” We can suggest that the Afghans are afraid of the Afghan culture’s disappearance, stifled in the host country (UK) for the future generation.

We can observe that the improvement of “English level” was the third most popular response and that there is still a need for this. In the category “Other”, the “Cohesion activities”, the “Religion education and afghan culture” and the “Cultural activities (music, theatre)” stand out.



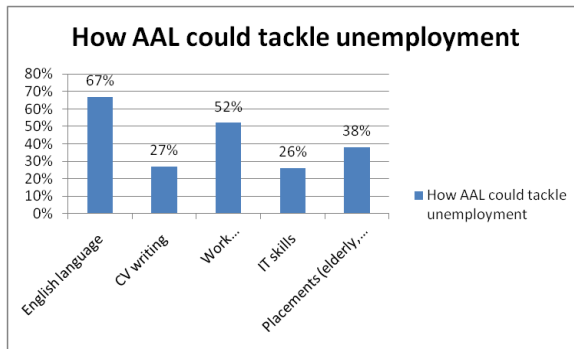
Q15. Afghan youth issues

This question is a multiple choices answer.

For the majority of respondents, the problems that youth encounter come from the lack of activities and the lack of inter-generational understanding. We had proposed the different options “Over-crowding in home”, “Anti-social behaviours” and “lack of positive male role” but the percentage that we find for these answers is too weak to represent them in this graph.

In the category “Other,” there were a number of “Lack of Afghan culture knowledge” responses.

Unemployment and the AAL's Role



Q16. How AAL could tackle unemployment

With this question, we really wanted to know which activities the respondents would like the AAL to offer as services to help Afghan community to feel more-confident and have more facilities to find a job.

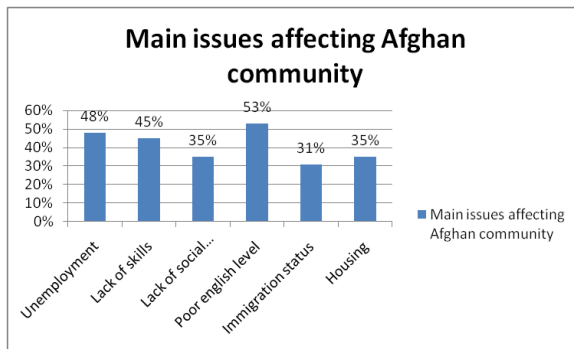
“English language” support and “Work experience” seem to be the most important to find a job for the Afghan community.

In category “Other”, one interviewee asked the AAL to offer to the population useful contacts of employers and agencies thus useful information.

Afghan Health Issues

Q17. Health Problems

Most of the Afghan people in the borough of Harrow (79%) don't suffer for any health problems. The illness which one they suffer the most is depression.



Q18. Main issues affecting the Afghan community

(This question is a multiple choices answer)

The questionnaire also asked participants to identify the main issues that they thought the Afghan community encounter in the borough of Harrow. The category “Unemployment”, “Poor English level” and “Lack of skills” are the most significant. It's important to specify that 6 other Categories (“Use of drugs”, “crimes”, “discrimination”, “isolation”, “poverty”, “children's underachievement at school”) were also present but we didn't represent them in the graph because the percentage of ticks was not as strong as the issues listed above.

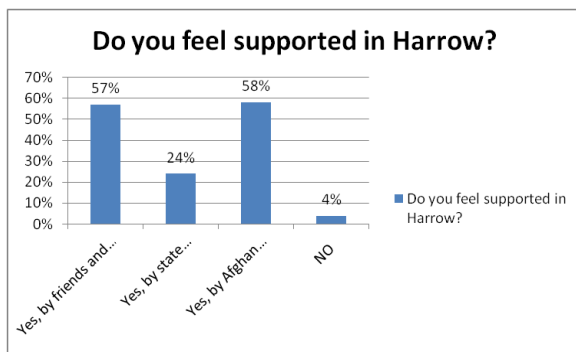
Q18. Suggestions on how AAL could tackle these issues

This question was an open-ended answer. 20/133 participants answer it. The most popular answers are and by chronological order:

1. "Education seminars/Advice"
2. "Get together events"
3. "English classes"
4. "Help in finding a job"
5. "Sport project"

We didn't report on the other responses as they were not the strongest.

Support in Harrow



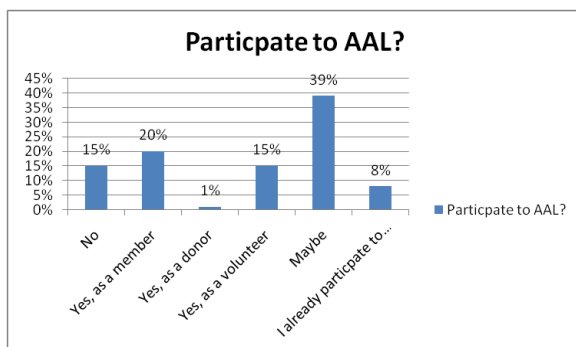
Q19. Do you feel supported in Harrow?

(This question is a multiple choices answer)

In general, Afghan people seek most of their support from the Afghan Associations and from friends and family. State support was weak in comparison.

Q20. Other needs or activities that AAL could tackle or propose

75% of the respondents find that there are no other needs or activities that AAL could tackle or propose. 25% thinks that there are (this question is an open-question answer). The majority of the answers concern "some activities to get people together", "More women activities" and "More sport activities for youth".



Q21. Participation in the AAL

We asked whether participants would be willing to further support the AAL. We were interested in attracting new volunteers. A number (39%) stated they might like to help. The next most popular

responses were yes as a member and yes as a volunteer. 15% said no outright. A tiny 1% said they would be willing to contribute financially. This is probably because of the high rate of unemployment and the low income of the families.

Q21. Any other comments

The main response in this section was concerned with the need for the AAL to do more advertising and organising in a way to be known by more of the Afghan community in the borough of Harrow.

Section 5: Focus Groups' Analysis: Women and Youth

We ran 2 focus groups for beneficiaries. The first one focused on youth and the second one on women. In the two cases, the atmosphere was positive and participants expressed their opinion easily. It was an interesting and enjoyable experience.

For choosing the different topics that we were going to tackle in focus group, we selected the key emerging issues from the questionnaire.

The focus group is a sociological method, centred on the qualitative way, to collect information about a particular issue. The goal is to observe a kind of informal discussion

➤ **Focus group with youth**

The focus group with youth involved 8 attendees and 3 professionals who were supervising the discussion.

Key issues of Afghan families

The first question was concerned with looking at the key issues of the Afghan family in the borough of Harrow. The strongest and more common responses to emerge were:

- Lack of knowledge of English language
- Lack of awareness of activities
- Lack of integration

“In general the problems regard gaining jobs, attending school; they may one to do activities but cannot because of the language. There is a lack of awareness about courses going on ...” (Lack of knowledge of English language – Lack of awareness of activities)

“They can’t speak English. They just speak their home languages. Also, children learn English faster than older people”

“It’s not just English. There is a lack of awareness about services (GP benefits for example)” (Lack of awareness of activities)

“It depends on age’s group; school and college age group are fine, but when they finish there are no ways to interact, learn)” (Lack of integration)

Key issues of Afghan women

This question directly gave rise to 3 major themes

- Lack of confidence

- Lack of knowledge
- Cultural difference

“Yes but there is a cultural side together with lack of English knowledge and confidence. The language barrier is strong, but the cultural issue is important as well” (Lack of knowledge- Lack of self-confidence– Cultural differences)

“Afghan women prefer to stay home- there is a lack of knowledge” (Lack of knowledge)

“Girls and boys are two separated things. They don’t see as the same thing” (Cultural difference)

Key issues of Afghan Youth

The different problems that the youth think encounter concern principally:

- Lack of intergenerational understanding
- Lack of positive mal role model
- Lack of activities
- Lack of participation in existing activities

“There is nothing to do” (Lack of activities)

“It depends; if the activities are just sportive one, you just go, play and come back. And some kids don’t play because they are not good enough and there is an issue of affordability” (Lack of activities)

“In the family the dad is always at work. When they come home kids are sleeping” (Lack of positive mal role model)

“Also parents allow mostly their kids hanging out with people from their own community” (Lack of intergenerational understanding)

“There is a clash of ideas. If we had grown in Afghanistan, we may have the same opinion, but we grew up here.” (Lack of intergenerational understanding)

“I go to university full time. I spend time out with friends. Instead, other Afghans are not allowed to do so. It is big issues for them.” (Lack of intergenerational understanding)

“Afghan people don’t go out. Afghan could go out for an Afghan language course” (Lack of participation in existing activities)

“I take part in an organisation where someone rents out green spaces, every one send a fee and a guy called BABA organise it. But there is only space for 10 people and often people don’t even come” (Lack of participation in existing activities)

The Role AAL Could Have in the Resolution of These Issues

During the informal discussion, the relation between the issues and the role that AAL could have to tackle them has been done constantly to observe the position of youth about what to do to help them feeling better in the borough of Harrow. What has emerged is:

- English classes for women
- Mutual aid classes between Afghans (each one learns each other what he knows)
- Classes of different tasks (like the use of computer) for women to make easier the way to use some techniques for the integration in the work world
- Advertising about existing activities
- Charitable activities for people unemployed
- Music activities for youth

➤ **Focus Group With Women**

The focus group with women involved 4 participants and two professionals who were supervising the discussion. One of the women couldn't speak English (she only speaks in Dari) but the other attendees helped her to understand and to translate.

We tried to ask quite the similar questions than for youth but the answers were a little bit less clear. They explain us principally their point of view about the major issues of women.

Key Issues of Afghan Families

When this question has been approached, one answer appears clearly to all participants:

- Lack of knowledge of English language

"Language problems are the main issues, especially for women. Older people, in addition, can't learn English at all, we should help them, for instance to go to the GP"

"For men there are also the same problems. \Language, is a real barrier"

"We also need computer courses about English I know that there is free English course on Friday"

But also, they consider another big issue:

- Intergenerational misunderstanding

"There are a lot of difficulties in managing the relationship between parents and children; children don't listen to their parents and since the parents are not allowed to beat them, they don't listen to them..."

"There are also problems linked to the language because children know English sometimes and their parents don't"

Key Issues of Afghan Women

For this question, three major elements stood out:

- Lack of knowledge of English language
- Unemployment
- Lack of self-confidence

“Most-women are unemployed. They struggle to find a job. A lot of doctors, engineers, they improve their English courses again and again to improve their level of English but they can’t get a job” (Lack of knowledge of English language – Unemployment)

“Well, I can talk about my experience. I graduated in Afghanistan from the faculty of agriculture and I also have experience with women, communication and gender issues. When I came here I was asked from the job centre what would be my preferential area of work and when I told it was agriculture, it was said that here there is no agriculture. Even when I said that I was also specialized in gender issues, they told me that here there are not these kinds of issues, everything is equal” (Unemployment)

“Some of them are also English-skilled, but they can’t get a job” (Unemployment)

“I arrived in London just for four months ago, but since I’ve been analysing a little bit the situation. I can see that sometimes men bring women here and they don’t feel confident at all, both for the language, both for their background.” (Lack of self-confidence)

The Role AAL Could Have In The Resolution of These Issues



For improving the intervention of Afghan association in the creation of new services or to improve the last one, attendees answered that they would like a better advertising of activities that happen because they didn’t know about the existence of some of them.

In addition, it was also felt that a good way to find a job is to participate in volunteering, so the Afghan Association could help them to learn office skills and therefore to gain experience useful in looking for a job.

A further proposition was to help women to improve their self-confidence by having some regular meetings to talk, express their fears and to exchange their experiences. All the activities that can gather women would be a good initiative it was felt as it would allow women to be more self-confident.

Section 6: The Professionals' Perspective

It was thought that having a professional perspective on the Afghan Community in the borough would be useful for this study. So we asked for their opinion about the issues they perceived as the strongest for the community and about the role that AAL have and could have in tackling these issues.

We sent an email survey to four professionals who had had contact with Afghan Association of London. We received 3 answers. We were keen to hear their perspective. We have collected some very interesting points of view.

Effect that AAL has had on the Afghan community in the borough of Harrow

The role of AAL is fully recognized by the experts. They underline the positive effect that AAL has on social life and cultural life (Afghan culture, Mother tongue language, and tradition, religious). The education sector is also an area where AAL has positive influence. In addition, housing and immigration problems are also key areas where the AAL is known to have had an impact.

Major issues of the Afghan community in the borough of Harrow

The different issues raised by professionals are loneliness of women, poor English level, and unemployment but also children's behaviour, drug abuse and extremism of youth.

"The major issue in Harrow for your Association to help them - bring out ladies from home, teach them English language, cooking, health care, sewing, drawing, numeracy and basic maths, where they are living, they must change their behaviour, attitude, regarding their children's (not joined the gang group, drug sellers,... - "

"Many Afghan people are facing unemployment, they have poor English due to lack of education, young people are involved in drugs, and some of the young people are being tricked by religious extremists into having bad point of view of Islam"

Which part of the Afghan community is the most affected by the problem of integration?

Apparently, women have the most difficulties to be and feel integrated in UK society. Poor English level was the key reason behind this but also the fact that they don't have a social life that could help them to feel more-confident and to feel better integrated. Elderly have quite the same problems than women.

"Elders and women are mostly affected by integration because many of the elders and women can't speak or understand the English language to express their problems in society"

Which role the AAL could have to tackle these problems

The professional respondents stated that the AAL should help particularly elderly and women with English classes but they could organise some activities like cultural activities or physical activities for all the community.

Section 7: Telephone Feedback

The staff of the AAL were keen to point out that they had also spoken to many hundreds of their clients by phone and had polled them to see what the key issues were. These are as follows:

- Lack of youth activity
- Concern over anti-social behaviour of youth
- Concern on increasing incidents of extremism
- Need for more inter-generational activities to bridge gap between the ages
- Need for cultural activities in order to support young Afghans to stay in touch with their roots
- There was also a great concern for isolated women who were not able to access any courses as they rarely left their homes.
- English language and unemployment were other pressing needs of the community.

Section 8: Summary

This section involves the point of views collected in the questionnaire, the focus group, the professional's perspective and the telephone polling. We have compared them, underlined the consistencies but also examined any differences in opinion that we've found. This part helps to target the real issues and needs of the Afghan community in the borough of Harrow.

The key findings are as follows:

Support for Afghans

Most of the support Afghans in our study support comes from the AAL or from friends and family. Accessing support from other agencies was limited. More needs to be done on building trust between Afghans and local service providers. This can also be explained by the fact that Afghans have a strong sense of self-help. In addition, people prefer to turn to the AAL as it is a community-led organisation that is known and trusted throughout the Afghan population.

The support of the AAL is effective. In general, the majority of the attendees that have already used the AAL's services are satisfied or very satisfied of the services offered. Among the respondents who have never used the AAL's services, the major reason is because they've never heard about its existence. This is a key area the group need to work on. They need to ensure they communicate their services and support available better to allow those who most need their services to access them. A multi-lingual website may help to achieve this but advertising at events, distributing leaflets at key Afghan social events, making themselves now not health visitors, GPS etc, could all help to spread the knowledge of their activities.

NB the AAL has recently designed a new website which has an update list of activities and has Afghan news in order to attract people to its website. (June 2011)

Where there was any dissatisfaction with the group, it is likely to have been because of the AAL's limited resources. The staff is only too aware that they are very stretched. They have no paid staff currently and are all volunteers. Previously, the AAL was much bigger and better resourced. They are concerned that their clients still expect the same level of service but this is not possible. They now operate out of very small premises and have a lack of funds and therefore are concerned that they do not meet the clients' expectations.

The group is currently working hard on developing new projects and internal systems to ensure that they operate effectively and are able to meet the needs of their clients.

English and Employment

Concerning the different issues of the Afghan community in London selected by the attendees, English language problem was the most mentioned. This clearly has some consequences on

employment. The majority of respondents were unemployed. It's difficult to find a job because they are under-skilled in terms of lack of English and hold qualifications from outside the UK. Sometimes they are well-qualified but the British government or the British institution or association don't recognise their skills. This vision is clearly shared by the women and youth that have taken part in the focus groups and by the professionals who clearly target the unemployment and language issues.

The Afghan Association needs to develop projects to help build English language and job seeking skills. A number of respondents thought it would be useful to be given support to access work placements. Self-employment is higher than average amongst the Afghan population and there is a possibility that the AAL could help people to start up their own businesses. Supporting women into employment is also a key area the group needs to look at further. Researching appropriate employment, building 'work readiness' skills and liaising with local education providers and employers to begin to build bridges would all be good starting points.

Young People

For the youth, the main consistent areas of need highlighted were the lack of activities, the lack of Afghan culture knowledge and the lack of intergenerational understanding. The youth that participated in the focus group agreed that they had limited possibility of activities (or some of their peers did). They believed that the reason behind the lack of intergenerational understanding was that their parents don't understand their need to participate to activities with the aim to be integrated in England. Women in the focus group agreed about the lack of intergenerational understanding but they also highlighted that some young people were badly behaved.

Many adults were very concerned about the rise in incidents of extremism in the community and felt that youth were disaffected. Professionals highlighted problems of youth behaviour like drug-taking and crime.

Some of the young people knew of people who had taken drugs or who did drink and highlighted a number of people who had 'fallen off the rails.'

The youth strongly felt that the AAL could support them to take part in more activities, with sports emerging strongly. Affordability was a key issue. AAL currently offers some limited sports opportunities including Tae Kwon Do and some after school support but this is limited.



Adults felt the youth needed additional English support was a further key area. .

Afghan culture was favoured by both youth and adults and it was helped that the AAL could play a role in ensuring Afghan culture is kept strong across the generations. Music, theatre and poetry merged strongly in the focus group. Interestingly, youth also suggested the AAL play a role in facilitating mutual aid so Afghan supporting other Afghans, i.e. those with musical ability volunteering to support youth to learn music; or a mentoring scheme working with Afghan women to support more disadvantaged Afghan women who are stuck at home.

The AAL needs to advertise its current activities better and try to build projects to meet the wishes of young people.

AAL are also keen to build a project that encourages inter-generational activities such as working with first generation Afghan elders and 2nd or 3rd generation youth to exchange skills / ideas/ culture. They will explore this in the coming months.

Afghan Women

For the women, the major problems reported are the lack of English knowledge with some reporting that they are afraid to pick their children up from school as they might not understand what the teacher says to them. In addition, and linked to this latter point, they often lack of self-confidence.

The youth interrogated the gendered differences in the focus group and agreed that some of the problems lay in cultural difference.

“Yes but there is a cultural side together with lack of English knowledge and confidence. The language barrier is strong, but the cultural issue is important as well”

The women who participated noted that there are often long waiting lists for community ESOL courses and that some of their peers are not eligible to attend such courses (as they have visa restrictions). In addition, it was felt that some women need pre-course support as their confidence was so low. There is a role here that the AAL could play in forwarding this.

The women also highlighted how many Afghan women were house-bound and therefore did not participate in any activities. The women, during the focus group, insisted on the fact that unemployment was one of the major issues from which one they were suffering. However, isolation was also an issue. Many of the women in the Afghan community are highly educated but do not have the language ability or confidence to go outside. This was also observed by professionals.

The AAL is already taking steps to overcome this by some courses on cooking and allowing a space for women to gather. There is a need for this to continue and to be built upon.

In addition, the women were also interested in having some meeting areas to share feelings with the goal to improve their self-confidence and therefore a peer to peer support group may be an interesting area of development for the AAL.

Elderly

There was not a high response rate from the elderly in this study but there were a number of comments on the issues faced by elderly as perceived by younger Afghans. Firstly, it was felt that the elderly are suffering because of limited English language. As a result, they struggle with basic tasks such as opening bank accounts, any ICT related issues and are very isolated from UK society. It was felt that depression was a real issue amongst the elderly Afghan community as they do not work, are often not in good health and are house bound with their children too busy to visit. Also, the roles of elders have changed. Where in Afghanistan they were asked to take all the big decisions in family life, here in the UK this is no longer the case and many Afghan families have adopted more western attitudes where the parents are in charge rather than grand-parents.

It was hoped that the AAL could offer community based specialised English language support for the elderly. In addition, there was a wish to see social sessions and activities for elderly Afghans. It was felt that light exercise could be appropriate but also sessions on health awareness and some sessions just as basic as allowing people the space to come together and chat.

It was felt that a mentoring or befriending project could be developed to support Afghan elders. Also, the AAL hopes to develop some further basic activities to bring people out of their hems.

Conclusion

In conclusion, to try to find some solutions to the issues listed in the study and to identify some area where AAL should create / continue its services are the following:

- More advertising of existing activities (not only on the website because a lot of Afghans don't have access to computers. Posters, notices, texts etc may work better)
- Different way to teach English language (smaller groups or targeted groups like women groups, elderly groups)
- Help Afghan community in the research of employment (CV writing, contacting employers, use of tools as computers, etc)
- New activities for youth, like musical or cultural activities, more sport club
- Additional language support for youth
- Session to tackle extremism and help disaffected youth to over anti-social behaviour and alcohol and other substance misuse
- Create some meeting / communicating area for women (thus, they can share their feeling and experience in UK society and feel more self-confident. It's a possibility too to have contact with the external world) and for youth and parents (thus, they can try to understand each other, the family can meet and share experiences and the children can have an expression area where they could speak freely and explain together their needs with their parents)
- Continue to organise activities or classes that keep Afghan culture existing because it's very important to feel belonging to a culture, and it's not easy for Afghan adults to feel it in the UK society

- Elderly activity / befriending to tackle isolation and loneliness

The group will try to develop as many of these projects as possible but are very aware that they have limited resources in terms of time, money and space and do not wish to compromise on quality. Therefore they will fundraise and try to implement this but this research will give them direction over the coming years and demonstrates priority areas. These findings form the basis of a longer-term plan.