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Education that works

**The Education of Portuguese Children in Britain:  
Insights from Research and Practice in England  
and Overseas**

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## Chapter 3

### **The socio-cultural characteristics and needs of a Portuguese community in South London**

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#### **Summary**

Drawing on secondary sources and interviews with service providers, community representatives and local residents, the findings from the research study reported in this chapter provide a snapshot of a community, which is thought to have grown ten-fold in the last decade. First the chapter describes a number of attributes commonly attached to the community, though in different ways, by both insiders and outsiders - it is said to be heterogeneous, both visible and invisible, hard-working and family oriented, open but simultaneously homeward and inward looking, reliant upon informal support networks and evolving. Secondly, a number of key issues and problems relating to local services are explored under the headings of general access, housing and homelessness, health, employment and unemployment, education, crime and community safety, social exclusion and community structures and resources. Combining quantitative and qualitative evidence, the study provides insights into the context for and dynamics underpinning educational and social disadvantage within a Portuguese Community in South London and identifies the key areas for further policy research and development.

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from a small-scale study of the social and cultural characteristics and needs of the Portuguese Community in the borough of Lambeth in South London. It arose from concern amongst representatives of the community and local statutory and voluntary service providers, that aside from the fact that North Lambeth's Portuguese and Portuguese speaking population has grown rapidly in recent years, there was little reliable information on which to base their organisations' response. The study was intended as a kind of initial 'fact-finding' mission that would inform a more comprehensive survey of the community. Drawing on secondary sources and interviews with service providers, community representatives and local

residents, the research offers a snapshot of the Community's socio-economic profile, culture and needs.

### ***Methodology***

Three kinds of secondary data were collected during the study. First were recent and ongoing research studies focused on particular issues, including educational disadvantage and underachievement (Barradas 2000), homelessness and problematic drug use (The Stockwell Project, undated) and lack of information about and access to health and welfare services (Figueroa 2000). Second were funding applications and planning documents written by service providers (examples include North Lambeth Education Action Zone and the Connecting Stockwell Partnership, a Single Regeneration Budget initiative) which made specific reference to the Portuguese Community and its needs. A third source of information for the study were media written in Portuguese and targeted at Portuguese residents, ranging from local newsletters to more widely available directories and magazines.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with community representatives, local service providers and local Portuguese residents. The former included members of the Steering Group who oversaw the research including representatives from the Portuguese Consulate, the London Borough of Lambeth and the Councillor of the Portuguese Communities in the UK and Republic of Ireland. These interviewees in turn provided the names and contact details of key service providers and of long-standing members of the community who they believed it would be helpful for us to meet. Interviews with this second group helped to identify a small number of Portuguese residents who we could talk to.

The fieldwork was conducted within a six week period between February and April 2001 by one of the authors who is herself Portuguese and has lived in Lambeth for several years. Inevitably, given the short time available and the 'snow-balling' technique deployed, the final sample of interviewees was determined more by the willingness of respondents to participate in the research than scientific method. It includes nonetheless, representatives from a wide range of agencies and organisations - the metropolitan police, primary and secondary schools, a family literacy project, housing associations, Lambeth Borough Council, the Stockwell (Health) Project, a

local employment agency, libraries, a parent-toddler group, shop and café owners and Portuguese Associations - as well as Steering Group members. Altogether, 28 representatives/providers and nine local residents were interviewed with some crossover in that some of those designated here as working in the community also live there.

The focus of the interviews differed for community representatives and service providers on the one hand and local residents on the other. Questions for the former concerned the nature of their organisation's work with the community, their perception of the community's strengths and weaknesses and the priorities for service development. Questions for residents related to how they came to live in Stockwell, their work and leisure lifestyles, their needs, concerns and satisfaction with services and with life more generally and their future plans. The interviews were intended to be as open ended as possible and such tended to be oriented towards interviewees' primary interests and concerns. In most cases the interviews were taped on a mini-disc recorder and subsequently transcribed and (if necessary) translated from Portuguese into English. What emerges is a wide range of common themes as well as different and sometimes contradictory perspectives. Our analysis seeks to provide a balanced interpretation of the various views and information presented to us.

### **3.2 Demographic Profile**

The part of Lambeth in which the Portuguese Community is most concentrated, Stockwell, has been home to Portuguese migrants for at least thirty years as evidenced in the number of Portuguese café-bars and shops dotted about the area. However, although within London, the Portuguese population is as heavily concentrated in Stockwell as in any other part of the city, within the three Lambeth wards where the community is most numerous, they remain a minority group. Moreover, whilst 'outsiders' might see and hear a relatively homogeneous community, 'insiders' are more aware of and sensitive to differences - between people from Madeira and mainland Portugal, between those from rural and urban areas, between long established and recently arrived residents and so on.

The most authoritative estimate available of the size of the community comes from a recent study of health needs amongst Portuguese speakers in North Lambeth (Figueroa 2000). Using GP [General Practitioner, Doctor] registration figures for 1999, but also allowing for up to 60 percent non-registration, Figueroa estimates there to be between approximately nine and fourteen thousand Portuguese people living in the Stockwell area, representing between 13 and 21 percent of the total population and a six to nine-fold increase since 1991 when the census identified just 1507 Portuguese residents across the whole of Lambeth.

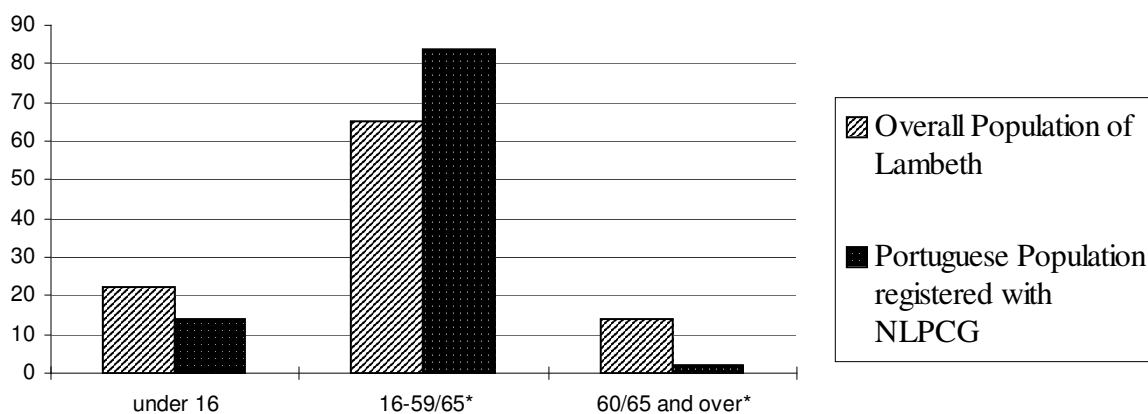
This estimate contrasted somewhat with those of representatives and members of the Portuguese community who reported to Figueroa and to ourselves that a more realistic estimate would be between 20000 and 30000 Portuguese living in the borough. However, both official and unofficial sources agree that the Portuguese population has grown as quickly as any other ethnic group in recent years. Between 1992 and 1999, there was a threefold increase in the *proportion* of school children in Lambeth whose first language was Portuguese (Lambeth Education Department 2001) whilst Figueroa's GP registration data show a four-fold increase even before the fact of under-registration is taken into account. More anecdotally, one local English teacher reported that "ten years ago there were one or two Portuguese pupils per class, now there are ten per class and 35 percent of the bilingual students I teach are Portuguese."

Figueroa's study also provides the best available estimates of the age and gender distribution of the community. In terms of gender, the distribution of males and females is more or less equal and therefore not significantly different from borough wide figures. However, the age profile of individuals registered with GPs does contrast noticeably with 1998 population estimates for Lambeth overall, as shown in Figure One.

The key difference is that whereas 65 percent of Lambeth's population overall are aged between 16 and 59, 84 percent of Portuguese individuals registered to GPs in the North Lambeth Primary Care Group were between the age of 16 and 64. Notwithstanding the different age ranges used, it is clear that the Portuguese Community has fewer younger and fewer older members. Moreover, Figueroa reports that 75 percent of Portuguese patients were between 16 and 45 years of age whereas

in the 1991 Census of Population, this age group constituted 50 percent of the population of Lambeth Borough. As children and older people are more likely to be registered with a GP than other age -groups, Figueroa’s data may underestimate the proportion of 16-60 year-olds.

*Figure One: Age profile of all Lambeth residents compared with age profile of Portuguese individuals registered with GPs in NLPCG*



Source: Figueroa 2000 & [www.national.statistics.co.uk](http://www.national.statistics.co.uk)

Note: The two sources use slightly different age ranges. National Statistics figures are for 0-16 year olds, 16-59 year olds and the over 60s. Figueroa’s data refer to 0-15 year-olds, 15-65 year olds and the over 65s.

The clear implication of this significant difference between the age profiles of the Lambeth and Portuguese populations is that the recent wave of Portuguese migrants have arrived in their 20s and 30s and that the proportion of people bringing dependent children with them has been fewer than for the host population. If this is the case, one could reasonably hypothesise that the proportion of children newly born to Portuguese parents in recent years would be greater than the proportion of Portuguese children in local schools. Sure enough, Figueroa records that “a recent unofficial communication from St Thomas’ Hospital Delivery Suite reported that in 1999 up to 14% of all deliveries were to Portuguese mothers” (Figueroa 2000, p19) whilst as we have seen

the proportion of Portuguese children in Lambeth's schools in the same year was 4.5 percent.

### 3.3 Cultural Characteristics

There is always a danger in this kind of study of over-emphasising difference and of highlighting problems rather than normality. As one local resident said, "I don't perceive any distinctive community. The Portuguese are like any other community, perhaps strong-minded people." Another interviewee noted that local service providers must have a 'dark idea' of the community - underachieving children, overcrowded bedsits, heroin addiction - all being problems with which it has been identified in recent studies.

With this caveat in mind, we can summarise those characteristics ascribed to the Portuguese Community by our interviewees as follows. It is said to be heterogeneous, both visible and invisible, hard working and family oriented, open but inward looking, reliant on informal support networks and evolving quickly. These characteristics are now described in more detail.

#### *Heterogeneous*

There is no single Portuguese Community but rather a collection of smaller communities linked together by a common language and national heritage and by the fact that they live in and around Stockwell. Figueroa identifies five sub groups:

- long term Portuguese residents
- transient migrant workers from mainland Portugal
- longer term manual workers from Madeira
- migrants from Brazil
- émigrés and refugees from ex-Portuguese colonies

The focus for this study was with Portuguese nationals rather than Portuguese speakers and therefore with the first three of these groups. Our interviews by and large confirmed the typology and the characteristics ascribed to the different groups by Figueroa. Thus longer term residents are unsurprisingly more likely to feel settled,

own their homes, be self employed and/or business owners, speak good English and be familiar with local health and welfare services. The more recently arrived migrants from Madeira and mainland Portugal tend to be younger, living in temporary, rented accommodation, employed in relatively low paid jobs in catering, cleaning or building work, have a limited command of English and be less likely to access health and welfare services. Whilst they share much in common, these two groups retain a strong attachment to their origins on Madeira or the mainland and are further divided according to which region they come from. Such affiliations are institutionalised in the various Portuguese Associations (usually identified with football clubs) and in the separate representatives for the Madeiran and for the Portuguese Communities.

### ***Visible and invisible***

Lambeth Education Authority's inclusion, since 1988, of Portuguese children as a distinct ethnic group in their education statistics, is testament to the growing visibility of the community whilst their assimilation in the category 'White Other' in the 2001 census reflects their enduring invisibility. Portuguese café-bars and delicatessen similarly ensure that the community is perceived as distinctive by 'outsiders'. But without obvious clues such as skin colour or national dress to distinguish them from other Europeans, away from such venues they blend in with the crowd. This is neither difficult nor surprising in Lambeth where 112 languages in addition to English are spoken amongst school children and where members of ethnic minorities are expected to represent 40 percent of the population by 2010 (Stockwell Community Initiative Programme, 2000).

### ***Hard working and family oriented***

Predominantly from rural and, in a western context, very poor areas, the principal motivation for coming to south London is the prospect of more jobs and better wages. Members of the community have a functional attitude to why they are in Britain, as one interviewee said, "the body is here, the heart is in Portugal." Unsurprisingly then, a quality regularly ascribed to the Portuguese Community by interviewees was 'hard-working' although more than one wryly added that whilst this may be characteristic of Portuguese migrants, it is not necessarily a national trait. The long hours worked by parents was noted by education professionals, by way of noting some of the problems this may cause:

“You know, if you’ve got two jobs and you live in a tiny flat, then you don’t exactly get the paints out and go and do paint with your children”

Yet the Portuguese Community was also characterised as family oriented. Partly this was a reference to certain ‘traditional’ values such as respect amongst children for adults which are held to be stronger within Portuguese than British culture. Partly it means that people work all hours not for themselves in the present, but for their family in the future. The importance of family within the community can be seen by what happens to individuals cut off from these ties. As the Stockwell Project states:

“Portuguese culture and life-style relies enormously on family circles and small communities with strong family links. The non-existence of a family structure for many Portuguese individuals, together with poor language skills is a decisive factor for social exclusion and isolation, especially when times are hard.”

(The Stockwell Project, undated, p1)

### ***Open but inward-looking***

On the one hand, several non-Portuguese service providers whom we spoke to described the Portuguese Community as open and friendly. On the other, there was a strong sense that the community keeps itself to itself. One British interviewee observed:

“The Portuguese Community has always been very helpful.....but they have to be approached, they do not contact us.”

This person also noted that some long-standing residents had lived in Stockwell for over 20 years without apparently wanting or needing to learn English and that this was a tribute to the self sufficiency of the community but also reflects how non-integrated it is. The community also looks homewards and are as likely or more likely to tune into Portuguese television and read Portuguese newspapers and magazines than the English counterparts. The relatively poor performance of Portuguese school children in key-stage examinations also points to this inwards and homewards-looking characteristic although other factors such as lack of support from schools which serve as a barrier to integration need to be taken into account.

***Reliant on informal support networks***

The family oriented and inward looking nature of the Portuguese community was presented by interviewees as both a strength and weakness. The following account conveys the former feeling well:

“I have come across quite a lot of parents, groups of parents, that I felt had quite a strong support network amongst themselves, which seems quite a positive thing....for instance, last week we had a music day at the Royal Festival Hall and ..... a group of Portuguese parents from Wyvil came and a group of Portuguese parents from Larkhall.....And they had obviously met up together and kind of support each other in how to get the best of food, and they encouraged each other because they were quite nervous about it, so I suppose I could see a kind of pride in their own culture.”

However, the reliance upon informal support networks is also disadvantageous, reflecting an inability to access formal structures. Adults not needing to speak English within their own network, have to rely on friends or children, when available, to translate for them when dealing beyond it. Figueroa reports that in a health context, “these solutions are far from ideal leading to problems with confidentiality and often misinterpretations,” (p31) whilst one of our interviewees commented “people save up money in order to get advice about something that is free.” Barradas cites an example of the difficulties parents face in schools:

“I tried my best....I understood many things, but then, to give a reply, that I couldn’t do....I always tell the children: “If you see something that Mummy is saying that it is not correct or that I don’t understand” - because sometimes there are conversations that you think you’re understanding and we are really mixing it up - and I say: “You tell me.” And it’s like that. It’s the only way we can move on. It’s difficult, isn’t it? When we have to keep asking for help, but....[gestures to mean “What can I do?”] (Mrs F, quoted in Barradas 2000)

The ambivalent quality of informal support networks, part safety blanket, part barrier to integration, is summed up well in the following story. Recounted to illustrate why, from this interviewee’s perspective, the community needs to nurture stronger links with the wider world, it also demonstrates the benefits which the existing network brings to its members:

“I would like to see the Portuguese Community improve in their relations with others....I know this man from the Algarve, he used to have a restaurant there. The business went wrong, he came here, asked me to help him find work, and I phone an Italian friend who has a restaurant...have you got any work?...can he wash dishes?...I asked him do you want to wash dishes? .... Anything he says, I don't care....I gave him £10, here is the address, started working the same day, he is still there.....he is now doing the salads, in the next six months he's gonna be the Chef in that restaurant, he is a good cook, it is just a question of getting used....all he's gotta do is learn the Italian kitchen.”

It needs also be said that if there is a tendency for Portuguese people to fall back upon their family and friends, it is because formal structures are not geared to meet their needs. As Keating (undated, p3) observes, “people are daily confronted with new social/power organisations and also new discourses coded in a different language. English is considered the language of dominant discourses, whereas Portuguese is the language of ‘other’ discourses - private, more intimate or community gathering discourses.” Several interviewees noted that where services have employed Portuguese-speaking employees, in schools, in surgeries and in training organisations, the increased take-up of services has been remarkable.

### ***Evolving***

Thus far we have suggested that the Portuguese Community is close knit, family oriented, homeward looking, bound together by informal social networks and in some ways overly dependent upon them. But it would be wrong to overstate the sense of ‘community spirit’ that these characteristics imply or to see the community as particularly well organised. As we have also noted, the community is heterogeneous, regional rivalries are pronounced and people are here, ultimately, to advance their own and their families’ economic well being. Local service providers observed that there was no obvious gateway into the community and that those organisations attempting to represent its collective interests do not have sufficient resources to fulfil the role.

Moreover, the recent rapid growth of the community has for some longer-standing residents weakened their sense of identity and undermined the close knit, hard-working and law abiding image they previously enjoyed.

“Until 10 years ago I was proud to be a Portuguese here, I am not anymore! I am sorry but I have to say this. We have too many Portuguese people that have brought in problems, you see....”

A non-Portuguese interviewee’ also detected a loosening of social controls within the community, but saw it as part of a more general pattern:

“it is quite a close community that has managed to look after itself until recently. We’ve noticed a definite change with the young people’s behaviour. The community has expanded beyond control and that brings problems like crime, drug taking etc. Family and religious values have eroded just like they have in other communities.”

The Portuguese Community in Stockwell has grown at such a pace that the informal social networks and controls which have traditionally characterised it are perceived as breaking down at the same time as its needs have multiplied and diversified. Before detailing the key issues and priorities which these changes have brought about however, we consider how the foregoing characterisation of the community compares with the experiences and views of the residents we interviewed.

### **3.4 The experience and views of residents interviewed**

Despite the small size of our sample of residents, their histories and experiences illustrated the heterogeneous nature of the community. One interviewee had lived in Stockwell for 25 years and one for 14 years but of the remaining seven, three had only lived here for six years and four for two years or less. They had migrated from six different regions: Ribatejo (1), Madeira (2), Lisbon (1), Beira-alta (Guarda) (2), Douro Litoral (1) and Tras-os-montes (2).

Five interviewees were living with their spouses and one with other family, three live alone. In five cases, interviewees lived with dependent children, including one single

parent and one single grand-parent who lived with her daughter and grandson. Eight people have other family living in the area and four described their friends as mostly Portuguese, but others said they mixed equally with Portuguese and non Portuguese and two that they only knew a few other Portuguese people.

Eight of the nine interviewees said that they had come to the UK for a better life whilst one said, more specifically, that she had come to be with and support her husband. Five people were in work, one was a retired shop-owner and the other two described themselves as full time parents. Those in paid work had jobs as cleaners (3), a shop attendant and a waitress and were a mixture of full and part time. One person had 'down-graded' her job since moving from Portugal where she had been a dressmaker but three of those in work expressed satisfaction with their job and only one had a fixed idea of another job that they would prefer to be doing.

Asked what they liked about living in Stockwell, interviewees mentioned the easy access to transport and to shops and one person commented on the improvements on their estate. Dislikes included litter which four people mentioned, cramped accommodation (2), having noisy neighbours (who were not Portuguese!) (1) and the discrepancy between the amount shown in their rent book and the amount they actually paid (1). One person highlighted issues of personal safety having been mugged themselves. Asked what they did in their spare time, interviewees mentioned watching Portuguese and English television, going to the cinema, walking, dancing and cafes. Two of the nine interviewees live in households with a car but most walk or use public transport.

Two interviewees expressed satisfaction with local services, singling out their GP and school respectively as being very helpful. Others expressed dissatisfaction with specific services - two were unhappy with treatment from a GP, two mentioned that the response from the police was too slow, one person that nursery costs were too high, one that they had been waiting for housing repairs for a long time and another that she and her spouse were living in a single room with a poorly child and had asked to be moved but not been told anything. Whilst all interviewees said that they would go to local services for help, a number said they would need an interpreter (a son, daughter or friend or, occasionally, the service's own translator). There was

general agreement amongst interviewees of the need for more accessible information about services and about the local Portuguese Community. Most said they relied on neighbours, the cafes and work contacts for information.

In the short to medium term, most interviewees planned to stay and work in Stockwell although one said they planned to be “back in Portugal as soon as possible.” One person simply said that they were used to living here whilst others indicated that it was not necessarily their choice and depended on their children’s needs and wishes and those of other family members.

In some respects - the importance of family, the reliance on ‘word of mouth’ for information, difficulties accessing services - these interviews bear out the socio-economic and cultural characteristics we have associated with the Portuguese Community. However there is little that is specifically Portuguese about concerns over litter, police response times, public housing services or nursery costs. This reminds us that members of the Portuguese Community are equally members of the Lambeth community and as such many of their concerns will be those of other residents. We need to bear this in mind in considering what the key issues and priorities are for the Portuguese Community, to which we now turn.

### **3.5 Key Issues and Priorities**

In this section we outline what emerged from our review of the literature and interviews as the key issues and priorities facing the Portuguese Community in Stockwell. As this was a preliminary study, our aim was to identify those areas which future research will need to gather more concrete evidence on such that services can be put on a sure footing.

#### ***Access to Information and Services***

The language barrier seems to underline many problems for the Portuguese Community, sometimes preventing them from using services altogether, otherwise creating problems in using the service. In relation to health services for example,

Figuroa reports that people having difficulties filling in forms, are unaware of services because leaflets written in Portuguese are (or at least were at the time of his study) not available, rely on friends and families to interpret for them. As a consequence many feel vulnerable, uncertain, isolated and ill treated and it is not uncommon for people to turn to private Portuguese Doctors or even to fly home to Portugal to receive treatment.

As described in the previous section, Barradas' (2000) study of Portuguese children formally excluded from school or simply missing from the school roll reveals similar difficulties for non-English speaking parents in dealing with schools, coupled with other barriers such as long working hours (see below). The problems are not simply to do with face to face contacts with individual schools and teachers. For example, in recent years the British education system has emphasised the rights of parents to choose which school their children attend but exercising this choice requires quite a sophisticated understanding of the system and of the information (league tables, admission criteria, the appeals process etc.) which education authorities distribute to parents.

Opening a bank account, finding accommodation, obtaining a travel pass, attending a job interview, dealing with bills, claiming state benefits, reporting a crime, shopping, insuring a car, voting in elections, arranging repairs or maintenance - it is an obvious point that the routine practices of daily life in any culture require a command of the host language. Yet as Figuroa and a number of our interviewees pointed out, many Portuguese immigrants arrive with poor literacy skills in their own language and from small villages where the kind of transactions listed above are negotiated informally, on the grapevine, in a socio-economic and cultural context that could hardly be more different from the inner city environment that is Stockwell. Small wonder then that the Portuguese community is in some respects insular, self sufficient and bound by informal social networks, it is simply a survival strategy and one which until recently at least has proven remarkably effective.

### ***Housing and Homelessness***

Notwithstanding the ongoing refurbishment work carried out by housing providers and considerable variation in the type and quality of accommodation that exists, the

quality of housing stock overall in Stockwell is recognised to be poor, as the following quotation graphically conveys:

“The physical condition of much of the residential estates is deteriorating, as seen in the Clapham Road estate in Stockwell ward. The security doors and entry phone systems are often out of order and the walls are covered in graffiti. Residents also complained about unhygienic smells and syringes in the stairwells. The lifts are often out of order, causing disruption to elderly and disabled residents who are unable to use the stairs. (St John’s parish Audit, April 2000)” (Stockwell Community Initiative Programme, 2000, citation as in original)

For the Portuguese Community, overcrowding, with families of up to six living in accommodation designed for two people, is said to be a particular issue, although one interviewee also noted that “locals have some resentment in the way it seems the Portuguese Community was able to ‘jump the queue’, maybe using the ‘too crowded accommodation’ criteria to their benefit in council housing access”. At the same time, a number of interviewees commented on the tidiness and cleanliness of families’ homes, even when pressed financially and amongst housing workers there was a sense that Portuguese people made ‘good tenants’ for this sort of reason. As one said, “even if on a low budget, their children look impeccable, their houses/bedsits very clean.”

There was also a perception that because of the language barrier and without information about how the housing system works, newly arriving migrants will often turn first to long-standing members of the community and the informal network for advice and direct access to privately rented or sub-let ‘council’ accommodation.

“Housing is the main problem. Everyday I have people coming here looking for rooms to rent.”

In this regard, the impression given by interviewees was that the community is no longer able to cope with the extra demands placed upon it in recent years, leaving people to fend for themselves in a situation of acute housing shortage for the population at large.

On the other hand, analysis of the electoral registers undertaken by a member of the Research Project Steering Group in October 2001 (Bottrall 2001) found that a “substantially larger number of voters (were) recorded as living in public/subsidised housing than in private housing. Even if the numbers living in the latter are significantly under-represented, the perception that a large majority of Portuguese are living in privately-rented properties appears incorrect. And, even if the privately-rented figure were doubled, those living in public/subsidised housing would represent 50% of the total population of voting age. Assuming that access to subsidised housing has been one of the main aspirations of recently incoming Portuguese families, one would have to conclude that they have been rather successful in achieving that goal.”

At the extreme of the housing situation is a growing problem of homelessness, linked to other issues such as drug misuse, unemployment, poverty, illegality and poor mental and physical health. The Stockwell Project recently reported that of an estimated one hundred “homeless drug users” in Lambeth, “60% are thought to be Portuguese. They seldom sleep on the open streets, preferring either the relative safety of squatting or sleeping on roof-tops and stairwells of estates or abandoned garages.” In an analysis of the circumstances of 118 Portuguese clients referred to the project, 46 percent were recorded as either sleeping rough, staying temporarily with friends or squatting and at risk of eviction (The Stockwell project, undated, p3).

### ***Health***

Figueroa’s (2000) study of health needs amongst Portuguese speakers in the North Lambeth Primary Group area involved analysis of mortality data, interviews with health professionals and group meetings with community members, representatives and other service providers. The following quotation is drawn from the report’s executive summary:

“The main areas of concern experienced by health care workers and the Portuguese community were the lack of information and access to services; language and cultural barriers aggravated by inappropriate interpreting services. Mental health problems were unrecognised by the community and sufferers felt isolated. Alcohol addiction was particularly common in the male retired population and often led to domestic violence. Substance misuse was highly prevalent in younger groups, many of them

homeless, squatting or living rough. These living conditions facilitate the spread of communicable diseases, known already to be high. Social and family networks have broken down in the host country adding to the feeling of isolation. Learning difficulties in children are prevalent and in the absence of appropriate services it may perpetuate social handicap in this community. Portuguese speaking women feel unable to convey their health concerns to health staff in the presence of inappropriately trained interpreters.” (Figueroa 2000, p4)

It is a bleak picture and whilst the report records that “a survey of GP practices in NLPCG revealed that five (16%) of the practices offered services specifically targeted to the Portuguese Community” (p25) the general conclusion is that more needs to be done.

### ***Employment and Unemployment***

There is reason to suggest that issues relating to employment and unemployment for the Stockwell Community and the Portuguese Community in Stockwell might be quite different. First, Stockwell’s unemployment rate, at between 11 and 20 percent, is both higher than that for London and in parts three times as high as the national rate (Connecting Stockwell Partnership, 2000) and the proportion of all residents ‘economically active’ is 38 percent ([www.national.statistics.co.uk](http://www.national.statistics.co.uk)). This in no way corresponds with the perceptions of our interviewees who emphasised that the majority of Portuguese people work, indeed that their principal motivation for coming to the UK is to work, since relatively low paid jobs here nevertheless pay better than in Portugal and because there are more labour market opportunities. Certainly long term unemployment does not seem a major issue. A Portuguese Speaking Outreach Worker employed by an employment agency met her annual target for helping Portuguese people into work within two months. Eighty percent of her clients were estimated to be between 16 and 40 years of age and 50 percent had recently arrived into the country.

The employment profile of the Portuguese Community also differs from that of Lambeth borough overall. Although jobs in transport and communications and public administration account for nearly 60 percent of all employment in the borough, Portuguese people, according to our interviews, are more likely to be employed in

catering, cleaning and construction, in low paid manual jobs and subject to poor working conditions. Ninety percent of the Outreach Worker's clients spoke no English at all.

The language barrier limits opportunities, and the key issue raised in relation to employment is this and the concomitant need for education and training to enhance the skills profile of the community. It is a circular problem. People who arrive unable to speak English and obtain jobs requiring long hours and little need to speak English do not have the time, resources or opportunity to access education and training and so on. There was some evidence from our research, moreover, that the language barrier prevents individuals with particular skills and experience (the café-owner, the dressmaker) from using them. The informal support network is perceived as double edged in relation to this issue. On the one hand word of mouth contact is the surest way to find work, on the other this tends to dampen down expectations and limit opportunities. Nevertheless, the fact that 81 percent of the Stockwell Project's Portuguese homeless drug users were unemployed shows just how isolated from the community they are.

### ***Education***

Both adult and children's education are key issues for the Portuguese Community and they are closely inter-related. Ironically, Portuguese children are frequently called upon to interpret for their parents yet, according to the borough's education statistics, perform consistently less well in English and other tests than other ethnic groups. Table 1 presents a sample of results in key stage subject tests and at GCSE level, for Portuguese Children, for the next lowest scoring ethnic group and for all pupils.

The children of migrants from poor rural areas are disadvantaged by a range of socio-economic and socio-cultural factors (Barradas 2000). Their parents work long hours and may speak English poorly or not at all, they have themselves to learn English and to adapt to a different school system, teachers may have lowered expectations for them, and neither parents nor teachers be equipped or able to respond to their learning needs. Those who have moved with their parents have been uprooted from one culture and only semi-immersed in the new one. The 1980s and 1990s saw cuts within British

schools to the Education Social Work Service, school counselling and pastoral care and home-school liaison services (Pitts 2002).

*Table 1: Average Test Results and Exam Passes for Portuguese and Other Ethnic Groups (2000)*

	<b>Key Stage 1 - Maths (7 Year-Olds)</b>	<b>Key Stage 3 - English (14 Year-Olds)</b>	<b>GCSE' 5 * 'A-C' Grades (16 Year-Olds)</b>
Portuguese children's results	48%	53%	14%
Next lowest scoring group's results	46%	62%	17%
All Pupils	84%	68%	32%

*Source: Lambeth Education Department Education Statistics 2000-2001*

These factors appear to lead to disaffection amongst Portuguese children, reflected in test results and in relatively high rates of truancy and exclusion from school. Barradas' research revealed that 38 percent of a sample of 88 Portuguese children whose educational circumstances she investigated had been removed from the school roll and effectively disappeared from the education system - "Portuguese children .... remain a silent and hidden minority." (2000, p10). A number of our interviewees expressed concern that Portuguese students were vulnerable to bullying in schools, a problem known to disproportionately affect young people from minority groups (Porteous, 1998), and also to be at risk of involvement in crime and drugs misuse as a result of their disaffection and of the relative ease with which they can disappear unnoticed from the system.

Adult education needs within the community centre around low levels of literacy in Portuguese and in English which inhibit the development of other forms of learning. Although English language classes are available through mainstream institutions such as Lambeth College, take-up of such courses is limited. Where English language courses have in the past been organised and run within the community, take-up was reportedly much higher and a number of interviewees noted with regret the cessation

of funding for this initiative. They observed that people feel more comfortable learning amongst other Portuguese speakers and that teaching methods need to be grounded in their common experience and culture.

### ***Crime and Community Safety***

Issues of crime and community safety did not emerge as a particular concern in our interviews with representatives and service providers. Although some interviewees detected growing disaffection and problematic behaviour amongst adolescents, and there is concern about crime committed by hard drug users as well as the increasing number of Portuguese inmates at Brixton prison, the Portuguese Community in general was characterised as law-abiding.

However, eight of the nine residents we spoke to expressed concerns about their personal safety in the area, and one had been the victim of a violent assault. Thus although fear of crime and actual victimisation may not be specific to Portuguese people, they certainly share the general concerns of all local residents. These are undoubtedly rational fears. According to the Stockwell Community Initiative Programme (2000), “the area has the second highest number of street crimes in London” and race related hate crime increased by 600 percent between 1997/98 and 1999/2000.

### ***Social Exclusion***

The foregoing commentary has included a number of examples of ways in which members of the Portuguese Community are excluded from mainstream services, most notably in health and education but also in terms of general access. At the same time we have characterised the community as quite self-contained and as having, through necessity and for historical and cultural reasons, informal networks and support structures which mitigate the effects of non-integration.

Some Portuguese people in Stockwell, however, appear to be doubly excluded - from mainstream services in the wider community and from the informal support systems of the Portuguese community. Homeless drug users are one group vulnerable in this sense, young people excluded from school another, and there is also some concern that older Portuguese people are increasingly at risk of isolation.

### ***Community Structures and Resources***

The rapid growth of the Portuguese Community in Stockwell reflects the community's expansion across the UK more generally. The Portuguese Consulate records that the amount of consular work almost doubled between 1997 and 2000, from 27667 to 49837 cases. This has placed great pressure on representatives such as the Councillors for the Madeiran and Portuguese Communities and the Consulate itself. They do not appear to have the resources necessary to meet the extra demands placed upon their services by the recent population increase. This is reflected in some dissatisfaction amongst the community with these services, and although it was widely recognised by interviewees that recent improvements in service provision had resulted from these same organisations' struggles to get the community's needs noticed, there remains a sense that Portuguese people's interests need further representation. As one interviewee commented:

“We need to create a structure within the community, to nominate representatives with the Police for example. This hasn't been done because there are no incentives and a lot of 'inner battles' ....The Portuguese Community needs to organise itself....it needs to elect representatives.”

Others observed that there is a general distrust of statutory authorities within the community, rooted in Portuguese history and attitudes towards state and civic society, which combined with the language barrier, long working hours and family oriented economic concerns, prevents people from engaging in or with local civic and political institutions.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

As this last point emphasises, those agencies committed to improving services for the Portuguese community in Lambeth appear to face many challenges. However, our research also revealed that local providers have already begun to respond to this challenge. Lambeth Education Action Zone (EAZ), for example, has developed a series of initiatives designed to address Portuguese children's needs, including family learning projects developed specifically for Portuguese families, the teaching of

Portuguese in four primary schools and the establishment of a link between the EAZ and the Regional Directorate for Education in Lisbon. Within health, a practical outcome of Figueroa's research was the translation and dissemination of a number of health information leaflets, whilst that project also led to what has become known as the Stockwell Portuguese Network, bringing together professionals from a range of different services. At the time of our research as well, Lambeth Police were in the process of drafting a "Portuguese Community Policing Strategy" geared towards improving their response to the community's needs.

Notwithstanding such developments, there is still a clear need for reliable information about the community as a whole on which to base services and indeed the principal aim of our own research was to identify those issues which a more comprehensive survey of the community could usefully explore. Whilst this is not necessarily exhaustive, we would suggest the following areas need to be covered.

*For households:*

- the number of Portuguese people in the household
- their age, gender, where they were born and marital status
- length of time living in the UK, in Stockwell and at this address
- whether or not in work, in school, in training or other
- number of rooms in the household
- type and tenure of accommodation
- number of cars (or other motorised vehicles) available for use

*For individuals:*

- whether or not they speak English and level of fluency and literacy
- whether or not they have family living elsewhere in Stockwell
- friendship groups - whether mainly Portuguese for example
- what they like to do in spare time
- academic and vocational qualifications
- if in work, job title, hours of work, length of time in work, location of employer
- satisfaction with work
- if out of work, whether looking for work or other

- general health status
- whether registered with GP
- satisfaction with health services
- if appropriate, satisfaction with children's schooling
- satisfaction with housing and local environment
- whether victim of crime in last twelve months
- satisfaction with police
- whether they expect to stay in Stockwell, London, UK
- what they like and dislike about living in Stockwell
- what would most improve their living circumstances

And finally and perhaps more important, are those principles that we consider should guide any future research, namely that:

- The research is sufficiently representative to provide reliable quantitative information and sufficiently 'in-depth' to obtain valid qualitative information.
- The research is carried out by members of the community who speak Portuguese and are familiar with local issues, concerns and culture.
- The research is seen and used as an opportunity to improve the flow of information between the community and local service providers and to create new channels of communication.

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