

**The importance of language and cultural identity**  
**Challenges and community responses**  
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### **Introduction and Overview**

Refugees who have come from Arabic countries of all ages recognise the centrality of Arabic to their cultural identity and religion. This research brings to light the challenges families face to preserve their language and identity in Scotland. One of the most important issues highlighted is that families where children now speak more English than Arabic struggle to communicate with older relatives in the family, who do not speak English as well or even at all.

### **Wider Research: Key Findings**

- In 2022, 6,063 children in school in Scotland spoke Arabic as their first language.<sup>1</sup>
- According to the 2011 Census, Muslims constitute 1.45% of the population in Scotland; 44.6% of the Muslim population is UK born, and 37.3% are born in Scotland.
- Muslims in Scotland are an ethnically diverse population. Although a majority of Muslims are South Asian (65%), 9.8% or 1 in 10 are Arab, and 7.8% (1 in 12) are White, while 7% are Black. Over one third of the Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) population in Scotland is Muslim. 71% of Muslims in Scotland consider their only national identity to be Scottish or British According to the 2011 Census only 4.5% of Muslims in Scotland had weak or no English language skills.<sup>2</sup>
- Between 2016-2021 the UK offered safety to 20,000 refugees fleeing the Syrian crisis (UNHCR UN Refugee Agency, 2021).<sup>3</sup>

### **Thrive Research: Key Findings**

- This research highlights the challenges refugees face to preserve their language and subsequently their identity. Throughout the city initiatives have been set up by local communities to teach children Arabic.

*“Within our family we have been teaching our older parents English, but they have really found it hard. Here there are so many different accents as well so it is very difficult to understand. They are taught basic English but it is not enough.”*

### **Conclusion**

- The main ‘ask’ by both of the researchers leading on this project is that in council run schools, the same options are given to children as those that are given in private schools, so that the choice of being taught Arabic is available to all.

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<https://www.statista.com/statistics/331886/most-common-non-english-languages-spoken-in-scottish-schools/>

<sup>2</sup> Elshayyal, K. (2011) Scottish Muslims in Numbers. Available at:

[https://www.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/scottish\\_muslims\\_in\\_numbers\\_web.pdf](https://www.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/scottish_muslims_in_numbers_web.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/announcements/uks-syria-resettlement-programme-looking-back-and-ahead>