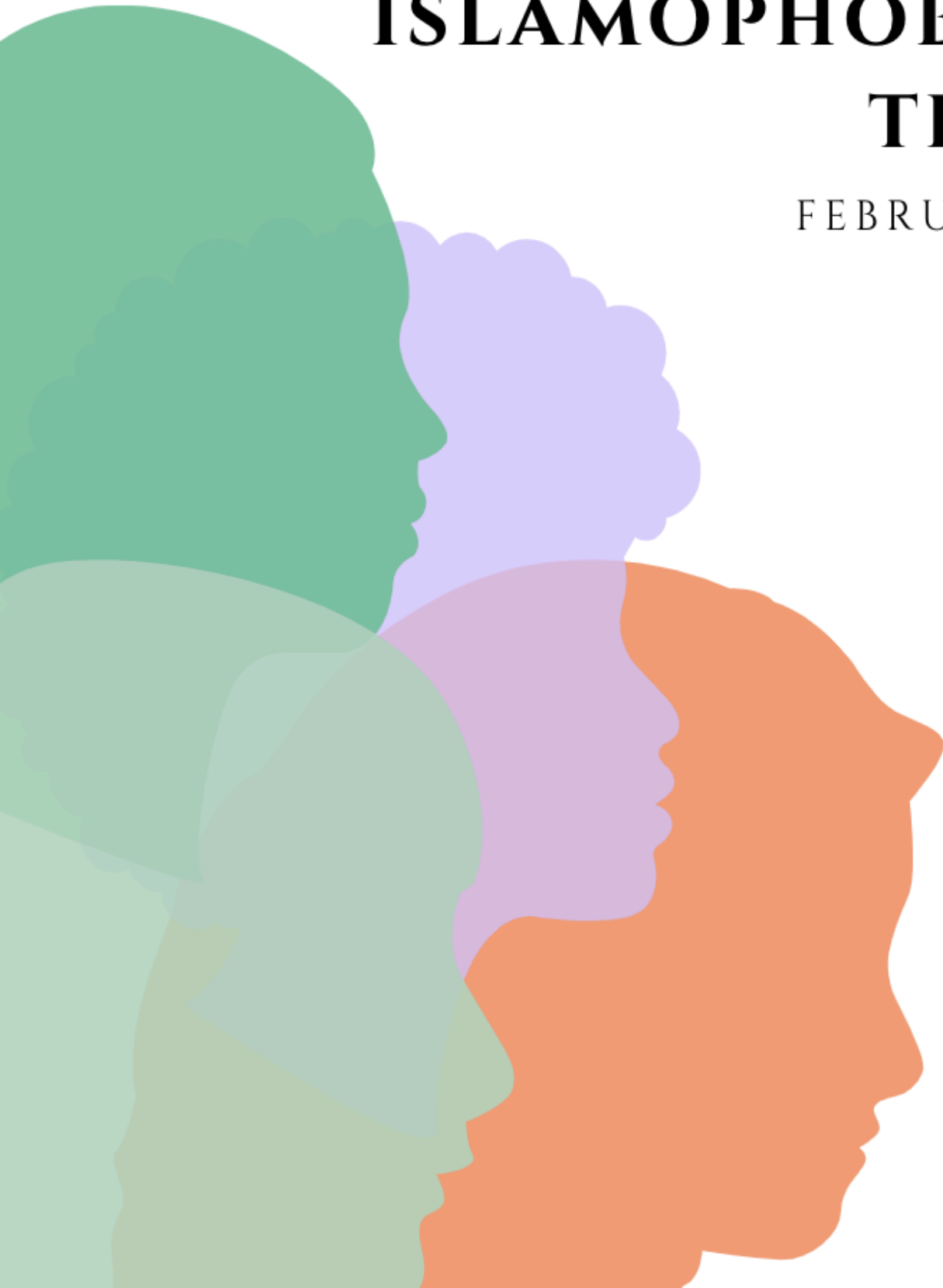


# STRATEGIES FOR ERADICATING ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE UK

FEBRUARY 2024



**February 6, 2023**

It has been a pleasure to support the thoughtful work carried out by Anisa Mahmood to mobilise various stakeholders in the United Kingdom to combat Islamophobia. I am impressed by what she has produced in this report, providing an evidence-based situation analysis and offering a clear and coherent set of strategies that can be implemented to eradicate Islamophobia. Her methodology is commendable resulting in an impartial, well-informed and compelling analysis, while the proposed strategies reflect good practice in combating hatred. The report is also very timely, given the current surge in Islamophobic and antisemitic hatred in the UK and around the world.

A statement issued on 22 December 2023 by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Professor Nazila Ghanea, together with the UN's Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Nderitu, and the High Representative for the UN's Alliance of Civilizations, Miguel Moratinos, decried rising antisemitism and Islamophobia around the world.<sup>1</sup> The statement notes that acts of religious intolerance 'which have been sharply rising in recent months [...] have spiked to alarming levels in recent weeks...'. While the statement does not specify any country by name, the evidence presented in this report show that the UK is one of the countries where, in the words of UN's top three focal points for combating hatred, 'acts of harassment, intimidation, violence and incitement based on religion or belief... have shocked our conscience and created a climate of fear and deep distrust across [society].' This report is therefore a much-needed publication in regard to Islamophobia at this time.

The methodology used to develop the report bears a special mention. Not only has the report drawn on extensive desk-based research but has also relied on the contributions and the collective expertise of highly competent and credible groups working with the grassroots in the UK, listening, learning and working with those affected with a variety of forms of hatred, from racial discrimination to religion-based bigotry, and their intersectional impacts. The organisations in the AIWG have already made ground-breaking and laudable efforts to challenge hate, offer solidarity, build social trust and promote inclusion. It has been a real pleasure for me to have been able to see these groups in action in the build-up to this report.

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<https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/12/un-special-adviser-prevention-genocide-high-representative-United-nations>

They are diverse in their inspirations, missions and operations and cut across many boundaries in many dimensions. This diversity enabled transdisciplinary practical insights into Islamophobia, a perspective that is so important to recognise and understand experiences of groups facing structural discrimination, as is often the case with religious and racial hatred.

The resulting output, as the report testifies, is insightful, balanced and action-oriented. The evidence gathered reliably illustrates how widespread Islamophobia is in the UK and highlights the mismatch between the efforts made to combat Islamophobia and the scope of the challenge. While human rights are not a numbers game, and one person facing harassment is one too many, and deserves our attention, the scale of the challenge is nevertheless important to note. This is especially so when all indications are, and as with all forms of hatred, that available data and reported incidents constitute only the tip of the iceberg. Widespread hate, as I have stated in my work for the UN on raising awareness about antisemitism, reflects a deep dysfunction in society, destroys social trust, and is toxic to democracy. Various forms of hatred may have different specificities and may change across space and time, but when left unchecked, they produce a common outcome.

Failure to develop and adopt an appropriate *working definition* of Islamophobia is an important impediment to mobilise efforts to challenge anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination in all its forms. This may accentuate the low level of awareness about the scale of the phenomena and its drivers and impede efforts to gather reliable and policy-relevant data. The absence of such data could in turn delay designing appropriate responses, including the allocation of the necessary resources.

More than making an urgent plea to take action against Islamophobia, the most important contribution of the report is the set of practical measures that it proposes for various stakeholders. These rely on good practice and lessons learned from work that is being carried out in the UK by the different organisations whose advice and support that the author of the report had solicited, in addition to her own work over a long period of time. Presented as six interrelated Pillars, the report identifies 18 strategic goals that should be pursued to counter and eradicate Islamophobia. These include measures related to formal and informal education, media literacy and public discourse, cross-community solidarity and allyship, legislative measures, government engagement both with UK civil society and the international community, and monitoring and documentation. The number 18 may not be an

allusion to the international protections on freedom of religion or belief, under Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted 75 years ago; but the proposed measures respond to the call by the three UN actors cited above to ensure that responses to tackle hatred are pursued within a human rights framework.

The primary focus of the report is clearly addressing Islamophobia in the UK, a legitimate worthy and urgent goal in itself. At the same time, the focus on building social trust, promoting inclusion, and seeking allyship, among others, will also contribute to challenging other forms of hatred at home. In addition, the measures proposed also recognise the high importance that the UK attaches to the promotion of freedom of religion or belief globally for which there is cross-party political consensus and robust domestic support. Not only would the implementation of the measures in this report strengthen British democracy and freedoms for all at home, but it could very likely increase the UK's 'soft power' abroad to achieve a high and rising foreign policy priority. This would be secured by the increased coherence between domestic and international efforts of His Majesty's Government in promoting freedom of religion or belief. This link, of course, may not be so incidental in an interconnected and digitised world, as evidence shows that lack of respect for freedom of religion or belief in other parts of the world can also affect British society. Clearly, the recent escalation of UK's efforts in this field, including through a resolution adopted at the UN Security Council in June 2023, signify the high importance of this issue to the United Kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

I am confident that all stakeholders would benefit from this report's findings and proposals, and hope that these measures are examined and followed up with the degree of urgency and effort that is necessary.

*~ By Professor Ahmed Shaheed, Former UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief*

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<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/freedom-of-religion-or-belief-forb-remains-a-priority-for-the-united-kingdom>

*“Prejudice is a burden that confuses the past, threatens the future, and renders the present inaccessible.” – Maya Angelou*

The current surge in Islamophobia demands urgent action, and sadly the gravity of the matter is simply not matched by the UK’s response. Within the 6 months of this group’s inception, Islamophobia has risen by 600% in the UK, a sobering figure which requires robust strategy and change.

I set up the Anti-Islamophobia Working Group (AIWG) to build a diverse coalition to demonstrate effective allyship, highlight intersectionality, celebrate British Muslim contributions, and finally propose meaningful change through our policy recommendations.

I would like to thank every single working group member who offered their support and expertise throughout, including: Islamic Relief UK; the Aziz Foundation; the Fawcett Society; Hope Not Hate; Show Racism the Red Card, the UK director of Human Rights Watch, Yasmine Ahmed; the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre; and the former United Nations special rapporteur on religious freedom, Dr Ahmed Shaheed.

Through this diverse and committed working group we analysed how Islamophobia affects British Muslims and those who are perceived as Muslim in the UK. The findings were alarming, showing remnants of prejudice and discrimination in all facets of society, ranging from sports, to education and the workplace, to the gendered Islamophobia that Muslim women disproportionately face, to the ever increasing hate crimes inflicted on British Muslims both offline and online revealed by the Government’s own data.

Most brazen of all, despite the wealth of evidence and data recognising the overt discrimination British Muslims face, the UK government has failed to adopt a formal definition on Islamophobia. This has devastating and real consequences in both perpetrating Islamophobia in the first instance, and secondly the failure to tackle it effectively when it occurs. Without a formal definition, an Islamophobic incident can go unchecked, law enforcement cannot protect the victim, and data collection in the UK fails to capture the full breadth and picture of Islamophobic incidents.

Hence why as a working group we analysed how different sectors can do better in understanding Islamophobia, and implement tools to tackle it effectively.

The result is this report, which is honest, informative, and most importantly a call to action. At its core it seeks to bring a greater understanding, empathy, and connectedness to the wider

society of British Muslim communities living here in the UK. It looks at how Islamophobia manifests itself and through its six interrelated Pillars, the report identifies 18 strategic goals that should be pursued to counter and eradicate Islamophobia. These include measures related to formal and informal education, media literacy and public discourse, cross-community solidarity and allyship, legislative measures, government engagement both with UK civil society and the international community, and monitoring and documentation.

This report however, could not have come at a more timely moment. With a sharp rise in Islamophobia and against a backdrop of political division and polarisation, this report aims to seek dialogue, understanding and step change to create a more inclusive and a fairer society for all.

The British Muslim community is 4 million strong and growing, and their contributions to British society are vast which are seldom celebrated. Our working group member, the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre, bears special mention. The Centre became a central source of emergency support immediately following the tragic Grenfell tower fire. The CEO of Al-Manaar, Abdurahman Sayed responded by opening the Mosque's doors welcoming all, regardless of faith or background. The Centre continues to support survivors and those impacted through counselling and workshops.

That is the spirit of the report, it retains optimism. Our dynamic British Muslim community is diverse, creative, kind, and resourceful. Imagine how we'd all be if these communities were served with greater equality and afforded greater opportunity.

Our collaborations during Islamophobia Awareness Month demonstrated the appetite and commitment by a variety of stakeholders to have an open dialogue and take steps to tackle Islamophobia. Ranging from the Bank of England, Leyton Orient Football Club, the London School of Economics, the Arab League, the London Fire Brigade, Westminster City Council, and the United States Embassy in the UK. I wish to continue this dialogue, pledge to eradicate Islamophobia, and I hope this report facilitates exactly that.

Above all, this initiative and report is a call to action, which we hope will encourage all sectors to engage and heed. The UK's brilliant and rich diversity must be celebrated, whilst fostering an environment that is inclusive and allows all to thrive and flourish.

*~ By Anisa Mahmood, Founder and Director of the AIWG*

### **Legal Disclaimer**

The Anti-Islamophobia Working Group (AIWG)'s *Strategies for Eradicating Islamophobia in the UK* does not supersede, modify, or dictate the interpretation of any existing national, regional, or local statutes, regulations, or policies, nor does it serve as binding guidance for the public, regions, localities, or government agencies, and therefore it does not necessitate compliance with the principles outlined herein. Implementation of the strategy will align with applicable law and is contingent upon the availability of necessary resources.

It is important to note that this strategy does not comment on ongoing legal proceedings or investigations and should not be construed as such. The application of the strategy's principles depends significantly on the context in which they are employed, and there may be circumstances where full or partial application may not be suitable. Even in situations where these principles may not be entirely applicable, government departments and agencies remain accountable to existing laws, regulations, and policies.

Furthermore, nothing in this strategy shall be interpreted to diminish or otherwise impact the authority of the Home Office and law enforcement agencies in the execution of their responsibilities. This includes their roles in directing, conducting, controlling, planning, investigating, organising, equipping, training, exercising, or engaging in other activities related to counterterrorism, intelligence, and law enforcement. These activities fall outside the scope of this strategy.

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## Overview

The victims of the highest proportion of religiously motivated hate crime in England and Wales since 2017/18, according to Home Office figures<sup>1</sup>, have been from Muslim communities. Islamophobic hate crime has risen every year since the last, accounting for 42% of recorded religious hate crimes, last year, with notable surges coinciding with terror incidents and global conflicts. In Scotland, a public inquiry launched by Anas Sarwar MSP in 2021 found 75% of Muslims said Islamophobia was a regular or everyday occurrence in Scottish society. Areas requiring immediate reform were identified in a further report in November 2023 by the Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group (CPG) on Challenging Racial and Religious Prejudice.

With a sixfold increase in Islamophobia between October 7-19 2023, in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attack by Hamas inside Israel, our findings reflect the sobering reality of Islamophobia which permeates through all aspects of society and life, including in sports, education and the workplace.

While Islamophobia most directly affects British Muslim communities, it can also be said to threaten the democracy, social trust, values, safety, and rights of the British public as a whole. A hatred of Muslims shares much in common with other forms of prejudice and discrimination, including anti-Black racism, antisemitism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia and misogyny; however, it also possesses unique characteristics that manifest distinctively and necessitate tailored responses. At its core, Islamophobia, not unlike forms of hate, divides Britons by scapegoating certain communities, erodes our trust in government and social institutions, and undermines our democracy. It is therefore imperative that Britons of all backgrounds and beliefs work together to counter this scourge with urgency.

The strategy detailed in the following pages, from the Anti-Islamophobia Working Group (AIWG), represents a comprehensive and ambitious effort to counter Islamophobia in Britain. The AIWG is an apolitical coalition of civil society organisations and experts coming together to raise awareness and urge change to tackle Islamophobia in the UK. But we cannot address Islamophobia alone. This strategy also calls on the government to act and play its part in countering Islamophobia. It demands action from all sections of society—national and



local authorities, civil society, community and faith leaders, the private sector, and individual citizens (or ‘members of the public’).

This important initiative is being supported by the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs with the Meridian International Center as the implementing partner.

As well as proposing recommendations for lawmakers and civil society, this report will also highlight the valuable contributions of our members towards the eradication of Islamophobia in society. Our membership includes:

- 1. Show Racism the Red Card**
- 2. Hope not Hate**
- 3. Islamic Relief**
- 4. The Aziz Foundation**
- 5. The Fawcett Society**
- 6. The Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre**
- 7. The former UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Professor Ahmed Shaheed**
- 8. The UK director of Human Rights Watch, Yasmine Ahmed.**

Combining the collective expertise and tireless contributions of our members, the AIWG calls for action now, and over the long term, in eradicating Islamophobia in the UK.

## **Framing the Challenge and the Solution**

Despite various efforts to address Islamophobia in the UK, it is evident that this issue has continued to persist and, in some respects, worsened over the past few decades.

Islamophobia, defined by Oxford University Press as the irrational fear, hatred, or prejudice against Islam and its followers, can be traced back to various historical events contributing to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes and prejudice against Muslims. The post-World War Two period saw significant immigration to the UK, including communities from former colonies. South Asian and Caribbean migrants, many of whom were Muslim, came to the UK to fill labour shortages, and witnessed a rise in Islamophobia in the 1960/70s linked to economic challenges, social tensions, and cultural differences, as well as the growth of far-right movements<sup>2</sup>. Events such as the Iranian Revolution, the Rushdie Affair (1989) and conflicts in the Middle East contributed to this stigmatisation, as well, more recently, 9/11 and ‘The War on Terror’<sup>3</sup>.

British Asians (both Muslim and non-Muslim) faced increased discrimination following Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech (1968), the rise of ‘Paki bashing’, and the establishment of the National Front, as seen in the murders of Altab Ali and Akhtar Ali Baig in 1978 and 1980<sup>4</sup>, respectively. White supremacy, prejudice and bigotry, and conspiratorial thinking have fuelled Islamophobic discrimination and violence throughout British history.

Islamophobia is now sharply on the rise again in the UK. As in previous eras, demographic changes, new technologies, economic disruptions and deepening socioeconomic inequality provide the backdrop against which we see a rise in discrimination against British Muslims and other vulnerable communities. Violent attacks against British Muslims are increasing at a time when hate crimes and other acts of targeted violence against many communities have rocketed. Verbal and physical harassment, bomb threats, and vandalism against British Muslims, mosques, and community institutions such as Muslim schools and community centres, remain prevalent.

The UK government’s efforts to combat Islamophobia can be traced back to 1997 when the Runnymede Trust published the report *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (1997), criticising the “unfair discrimination and the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs”<sup>5</sup>. Despite this, a subsequent report in 2017 found that in the intervening 20

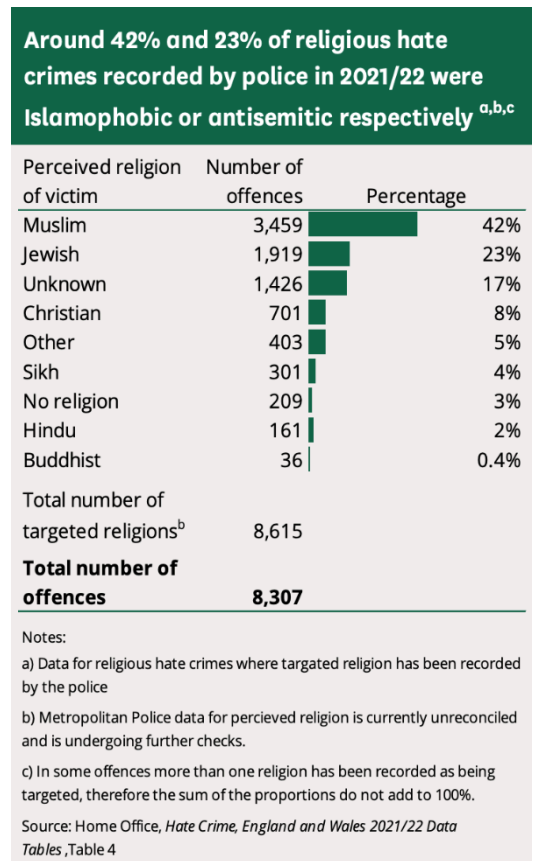
years, Islamophobic “prejudice has grown further and wider”<sup>6</sup>. Islamophobia has many manifestations in the UK, including hate crime (online and offline), employment discrimination, media stereotyping, hate speech and hostility in public life. Recent trends of online radicalisation, Islamophobic sentiment and political rhetoric further highlight the importance of addressing Islamophobia through education, awareness and legal measures, to protect the rights and safety of Muslims.

Over the past 5 years, figures show that British Muslims are consistently the victims of the highest proportion of religiously motivated hate crime, accounting for 42% of recorded hate crimes, last year, in England and Wales, and 16% in Scotland. This trend remains unchanged from the Home Office 2017/18 and 2019/20 dataset<sup>7</sup>, though there is a disconcerting increase in religiously motivated hate crimes targeting Muslims. The current government’s decision to pivot away from its commitment to defining Islamophobia, despite four years of assurances, shows a worrying inaction when tackling Islamophobia, alongside a refusal to even acknowledge the term<sup>8</sup>. This stance raises important questions about the government’s commitment to addressing the issue of Islamophobia in the UK, which currently shows no sign of abating.

The issue of Islamophobia will be examined through the work of our member organisations and/or individuals, using the following broad themes:

- a) Hate Crime and Far-Right Activity
- b) Sports-related Prejudice and Racism in Society
- c) Prejudice Against Muslim Women
- d) Fundamental Human Rights and Global Religious Freedom
- e) Representation and Unequal Opportunity

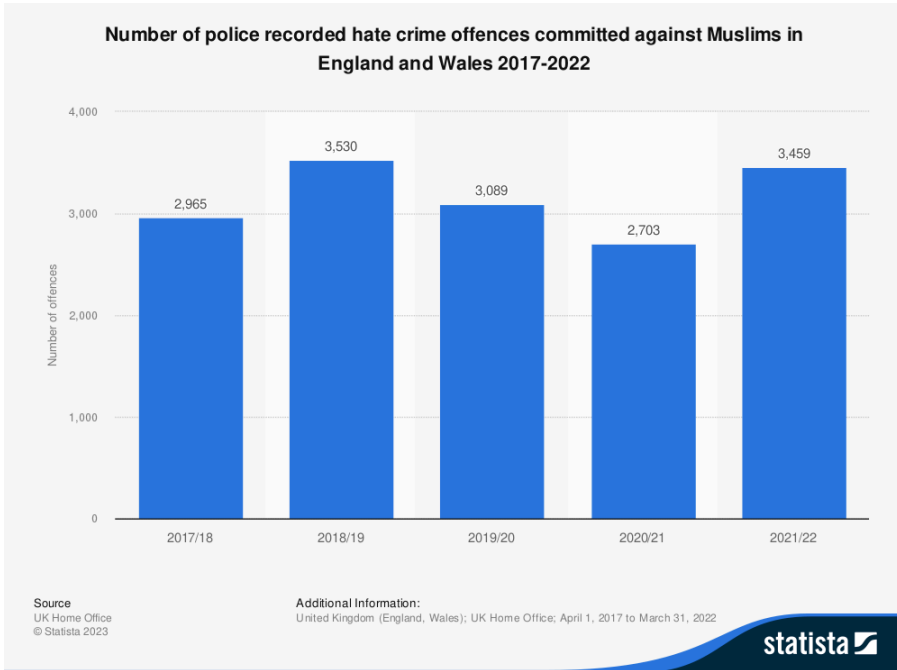
*Note:* Please note that the above list is not an exhaustive account of how Islamophobia impacts society, as its repercussions pervade all aspects of society, as any form of racism does. Nevertheless, this list serves as the means to highlight the influential contributions made by our member



organisations and/or individuals in addressing this pressing issue.

### (a) Hate Crime and Far-Right Activity

The House of Common’s latest report on Islamophobia (2023)<sup>9</sup> confirmed that there is no specific law prohibiting Islamophobia, despite over 50% of religious hate crimes recorded by the police being against Muslims in 2019/20<sup>10</sup>. Recent Home Office figures are more alarming; with 3,459 Islamophobic hate crimes in 2022, showing a 42% increase from the year before (Figure 1), it is clear to us that these incidents, online and offline, are becoming



more commonplace. Hate crimes targeting mosques and other Islamic places of worship across the UK have also doubled between 2016 and 2023, with threats, harassment or other intimidating behaviour more than tripling<sup>11</sup>.

Far right agitation, Islamophobic attacks globally, political discourse and

terrorism/extremism have all led to spike points in Islamophobic hate, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic leading to the highest online recorded cases. Perhaps unsurprisingly is that Islamophobic sentiment, too, is on the rise, with 29% of Britons, out of 20,000, believing that Islam was incompatible with a British way of life. *HOPE not Hate* have detailed how this Islamophobic narrative has been adopted by the British far-right:

Best known are established Islamophobic activists like Tommy Robinson (real name, Stephen Yaxley-Lennon), Anne-Marie Waters and Paul Golding’s Britain First party. Over the last 15 years, they have held provocative marches across the country, invaded mosques and accused whole communities of extremism, also using social media to create public animosity towards Muslims.

Over the last 10 years, several far-right, Islamophobic activists have resorted to terrorism and even murder. Lesser known, but perhaps more dangerous, are the more mainstream anti-Muslim networks. Since the early 2000s, there has been the growth of the so-called ‘Counter-Jihad movement’, a broad alliance of people who share a common loathing of Islam and view Islam as a supremacist ideology fighting to destroy the Christian West.<sup>12</sup>

Earlier this year, HOPE not hate exposed the New Issues Group (NIG), the most prominent of these counter-jihad networks in the UK, operating out of the House of Lords, and partly financed by the Christian Right in the US (HOPE not Hate, 2023).

In 2012, the organisation found significant support for far-right political parties in the UK, and emphasised the need for politicians to refrain from encouraging ‘hate speech’; for example, Priti Patel’s recent portrayal of South Asian, Muslim men as disproportionately responsible for child sexual grooming, claimed false by the press regulator, Ipso<sup>13</sup>.

Islamophobia has become the driving force behind the rise of far-right movements in the UK, according to Hope Not Hate. From the 2015 migrant ‘crisis’ and campaigning around the 2016 EU referendum, with fears of ‘Islamisation’ in a post-Brexit Britain, figures like Tommy Robinson, Katie Hopkins and Nigel Farage, and the recent far-right activity surrounding the conflict in Gaza, there have been decades of mainstream political rhetoric demonising Muslims and racialised people<sup>14</sup>.

Data also indicates a significant increase in Prevent referrals for extreme right-wing ideology. At the ‘National March for Palestine’ in London (11 November 2023), in which organisers and protestors called for a ceasefire from Israel’s bombardment of the Gaza Strip, far-right counter protestors clashed with police, chanting “England till I die” and “let’s have them”. Tommy Robinson, founder of the far-right English Defence League, was seen among the protestors; 126 individuals were arrested on the day<sup>15</sup>.

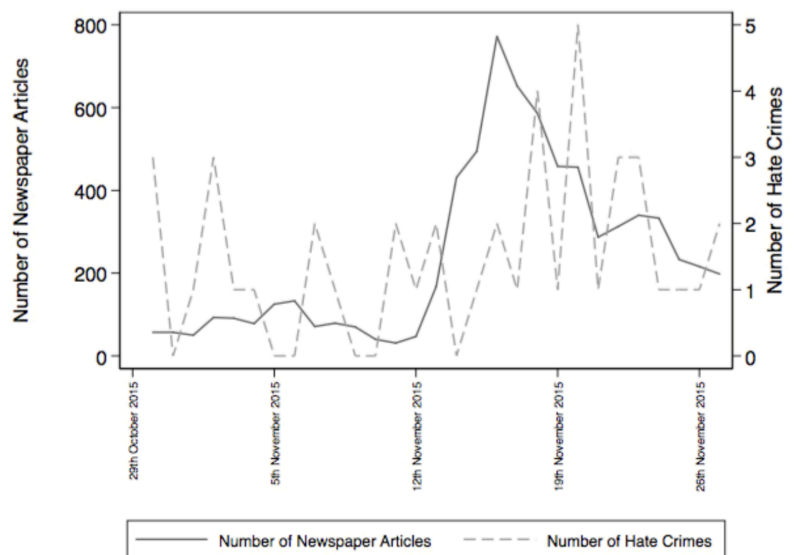
Islamophobia is not exclusive to the far-right; it is a systemic issue. Recent research from Hope Not Hate found that perceptions about Islam/Muslims are overwhelmingly negative, including amongst the members of mainstream political parties. Last year, a Hope Not Hate

report revealed widespread Islamophobia within the governing party, with 57% of Conservative Party members holding a negative view of Muslims and nearly half believing Islam is a threat to the British way of life<sup>16</sup>.

The pro-Palestine demonstration in London, on 11 November 2023, took place amid heightened tension, after Suella Braverman, then home secretary, labelled them “hate marches” and accused the Met police of favouring left-wing causes. In response, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims warned Braverman was “inspiring [the] far-right” in propagating Islamophobia and risking the safety of British Muslims<sup>17</sup>. Scotland’s First Minister, Humza Yousaf, also accused her of “fanning the flames of division” and “emboldening...the far right”. The mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, blamed Braverman for the clashes, claiming that ‘The scenes of disorder we witnessed by the far right at the Cenotaph are a direct result of the home secretary’s words.’ The complex intertwining of Islamophobia, far-right movements, and political rhetoric needs to be detangled if we are to foster a more inclusive and tolerant society.

### (i) Spikes in Islamophobic Hate Crime

There has been notable surges in Islamophobic incidents across the UK, reflecting an alarming tendency in coinciding with terror incidents and global conflicts. ICM figures show how Islamophobic incidents spiked significantly during 9/11, the 7/7 London bombings in 2005<sup>18</sup>, and the Manchester Arena bombing in 2017, often fuelled by fear, misinformation, and prejudice. The ICM poll also found that one in five Muslims faced abuse or hostility following the 2005 bombings, with more than 1,200 Islamophobic incidents taking place in the three weeks following the attack. Nearly two-third of Muslims claimed they considered leaving the UK in the aftermath, demonstrating the profound impact on Muslim communities, due to an atmosphere of fear, anxiety and mistrust created.





In the week following the 2017 London Bridge attack, Islamophobic hate crime increased fivefold<sup>19</sup>, including the case of Darren Osborne intentionally driving a van into a group of Muslims exiting a mosque in London, resulting in the loss of one life and leaving ten injured. This constituted the most substantial increase in Islamophobic hate crime since the 2013 murder of Lee Rigby. Moreover, instances of acid attacks against Muslims experienced a significant rise following the 2017 Beckton acid attack<sup>20</sup>, underscoring a growing threat posed to the Muslim community.

Research from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)<sup>21</sup> found that terrorist attacks with Muslim perpetrators attracted an average 4.5 times more media coverage. Indeed, further study finds that real-time media is a causal mechanism underpinning surges in hate crime and incidents that occur following attacks. Figure 3, focusing on the 2016 Paris attacks, visually illustrates a correlation between peak Islamophobic hate crime and a surge in newspaper reporting. Islamophobic hate crime is shown to be exacerbated and catalysed by media coverage. This poses significant policy questions about how politically sensitive events, and events entailing Muslims, are reported.

What's more concerning is that these terror attacks do not necessarily require Muslim perpetrators to induce a spike in Islamophobia. Tell MAMA found that Islamophobic hate crimes increased sixfold following the shooting at two mosques in Christchurch, 2019. Iman Atta, director of Tell MAMA, said: "You would think since the victims in the New Zealand attack were Muslims praying, there would not be members of this community targeted for further hate in the UK. Our figures corroborate police figures and show a latency of anti-Muslim prejudice that is sadly a part of our society now."<sup>22</sup>

Data from the last decade reveals that religious hate crimes against Muslims also experience a noticeable uptick during global conflicts. During the Israel-Palestine conflict, in May 2022, Tell MAMA reported a 430% rise in reports of Islamophobic hatred, alongside a spike in antisemitic hatred<sup>23</sup>. The organisation noted similar, if not more worrying, trends this year<sup>15</sup>, following Hamas' attacks on 7 October 2023 and during the ongoing painful repercussions for Palestinians and Israelis. In six days (October 7th to October 12th, 2023), the number of Islamophobic cases spiked by 600%, with 37 offline cases and 61 online cases reported. For example, a Palestinian Muslim family had "Killers Terrorists" daubed on their front door, and

a Palestinian restaurant-owner in London was flooded with negative reviews and abusive phone calls<sup>23</sup>.

Online cases have also increased threefold, with one such case where a Sussex-based individual who self-identified as being on the far-right calling for violent “resistance” against Muslim communities on Twitter/X. In general, online hate increased rapidly to 1,318 verified cases (Tell MAMA) in 2020 following Covid-19-related lockdowns, a figure which has been overtaken every year since. It is evident that these platforms provide an outlet for the spread of misinformation, stereotypes, and vitriol. Such language reduces all Muslims to tropes that dehumanise and foment hatred towards them.

### **(b) Sports-related Prejudice and Racism in Society**

Islamophobia and racism permeates many facets of society, including the world of sports. Below is part of a submission from *Show Racism the Red Card*, an anti-racism education charity, on how Islamophobia manifests itself in UK football, as well as other sports:

People are calling upon the Football Association to provide more support for Muslim players after new research revealed the rising impact of Islamophobia, both on and off the pitch.<sup>24</sup> As well as systemic barriers that Muslim athletes face in entering sports, Muslim football players were also found to experience hate crime from members of the public, opposition players and managers. South Asian footballers have also been historically underrepresented in English football, making up less than 0.3% of Premier League and Football League players despite forming 7.5% of the UK population<sup>25</sup>.

A study found that 67% of Muslim athletes surveyed experienced microaggressions in their sporting careers, ranging from insensitive comments to isolation. It is important to recognise that athletes’ visibility as Black or Asian Muslims is usually a key trigger for the hate received, both online and offline. Islamophobia and racism also finds a disconcerting platform with sports fanbases. Incidents of discriminatory chants, banners, and even physical abuse against Muslim athletes have been documented – an issue that is also becoming more common in society. A report by Kick It Out (2023) found a 300% increase in reports of Islamophobia behaviour in the 2022/23 season<sup>26</sup>, including chanting and abuse.

In August 2007, fans of Newcastle United directed Islamophobic chants at Egyptian Middlesbrough F.C. striker, Mido<sup>27</sup>. An FA investigation led to the arrest of two men regarding the chanting, but Mido expressed his disapproval over the investigation, believing that they would make no difference to any future abuse.

During September 2020, we also witnessed racism allegations made by Pakistani-British cricketer, Azeem Rafiq, against Yorkshire County Cricket Club (YCCC) in which he told ESPN Cricinfo that “institutional racism” had left him close to taking his own life. He also appeared before a UK parliamentary committee in November 2021, saying he lost his career to racial harassment and bullying and breaking down in tears on more than one occasion. Seven of Rafiq’s 43 claims were upheld in a report commissioned by YCCC, but the full version of the report was not published and did not lead to any of the club’s hierarchy facing disciplinary action, including former England cricket captain, Michael Vaughan.

Rafiq shared his powerful story at an Anti-Islamophobia Working Group (AIWG) event at the US Embassy in London, hosted by the US State Department.

### **Women’s Sports**

Out of 11 Muslim athletes who made headlines at the Tokyo Olympics 2021, three of them were women. Hijab bans have been lifted by various sports authorities worldwide, and this change in policy is a positive step forward for Muslim women: the result of years of persistence by individuals and organisations tackling barriers facing Muslim women. However, whilst the doors of opportunity have been opened, a lot more action is needed to give Muslim women an equal footing in sports. The French Football Federation (FFF) maintains a ban on the wearing of “conspicuous religious symbols” despite FIFA lifting its own hijab ban in 2014. The think tank, Sporting Equals, has reported that only 26.1% of Asian women take part in recommended levels of sports and physical activities compared to 31.4% of white British women. A Sports England study revealed that only 18% of Muslim women participate in regular sport, compared to 30% of the entire UK population<sup>28</sup>. Within school settings and sports clubs, many Muslim girls and women are compelled to make a choice between playing a sport or practising their faith. They typically face accusations of disliking the physical challenges needed to pursue sports.

The media also plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion when it comes to Muslim participation in sports, with Islamophobia and racism being perpetuated through biased reporting or sensationalism. A study by The Guardian (2019) found that British newspapers tended to focus more on negative stories about Muslim athletes<sup>28</sup>. Show Racism the Red Card makes the point that, when writing a negative story, British news outlets must ensure it is fair and reflective, and does not generalise about all Muslims, feeding into a broader far-right narrative.

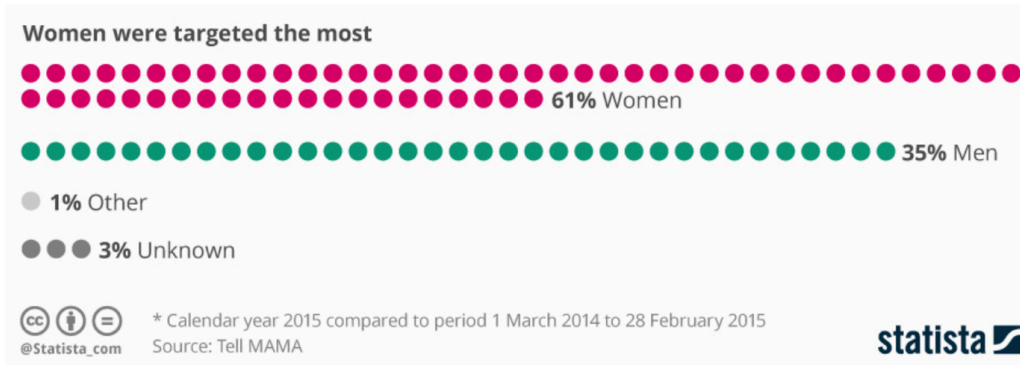
### **(c) Prejudice Against Muslim Women**

*The Fawcett Society* submitted an analysis on the compounding discrimination, violence and abuse faced by those in society with intersecting identities:

A large proportion of Muslim women face a triple penalty— race, faith and gender. Instead of understanding Islamophobia as a universalised, unvariegated social force impacting all Muslims in the same way, we must recognise Muslim women’s disparate experiences and agency. The same can be said for the tendency to see Islamophobia as an Arab and Asian Muslim issue, which renders the experience of Black Muslims, and specifically Black Muslim women, invisible.

In 2016, the Fawcett Society noted that Muslim women face some of the highest pay gaps and barriers to employment of any British group<sup>29</sup>. Economic inequality for women manifests itself in occupational segregation, lower levels of labour market participation and differences in pay. The causes include the greater caring responsibilities of women; men’s greater progression to the top; prejudices and stereotypes about the roles women and men can play at work and discrimination. Muslim women experience barriers in work on account of being women and being Muslim, usually further compounded by their race or perceived race.

In 2016, Fawcett found that British Muslims as a group had low earnings, qualifications, and employment rates, and were at high risk of poverty. Research by the EHRC looking at mean gaps in average hourly pay found that Muslim women experienced a pay gap compared to Christian men of 22.4%: the highest of any religious group<sup>30</sup>. They also experienced a gap relative to Muslim men of around 9%.



Tell MAMA also identified that Muslim women were particularly vulnerable to discrimination and abuse, especially when visually identifiable (wearing hijab, niqab or other Islamic clothing), making up 80% of female victims, and 58% of all incidents<sup>31</sup>. An EUMC report identified Muslim women as the most likely targets of “verbal abuse, being spat upon, having their hijab torn from them and being physically assaulted”<sup>32</sup>.

There are clear gendered manifestation of anti-Muslim hate-crime. For many Muslim women who become victims of Islamophobia, there is a real sense of fear and mistrust in dealing with the police and state agencies, and for some, cultural and religious factors combine with that mistrust to create additional obstacles.

#### **(d) Fundamental Human Rights and Global Religious Freedom**

Freedom of religion or belief is a fundamental human right recognized by the United Nations, globally and under international law and British law. Islamophobia undermines this right by creating an atmosphere of fear and hostility for Muslims, limiting their ability to practise their faith freely. Discrimination in employment, education, and public services can restrict Muslim individuals’ ability to exercise and enjoy their fundamental human rights to fully participate in society.

As *Professor Ahmed Shaheed* (former UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief) expressed it, a key challenge to anti-Islamophobia action is the glaring mismatch between the scale of Islamophobia globally and the responses to it, including the ‘chilling effects’ on freedom of expression, a refusal to acknowledge ‘racialisation’ and the securitisation of Muslims. It is a normative confusion that combating Islamophobia could ‘undermine freedom of expression’, somewhat fuelled

by the appeal to the notion of ‘religious offence’ by states promoting the UN resolutions on ‘defamation of religion.’

A related normative challenge is the inability across many jurisdictions to recognise the social constructions of race; although primarily a religious community consisting of people of diverse cultures, ethnicities and phenotypes, Muslims can be racialised and stigmatised on the basis of religious identity. Most human rights lawyers operating within the UN’s standard-setting system have failed to acknowledge that Muslims and their religious practices are essentialised and stigmatised through negative stereotyping, for the purpose of treating them as inferior. This refusal is often accompanied by ignoring evidence of widespread discrimination. Thus, the institutional dimension of Islamophobia remains unacknowledged by human rights standard-setters.

The rejection of the institutional dimension of anti-Muslim hatred is also due to the ‘securitisation’ of Muslims both by Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority states. Conceptually,<sup>34</sup> securitisation refers to the designation of a particular group or issue as posing an existential threat which justifies taking extraordinary measures against the threat with minimal public scrutiny. The ‘war on terror’ has spawned industrial scale securitisation and ‘Othering’ of Muslims.

Human Rights Watch have long argued that nation-states have an obligation under human rights law to protect the right to life and security of everyone within their country without discrimination. That includes protecting people against antisemitic and Islamophobic violence. Governments should collect disaggregated data on race and ethnicity to allow them to respond more effectively to structural and other forms of racism and discrimination.

### **(e) Representation and Unequal Opportunity**

The issue of representation and unequal opportunity in the UK surfaces in various aspects of society. *The Aziz Foundation*, a family charitable foundation established to nurture public leaders of Muslim background, produced a submission with a particular focus of Islamophobia’s institutional forms within higher education, but also more widely in workplaces and public life:

While higher education (HE) is a key driver of upwards social mobility, it is also an incubator of institutional Islamophobia. British Muslims are less likely to gain first class degrees compared to those from non-faith backgrounds, and are still omitted from widening participation formulas and frameworks, constituting a form of policy exceptionalism. The differential in experience is noted by the Foundation’s internal research and survey of its scholarship candidates<sup>35</sup>.

The decolonising movement in higher education has raised awareness about the extent of Eurocentrism that still lingers in the curricula of most disciplines, from the humanities, social, and natural sciences. While mobilisations of students and staff have led to the creation of initiatives across higher education (for example, student consultancy and advocacy programmes), more needs to be done at pre-university levels to raise awareness of the contribution of the Islamic world to the sum total of knowledge. Furthermore, teaching of the British Muslim contributions to society, as well as Islamophobia and its impact, ought to be a crucial part of decolonising efforts at the secondary state school curriculum level.

**MUSLIM CHARACTERS ARE MISSING IN POPULAR FILM**

Percentage of Muslim characters across 200 popular films, 2017-2019



Stereotypes, conspiracy theories and worrying social attitudes about Muslims are on the increase, as opinion polling of the British public’s views on Islam by the Muslim Council of Britain has found, with 31% of young children believing that Muslims are taking over England, and 22% holding negative feelings towards

Muslims<sup>26</sup>. Negative stereotypes can overshadow the accomplishments of British Muslims and hinder their integration into society, so in contradiction highlighting the contributions and the achievements of British Muslims helps to dispel misconceptions and promote diversity. Media coverage also contributes to negative perceptions and social attitudes. 43% of media clips, in 2019, portrayed Muslims with a negative association<sup>36</sup>; when looking at misrepresentation online, the majority of it, 87%, came from news reporting.



Other key findings show that 7% of all articles included one or more generalisations about Muslims and Islam, with topics of terrorism or extremism making up 25% of these instances. This is also a gendered and racial issue, with the ratio of male characters to Muslim female characters across 200 films being 175 to 1, and 66.7% of Muslim characters being depicted as from the Middle-East, despite accounting for 20% in reality. In the top 200 grossing films in the UK, from 2017 to 2019, 1.6% of speaking roles included Muslim characters. 53.7% of Muslim characters are depicted as targets of violence and 39% are depicted as perpetrators of violence, which only reinforces negative stereotypes surrounding the British Muslim community, contributing to Islamophobia and prejudice.

The British media, in relation to Muslims, “tended to focus on a narrow range of issues and recurrent, negative types of characterisation”<sup>37</sup>. However, promoting the values of diversity and inclusion are fundamental to a democratic and pluralistic society, and positive Muslim representation can dispel stereotypes and misconceptions, reducing the likelihood of prejudice.

History shows us that we cannot allow hatred towards minorities to fester. Where Islamophobia and other forms of hatred are left unchecked, democracy, freedom, stability, security, and peace are at risk. Islamophobia, like numerous forms of hate, seeks to divide Britons from one another. It is not only a threat to British Muslims; it is a threat to all of us.

The former UN special rapporteur has highlighted the importance of freedom of religion or belief as crucial to the exercise of a range of fundamental human rights. We must recall our historic national obligation to ensure people of all faiths and none are free to practise their faith peacefully and live their cultural identities without fear of persecution. We must confront Islamophobia in Britain with urgency. This strategy sets forth the plan to do so.



## Our Strategic Approach

In the ongoing battle against Islamophobia in the UK, it is imperative that we not only identify the challenges but also propose tangible solutions to foster a more inclusive, and harmonious society. In this report, we outline key policy recommendations put forward by our members – a diverse and dedicated group committed to eradicating discrimination and prejudice against Muslims in the UK.

Our intent is not only to provide a roadmap for the government and wider society but to spark meaningful discourse, collaboration, and change in the relentless pursuit of a more tolerant, just, and inclusive UK. The policy recommendations featured are a culmination of research, collaboration, and the collective wisdom of our members. It is our hope that these recommendations will serve as a catalyst for meaningful policy change and the eradication of Islamophobia in the UK. Although Islamophobia is an increasingly global problem, the scope of our strategy is domestic and national. The strategy is focused on countering the threat and manifestations of Islamophobia in the UK.

The previous chapter explored a tendency by the British media to focus on and prioritise “recurrent, negative” Muslim narratives, which, as previously-quoted figures have found, can contribute to a distorted, unfair portrayal of a pluralistic community. The Anti-Islamophobia Working Group believes that it is equally important to celebrate and highlight the incredible work and positive contributions of British Muslims.

British Muslims are making remarkable contributions across various sectors, including education, healthcare, business, sports, the arts, and community development. While it is important to report on challenges and issues facing any community, it is equally essential to highlight the achievements, aspirations, and positive contributions of individuals and organisations in combating Islamophobia.

Thus, our strategy will also seek to highlight the tireless commitment and unwavering dedication of individuals and organisations under our membership (outlined in our Overview) in tackling Islamophobia. This strategy advances a whole-of-society approach to countering Islamophobia, resting on six pillars:

- **Pillar 1: Foster Understanding and Counter Misconceptions About Muslims and Islam Through Education.**
- **Pillar 2: Use Media and Public Discourse to Counter Anti-Muslim Bias.**
- **Pillar 3: Build Cross-Community Solidarity and Collective Action to Counter Hate.**
- **Pillar 4: Legislative Approaches and Policy Frameworks to Combat Islamophobia.**
- **Pillar 5: Government Engagement with Civil Society to Combat Prejudice and Discrimination.**
- **Pillar 6: The Importance of Monitoring and Data Collection in Anti-Islamophobia Efforts.**

Note that some sections will transcript submissions from members, in whole or in part, attributed to the author.

## **Pillar 1: Foster Understanding and Countering Misconceptions About Muslims and Islam Through Education**

As mentioned previously, the issue of representation and unequal opportunity in the UK manifests itself in various aspects of society, with higher education (HE) an incubator of institutional Islamophobia, and stereotypes, conspiracy theories and worrying social attitudes about Muslims. Negative stereotypes can overshadow the accomplishments of British Muslims and hinder their integration into society, and media coverage is a key contributor to this<sup>37</sup>. Promoting the values of diversity and inclusion are fundamental to a democratic and pluralistic society, and positive Muslim representation can dispel stereotypes and misconceptions, reducing the likelihood of prejudice.

Given the contemporary global events regarding Muslims, which trigger spikes in Islamophobic sentiment in the UK, it is imperative to incorporate education about Islam and Muslims in British schools. Unfortunately, the presence of crude portrayals of Islam and Muslims often hinders this educational process. Overcoming these challenges is crucial for fostering the development of compassionate and well-informed students capable of critical thinking in our increasingly complex and globalised world. This pillar underscores the significance of addressing Muslim representation in the media, dispelling myths about Islam and Muslims, and offers practical classroom recommendations for teachers.

### **The subjection of children and youths to Islamophobia**

The Ombudsman for Children's report, titled “Subjection of Children and Youths to Racism” (2021)<sup>37.5</sup>, revealed that numerous children perceive racist expressions as all too normalised, a part of their daily experiences, especially in school and online. The report is based on interviews conducted with both victims of racism and those who have encountered racism in various contexts. A study by Save the Children (2021)<sup>37.55</sup> on children’s exposure to racism indicates that religious Muslim children, in particular, face discrimination and harassment, often on multiple grounds, from peers and teachers. Notably, many complaints highlight instances of Muslim girls facing harassment related to their wearing of a headscarf.

Dialogues with representatives from Muslim civil society organisations affirm the vulnerability of children and youths at school, especially the frequent lack of awareness among children and youths about where to seek redress for grievances in order to uphold

their rights. Schools play a crucial role in imparting fundamental democratic values and respect for human rights to children and youths. It is crucial to provide tools that enhance awareness of Islamophobia and various forms of racism throughout the educational journey, ensuring that initiatives effectively cater to the needs of both teachers and students.

### **Strategic Goal 1.1 - Incorporating British Muslims as an underrepresented group in the Widening Participation Agenda in higher education**

While higher education (HE) is a key driver of upwards social mobility, it is also an incubator of institutional Islamophobia. British Muslims are less likely to gain first class degrees compared to those from non-faith backgrounds, and are still omitted from Widening Participation (WP) formulas and frameworks, constituting a form of policy exceptionalism. The differential in experience is noted by the Aziz Foundation's internal research and survey of its scholarship candidates.

There is a critical progression issue, with just 8% of postgraduate students who identify as British Muslim; down from 12% at the undergraduate level. Not only does WP's mandate have to be extended to the postgraduate level, 'British Muslims' should be listed by the Office for Students (OfS) as an 'underrepresented group' in Access and Participation planning requirements. There has been some progress with the inclusion of British Muslims in the new OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Registers. This helps regulate experiences within HE, but this needs to be supplemented with the above WP policy recommendation.

The Aziz Foundation has recently released a significant report<sup>38</sup> addressing challenges faced by British Muslims aspiring to pursue postgraduate (PGT) studies amidst changing student demographics, referred to as 'hyper-diversification' in higher education (HE) policy discussions. Recent projections by Advance HE indicate a dynamic shift in the student population, and a TASO publication highlights the sector's uncertainty in addressing disparities in progression and attainment. The report, titled 'Transitions: British Muslims between UG and PGT studies' provided valuable insights for HE practitioners, researchers, and institutions seeking to understand the experiences of minoritized communities in detail. It emphasised the need for targeted interventions rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, and

expresses concern about the direction of the widening participation agenda, urging a better incorporation of the access needs of faith communities in future strategies.

### **The progression challenge**

The existing policy exceptionalism that excludes British Muslims from regulatory frameworks and formulas in higher education (HE) contributes to sustaining inequality gaps that impede academic progression. While recent regulatory attention has rightly focused on disparities related to ethnicity, addressing the sector-wide challenges like the degree-awarding gap and access to doctoral studies for minoritized communities, there remains a noticeable gap regarding the disadvantages faced by British Muslims due to their faith. Although the newly established ‘Equalities of Opportunity Risk Register’ acknowledges Muslim students, the regulatory agenda has yet to fully incorporate the intersectional challenges faced by British Muslims.

The progression challenge is evident in the data presented by the Office for Students (OfS), showing a decline in British Muslim participation from undergraduate to postgraduate taught levels. This contrast is not observed among those from non-faith backgrounds or other control groups, such as Christian students. The national datasets reveal a deep-seated social mobility fault line, demanding a critical response from the sector to enhance the current access regime and address the specific forms of disadvantage hindering intersectional communities like British Muslims from participating at the postgraduate level.

### **Intersectionality of disadvantage**

The report, titled “Transitions,” delves into the testimonies of British Muslims using a Critical Race Theory (CRT) methodology and qualitative analysis. By exploring the lived experiences of candidates for the Aziz Foundation’s Masters Scholarship program, the report positions itself as a form of community-based research, with survey respondents considered co-producers of knowledge. The concept of ‘intersectionality’ is central to understanding the British Muslim identity, focusing on the interaction between faith and ethnicity and its impact on their experiences within higher education.

### **Pipeline issues and recommendations:**

“Transitions” highlights the significance of the transition to postgraduate studies for British Muslims, not just for academia but also as a means to address imbalances in social capital and widen networks for professional development. The report recommends that higher

education institutions (HEIs) ensure parity between pre-entry and postgraduate widening participation, actively include British Muslim students as a disadvantaged group in Access and Participation Plans (APPs), and bridge the postgraduate pipeline with appropriate funding opportunities like ring-fenced scholarships.

*The Aziz Foundation* was established in 2015 as a family foundation by Asif Aziz, with eradicating Islamophobia central to its social mission and particular focus on its institutional forms within higher education, but also more widely in workplaces and public life. The Foundation initially engaged in a dynamic combination of scholarships and grants across strategic areas such as community initiatives, arts and culture, and research. In 2018, the Foundation launched a scholarship program for British Muslim at the Masters level, noting a critical progression issue between the undergraduate and postgraduate taught level.

- In 2020, the Aziz Foundation granted over 200 scholarships at 54 universities, with 65% of these going to female scholars and 160 to young academics.
- Notably, 45% of this group marked the first in their families to pursue higher education and 40% fell within the household income bracket of less than £20,000 per annum.

The Foundation has strategically positioned itself to more effectively influence interventions in Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and widening access. This is done through its Masters scholarships programme; partnerships with UK universities; internships with employers in a range of professions; and discretionary grants to support key organisations. These are the primary means through which it envisages driving policy change, in order to render public policy more responsive to marginalised British Muslim communities. The Foundation also works with media outlets, think tanks and chambers, amongst other workplaces, to provide internship opportunities to British Muslims, helping to mend the pipeline between education and work.

## **Strategic Goal 1.2 - Incorporating teaching on Islamophobia within the National Curriculum**

The decolonising movement in higher education has raised awareness about the extent of Eurocentrism that still lingers on in the curricula of most disciplines, from the humanities, social, and natural sciences. While mobilisations of students and staff have led to the creation of initiatives across higher education (for example, student consultancy and advocacy programmes), more needs to be done at pre-university levels to raise awareness of the contribution of the Islamic world to the sum total of knowledge.

Furthermore, teaching of the British Muslim contributions to society, as well as Islamophobia and its impact, ought to be a crucial part of decolonising efforts at the secondary state school curriculum level. The national curriculum can only be modified by the UK government, and any changes to the national curriculum reflect the government's strategic position on anti-racist pedagogy. The Leader of the Opposition, Sir Keir Starmer, has already been reported as stating that there ought to be more teaching of Black British History incorporated within the school curriculum<sup>38</sup>. A public consultation that solicits the views of a whole range of British Muslim community and civil society groups ought to be conducted to feed into any review of anti-racism and citizenship teaching at the secondary state school level.

A 2023 report titled 'Report of the inquiry into Islamophobia in Scotland by the Cross-Party Group on Tackling Islamophobia' recommended that Scotland urgently introduce education reforms to combat the "scourge of Islamophobia" in society. This involves incorporating an awareness of Islamophobia into both the curriculum and teacher training across educational institutions. It necessitates the establishment of safe spaces within schools for discussions, prayers, and reflections, as well as the implementation of dress-code policies that are considerate of the requirements of Muslims.

The same research indicated that 75% of Muslims view Islamophobia as a daily issue in Scottish society. Given that Muslim women in Scotland are more prone to experiencing Islamophobia than men, the report also urges the Scottish Government to financially support organisations and initiatives that foster social cohesion and integration, especially for Muslim women (as further discussed in *Strategic Goal 3.2*).

### **Strategic Goal 1.3 - Make Enhanced Educational Initiatives mandatory for all sporting bodies**

These educational initiatives could cover a range of topics, such as diversity, inclusion, anti-discrimination, fair play, and ethical conduct, with routine follow-ups to gauge their impact. This helps ensure that these educational efforts lead to real change and result in a more inclusive and fair sports environment. Routine assessments might involve surveys, feedback from participants, and statistical data to measure improvements in areas such as diversity, inclusivity, and the reduction of discriminatory incidents.

Certain sports providers may embrace the principles of a ‘level playing field’ or the concept of ‘meritocracy’ as a way to address issues of racism and Islamophobia. Ratna’s (2007)<sup>38.5</sup> examination of British Asian girls and women suggests that this approach can be problematic. In this context, sport administrators, managers, and development officers may attribute an individual’s failure to engage in readily available sports to personal shortcomings, rather than acknowledging their own responsibilities in combating racialized exclusion and discrimination rooted in established customs and practices.

It is crucial for stakeholders in sports to actively seek input from black and minority ethnic communities regarding their reasons for participation or non-participation. This proactive approach helps avoid analyses based on racial stereotypes and assumptions. Numerous Pakistani and Indian women faced barriers to participation due to providers neglecting their specific religious and cultural beliefs, and the relatively low participation of South Asian communities in formal cricket settings, despite their high involvement in informal formats, stems from a complex set of barriers and constraints. These include a combination of lifestyle choices, individual preferences, and broader racialized issues.

By making such educational initiatives mandatory and consistently evaluating their impact, the aim is to foster a sports culture that is more respectful, equitable, and welcoming for individuals of all backgrounds, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and fair sporting community.

***Show Racism the Red Card (SRtRC)*** is the UK's leading anti-racism educational charity.



We provide educational workshops in schools to either pupils or teachers as well as corporate organisations, training sessions, multimedia packages, and a host of other resources, all with the purpose of tackling racism and hate crime in society. To enhance the learning, we have developed a physical activity centred around football that promotes inclusivity and teamwork. Established in January 1996 by Shaka Hislop the ex-professional Newcastle goalkeeper, the organisation utilises the high-profile status of football and football players as well as other sports to publicise its message. Across Britain, Show Racism the Red Card delivers training to more than 50,000 individuals per year.

Through delivery of their Anti-Racism and Anti-Discriminatory workshops, SRtRC continues to challenge Islamophobia where possible:

- SRtRC critiques and analyses stereotypes and biases against British Muslims through a range of education, activities and facilitated discussion. These discussions are had with young people in schools to adults in EDI training sessions.
- Moreover, Stop the Hate, a joint project with West Ham United Foundation, facilitates discussions around Extremism whereby myths are dispelled in terms of Islam and Extremism.
- Through comparing Islam to Christianity, SRtRC focuses on similarities rather than differences and outlines how many beliefs, customs and traditions overlap with other Abrahamic religions.
- SRtRC workshops examine the extent and manifestations of Islamophobia and racism in UK sports, backed by relevant statistics and research findings.

## **Pillar 2: Use Media and Public Discourse to Counter Anti-Muslim Bias**

Studies<sup>39</sup> reveal that the peer-to-peer structures inherent in social media platforms significantly influence public discourse, leading to an increased likelihood of citizens being exposed to unregulated, false, and prejudicial content. The decentralised nature of these platforms allows information to spread rapidly and often without proper oversight, contributing to the dissemination of inaccurate or misleading information against marginalised groups. This phenomenon has significant implications for the quality of public discourse, potentially shaping attitudes in ways that can be detrimental to the overall information ecosystem.

The portrayal of Muslims and Islam in the British media has undergone significant scrutiny, particularly in the aftermath of events such as the 2001 riots, conflicts in the Middle East, and the global war on terror. The ideological threat posed by Muslims in the UK, as constructed in the media, allows for their suppression<sup>40</sup>. Media coverage has evolved from associating ethnically marked minority youth with criminal behaviour to emphasising Muslim individuals as potential troublemakers. The distortion and negative framing of Muslims in the media have been further highlighted in a BBC Radio 4 interview, “Face the Facts: Islamophobia,” which investigated how press coverage contributes to growing tensions between communities through negative representations of Muslims. The broadcast revealed instances of false stories and Islamophobic narratives, raising questions about editorial responsibility and the need for stricter sanctions.

Research by Professor Justin Lewis from the University of Cardiff supports these findings, stating that adjectives commonly used in relation to Muslims include ‘radical’, ‘fanatical’, ‘fundamentalist’, ‘extremist’, and ‘militant’, contributing to a pervasive narrative of Islam as a threat.

**The Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM)** analysed over 48,000 articles and 5,500 broadcast clips, in their report, ‘British Media’s Coverage of Muslims and Islam (2018-2020)’, which found that:

- 59% of all articles associated Muslims with negative behaviour

- 37% of articles in right-leaning and religious publications were categorised with the lowest rating of ‘very biased’
- Over a third of all articles misrepresented or generalised about Muslims
- Terrorism was the most common theme

Alluding to the last point, the CfMM also published a special report, ‘How the British Media Reports Terrorism’ (2020), which found an inconsistency in the way attacks are reported, depending on who the perpetrator is;

- Words identifying Muslims or Islam are more frequently placed alongside “terror” or “terrorist” in comparison with the most frequent identifiers of “far-right” or “white-supremacist” terrorism.
- Between 2015-2019, over half of the terms “terrorist” were used with the terms “Islam” or “Muslim.” This is almost nine times more than with the terms “far-right”, “neo-Nazi” or “white supremacist.”
- Online news sites, in particular, the Mail Online, have appropriated the phrase “Allahu Akbar” in headlines as shorthand for terrorism committed by individuals of a Muslim background.

The Director of MCB’s Centre for Media Monitoring, Rizwana Hamid said: “It is time for the industry to admit that, on occasion and too often when it comes to Muslims and Islam, it gets things wrong.”

The latest report by the Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group (CPG) on Challenging Racial and Religious Prejudice made a number of recommendations, including for the Scottish media. These include encouraging editors to consult regularly with the Muslim community to promote understanding and prevent misrepresentation.

### **Positive Contributions from British Muslims**

We must tell the positive stories of Muslim contributions to the United Kingdom, advancing equity for all and celebrating the heritage of the UK’s many diverse communities. In doing so

we will also broaden awareness and understanding of the immense contributions made by British Muslim communities.

Highlighting the work of our members allows us to showcase excellent examples of the positive contributions British Muslims are making in the UK:

### **Community Engagement**

*Al Manaar Mosque/Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre* has actively organised events such as cultural festivals, interfaith dialogues, and educational workshops, creating spaces for diverse communities to come together and build understanding. Their initiatives, such as language classes, community art projects, a community kitchen and mentorship programs, exemplify their dedication to enriching and connecting the local community. The centre has played a pivotal role in promoting inclusivity and fostering positive relationships among people of different backgrounds.

*Alessandro Babalola* is an Olivier award-winning actor, writer and artist, as well as a co-chair and artist in residence of the Soho Theatre. Babalola is best known for his role as Haze in the Netflix series, *Top Boy*, and the film, *Wrath of Man*.

In the summer of 2023, he converted to Islam, and the moment he took his shahadah was captured by the Islam Channel. In an Anti-Islamophobia Working Group (AIWG) event at the Westminster City Council, where Babalola was invited as a guest speaker, he said, “this is a very important call because it is all about the equality of the human race. It’s so important that humans unify together, to tackle and eradicate hatred, prejudice, bigotry and division in society.”

### **Educational Initiatives**

*The Aziz Foundation* provides scholarships to British Muslims from disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue postgraduate studies in various fields, empowering Muslim students to reach their full potential and contribute to their communities.

## Healthcare and Humanitarian Efforts

**Islamic Relief UK** is a leading Muslim charity and independent NGO founded in the UK. Since 1984, they have saved and transformed the lives of over 120 million people. By responding to disasters, rebuilding lives and preparing people in case disaster strikes – they save lives before they are lost, as well as promoting sustainable economic and social development by working with local communities – regardless of race, religion or gender. These shape the organisation's five key values: *ikhlas* (sincerity), *ihsan* (excellence), *rahma* (compassion), *adl* (social justice), and *amana* (custodianship).

As stated in their website, the organisation is guided “by the timeless values and teachings of the Qur’an and the prophetic example (Sunnah)”. They are “driven and motivated by sincerity to God and our duty to humanity”. In 1994, Islamic Relief became the first Muslim NGO to receive UK government funding when it was awarded £180,000 to support a training centre in North Kordofan, Sudan<sup>42</sup>. Their faith focus promotes a positive, accurate understanding of Islam in the UK, dispelling myths and challenging misconceptions. The organisation helps counter stigmatisation and discrimination faced by Muslim communities.

**The APPG’s Report, ‘Rising to the Challenge: A community’s response to Covid-19’ (2017)** highlighted the fantastic work undertaken by British Muslims during the pandemic.

- Many religious institutions, facing their own challenges due to the closure of places of worship and changes in their regular operations, took proactive measures to fulfil their duty of care to their followers, including ensuring dignified burials during Covid-19 or providing prayers and pastoral care online.
  - A noteworthy example is Mohamed Omer of Gardens of Peace in east London, who worked at a Muslim burial site, especially during a period of restricted funerals. Similarly, the Muslim Council of Britain and the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) actively engaged in information dissemination campaigns to address fears and dispel misconceptions regarding Covid vaccines within Muslim communities.
  - **The Al Manaar Mosque**, North Kensington, was one of the main food hubs in the west London area providing food and essentials to the local

community. The mosque also set up online fundraisers, volunteering training and recruitment schemes and distributed food and supplies to local communities by partnering with groups like AgeUK, NHS, BME Health Forum and Notting Hill Methodist Church.

### **Key Statistics from the COVID-19 Pandemic**

- 198.9 deaths per 100,000 males ONS data shows the highest age-standardised mortality rates of Covid-19 related deaths were amongst Muslims, with 198.9 deaths per 100,000 males and 98.2 deaths per 100,000 females.
- Among Muslim males, the mortality rate was 2.5 times greater than for Christian males, while for females it was 1.9 times higher.
- The first 10 deaths in the UK health sector were of those of a minority ethnic background, the first four of whom were Muslim doctors (Amged el-Hawrani, Adel el-Tayar, Dr Habib Zaidi and Dr Fayaz Ayache). Despite making up less than 5% of the British population, and 15% of the medical workforce, over 50% of doctors who have died have been Muslim.
- Muslim Youth Helpline, a counselling service for young Muslims in the UK, reported a 300% increase in calls, web chats and emails from distressed teens and young adults since the onset of the pandemic including a spike over the Eid weekend (in May 2020).
- 81% of Muslim medical professionals say they have experienced Islamophobia or racism within the NHS from staff and patients; 69% felt it had got worse during their time at the organisation and more than half (57%) felt Islamophobia had an adverse effect on their career progression. More than 2 in 5 (43%) admitted that they had considered leaving the NHS because of Islamophobia.

The report ended with a call to action to tackle structural inequalities, persistent weaknesses in the Government's engagement strategies with Muslim communities, and the financial and infrastructural support given to the charity sector, and especially Muslim-led charities.

### **Social Justice and Advocacy**

**Professor Ahmed Shaheed**, former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief investigated and reported on violations and challenges related to the right to freedom of religion or belief globally, advocating for the protection of individuals' rights to practise their religion or belief without discrimination.

Professor Shaheed's advocacy efforts include raising awareness about the impact of hate speech, violence, and discrimination on religious minorities and promoting policies to foster religious and societal harmony. Professor Shaheed has presented reports and recommendations within international forums including the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly.

As an academic, he has contributed to the field of human rights through research, publications, and lectures, informing policy discussions and shaping a global discourse on social justice and human rights. Professor Shaheed has also been actively involved in efforts against torture and ill-treatment, as well as collaborating with grassroots movements to advance justice and equality.

**Mariah Idrissi** is a prominent British model, public speaker, and online personality who gained widespread recognition as the first Muslim hijab-wearing model through her participation in H&M's "Close the Loop" campaign in 2015. The campaign went viral and received coverage from international news broadcasters, including CNN, ABC AU, Huffington Post, NBC, and Al Jazeera.

Idrissi is also an active humanitarian, advocating for Syrian Women and supporting Human Care Syria's 'Women's Hygiene and Sanitation' project. She spoke at London's TEDxTeen conference in 2016 and engaged in charitable efforts, including joining the 'Represent' campaign to encourage young donors to register and donate blood.

Recognized as an influential role model and voice for fashion-conscious modest women, Idrissi was nominated for the 2016 'Cultural Icon of the Year' award by The BEAM

Awards. She continues to use her online presence and speaking engagements to share insights into the H&M campaign, her advocacy work, and the incorporation of Muslim dress in mainstream fashion by various brands

Speaking at an Anti-Islamophobia Working Group (AIWG) event, 2023, at Westminster City Council, Idrissi said “it’s so important to address [Islamophobia], especially in the current climate where it has shot up 600%.”

### **Strategic Goal 2.1 - Fund and produce media literacy programmes which identify what constitutes Islamophobia**

Creating media programs that define Islamophobia and shed light on its impact on innocent members of the Muslim community and their institutions is crucial for raising awareness and fostering tolerance. These programs should begin by offering a clear explanation of what Islamophobia entails, encompassing the various forms of prejudice, discrimination, and bias directed at Islam and Muslims.

By sharing personal stories and community perspectives, the human side of the issue can be illuminated, demonstrating the emotional and practical consequences of Islamophobia. Moreover, such programs should explore its daily implications, from educational and employment challenges to social interactions. Highlighting counter-narratives, legal and policy measures, educational initiatives, and global perspectives, media can contribute to a more informed and empathetic society while providing a platform for victims' voices and allies' actions. Furthermore, interactive elements and resource-sharing can empower viewers to engage actively in combating Islamophobia and fostering understanding and support for the Muslim community.

Funding and supporting media literacy programs are crucial in the effort to combat the spread of misinformation and stereotypes. The negative attitudes towards Muslims, as indicated by a study from Public Religion Research, often stem from sensationalist news headlines rather than personal experiences<sup>43</sup>. This misinformation effect was notably evident in media coverage of the War in Iraq, where pro-war reporting significantly influenced public opinion,



despite later revelations that no weapons of mass destruction were found. The ethical consequences of this misinformation were severe.

The crisis in mainstream journalism, exemplified by biased reporting, along with the rise of social media, underscores the need for more media literacy programs in public education, empowering students and faculty to analyse how media industries shape socio cultural structures of power, determine who controls narratives, and influence the perspectives and interests that construct stories for the target audience.

This strategy not only contributes to creating a more informed and ethical society but also plays a role in shifting the prevailing Islamophobic narrative, ultimately contributing to the building of a stronger democracy.

***Al Manaar: The Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre*** provides the Muslim community in and around North Kensington with a focal point for a range of social, cultural, economic, training and educational activities. Al Manaar is a national role model of social impact and engagement, with achievements that include:

- Leading centre of first victim response (including the Grenfell Tower Tragedy)
- Regular congregations and services for thousands of locals
- Best managed Islamic community centre in the UK
- Homeless support & Community Hub Kitchen
- Joint success with Megan Markle and the famous cookbook “Together”
- Deep relationships with the Royal Family, Christians, Jewish and interfaith communities
- Fundraising for Macmillan Cancer Support

Their services include a community kitchen, mosque, youth club sessions, training programmes, elderly wellbeing projects and counselling services, all accessible to both Muslims and non-Muslims in the area. They also run ‘Visit My Mosque’ sessions, which allow guests from all backgrounds to educate themselves on the lives of British Muslims. As well as this, Al-Manaar provided vital services during Covid-19 Lockdown, where they distributed 1400 reusable prayer mats, 3400 packs of dates, over 2000 food packages to vulnerable elderly members of the community, and 875 counselling sessions. As well as

providing Covid-19 vaccine information sessions in English, Arabic, and Somali languages, they also provided regular weekly sessions for new Muslims and those interested in Islam, where they covered topics on the basics of the faith to intellectual discussions on history and health, forming a safe, supportive community during a tumultuous time.

### **Strategic Goal 2.2 - Authorities should implement stricter monitoring and penalising mechanisms to curb online prejudice**

To address the growing problem of racist and Islamophobic comments on social media platforms, the government should implement more rigorous monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to combat online hate speech and toxicity, via regulators. This could involve measures such as enhanced content moderation, better reporting systems, and more severe penalties for individuals who engage in hate speech or discrimination online. The goal of these stricter measures is to create a safer online environment, where individuals are less likely to encounter or be victimised by racist and Islamophobic comments. It aims to deter such behaviour by holding those responsible accountable for their actions.

The Online Safety Act proposed by the UK Government recently received Royal Assent (26th October, 2023) and has become law. However, it does not entirely follow the provisions outlined in the previous parliamentary document, ‘Inclusive Britain’ (2022)<sup>42</sup>. The document outlines the UK government's commitment to combating racial abuse, particularly in the online space.

The Online Safety Bill aims to hold social media companies accountable for racist abuse on their platforms<sup>43</sup>. The legislation proposes a regulatory framework applicable across the UK, requiring services, especially social media platforms, to take proactive steps in removing and preventing users from being exposed to illegal content, including hate crime. Key provisions of the Online Safety Bill include proactive content removal, child protection measures and user reporting and redress mechanisms.

For major companies, there will be a requirement to maintain commitments to adult users by taking action against legal but harmful content prohibited under their terms of service. Ofcom will be empowered with enforcement powers, including fines of up to £18 million or 10% of

annual global turnover, and the ability to limit or prevent a company's operation in the UK in egregious cases. Additional measures focus on giving individuals more control over their online experience, particularly addressing anonymous online abuse. This includes obligations for social media sites to enable users to block individuals who have not verified their identity and providing options to opt out of seeing harmful content.

The UK government also acknowledges the global nature of online abuse and is actively engaging internationally to address the issue. This includes hosting international roundtables and exploring partnerships to tackle online identity-based abuse<sup>44</sup>. Furthermore, the government plans to extend the use of Football Banning Orders to ban online abusers from stadiums for up to 10 years, similar to how violent individuals are barred from attending grounds. However, these measures have not materialised alongside the Online Safety Bill.

## **Pillar 3: Build Cross-Community Solidarity and Collective Action to Counter Hate**

Building cross-community solidarity and collective action is crucial in countering Islamophobic hate in the UK. Not only is a collective voice more impactful, but a collective approach allows for a deeper understanding and addressing of the root causes of Islamophobia. It enables communities to work together to challenge systemic issues, discriminatory policies, and negative stereotypes that contribute to hate.

By standing together, individuals and communities can ensure that their concerns are heard, understood, and addressed on a broader scale. Collective action also facilitates educational initiatives and awareness campaigns that not only dispel ignorance but promotes understanding and tolerance. Collaborative efforts allow communities to pool resources, share strategies, and coordinate activities to combat Islamophobia effectively. By promoting dialogue and understanding, communities can work together to create a peaceful and cohesive society.

In conclusion, building cross-community solidarity and engaging in collective action is essential for creating a society where Islamophobic hate is actively countered. It not only empowers affected communities but also contributes to the overall well-being and harmony of society as a whole.

### **Strategic Goal 3.1 - Provide a platform for and spread awareness of UN-designated International Days**

The designation of 15 March as international day to combat Islamophobia also opens up opportunities to fight Islamophobic racism, particularly through various United Nations (UN) platforms, such as the Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and its associated mechanisms, and the UN Office on Genocide Prevention.

Their roles in applying various generic action plans to combat hatred and discrimination also present additional opportunities. Furthermore, AOC & UN special rapporteurs can be engaged to develop a specific action plan, especially in light of the UN Human Rights

Council resolution 53/1 adopted in July 2023. Other days that can be used to generate solidarity against Islamophobia include 18 June, Day for countering hate speech A, and 22 August, Day to commemorate victims of acts of religious intolerance. Two other important UN-designated Days, which fall within the UK's Islamophobia Awareness month are Tolerance Day, 16 November and Day to Eliminate Violence Against Women, 25 November.

As described by the United Nations, 'International days are occasions to educate the general public on issues of concern, to mobilise political will and resources to address global problems, and to celebrate and reinforce achievements of humanity.' The UN recognises and commemorates various international observances, which are among the most visited pages on the UN website. These international days not only provide a platform for raising awareness but also serve as indicators of the level of interest and engagement in specific subjects worldwide. The International Day of Human Rights, observed on December 10, is a noteworthy example, attracting significant attention and engagement globally.

***Professor Ahmed Shaheed*** has been a tireless advocate for combating Islamophobia, working to promote religious tolerance and human rights on a global scale. He was appointed as the United Nations Special Rapporteur in 2016, serving in this role for the six consecutive years. Additionally, he chairs the Geneva-based international human rights think-tank, Universal Rights Group, and holds the position of Professor of International Human Rights Law at the University of Essex.

Professor Shaheed's dedication to countering Islamophobia is evident through his leadership of the Human Rights Centre's Religion and Equality Project and his active involvement in the Project on Mobilising a Global Alliance to Counter Islamophobia. His expertise is further recognised as he serves as an advisor on 'hate speech' to the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and is a member of the Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief convened by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

In his research and advocacy work, Shaheed focuses on various critical issues, including human rights implementation, freedom of religion or belief, 'hate speech,' the freedom of thought, and progressive interpretations of Islam. His reports to the United Nations have

addressed important topics such as the freedom of thought, the fight against antisemitism and Islamophobia, the promotion of gender equality alongside religious freedom, integrating religious freedom into the sustainable development agenda, defending religious freedom while countering terrorism, and advocating for freedom of expression.

Professor Shaheed's dedication to promoting human rights on a global scale has also earned him numerous prestigious awards, including the UN Foundation's Global Leadership Award in 2015 for his outstanding contributions to advancing human rights both nationally and internationally. Through his work and advocacy, Professor Ahmed Shaheed continues to promote religious tolerance and human rights worldwide.

### **Strategic Goal 3.2 - Assist Islamic Centres and Mosques in developing safeguarding resources**

Providing support and resources to these institutions in order to enhance their capacity to protect the well-being and safety of their community members, especially vulnerable individuals. Safeguarding resources may include guidelines, training materials, policies, and procedures designed to prevent harm and address concerns related to issues like child protection, vulnerable adults, and mental health. By offering assistance, governments, non-governmental organisations, and other stakeholders can help Islamic Centers and Mosques create a safer and more secure environment for their congregants. This initiative contributes to the broader goal of promoting well-being and ensuring that religious and community spaces are safe and nurturing for all attendees.

There was a 600% increase in Islamophobic hate crimes in the days following October 7, 2023, including vandalism, with Acton Mosque in west London being splashed with red paint three times in two weeks, and a pig's head being dumped at a mosque in the market town of Barnoldswick (Tell MAMA)<sup>44.5</sup>.

The inadequacy of funding for the security of mosques and Islamic institutions poses a significant challenge, with disparities compared to funding allocated for the security of other religious institutions. The last 'Places of Worship Security Fund'<sup>745</sup> in 2016 allocated only £2.4 million for distribution among various institutions, including mosques. A recent

government pledge of £1.6 million for mosque security, while a step forward, requires a comprehensive risk analysis to ensure effective strategies and proportional funding plans.

The current funding allocation seems imbalanced when considering the risk faced by Muslims. Hate crimes against Muslims constitute 47% of religious hate crimes, while Jewish communities face 18%. The Prime Minister's commendable decision in April 2020 to increase security funding for Jewish institutions, committing £14 million, underscores the need for proportionate funding for mosque security. However, the £1.6 million pledged for 1825 mosques translates to a mere £877 per institution, emphasising the urgency for more equitable financing.

To address the threats faced by Muslim institutions, examining existing policies and procedures is crucial. However, a significant challenge lies in the inconsistent recording of hate crimes against religious institutions by different police constabularies. Freedom of Information requests revealed disparities in data recording, with some forces unable to provide specific breakdowns for particular religious institutions. Between 2013-2015, at least 138 attacks targeted mosques, and at least 200 were reported in 2016-2018, though the actual figures are likely higher due to recording inconsistencies. It is imperative to introduce strategies promoting accurate and standardised recording of hate crimes against religious institutions across all police constabularies. This step is essential for developing targeted funding plans and protective measures to safeguard mosques and Islamic institutions effectively.

Leading by example, in 2018, Faith Associates successfully conducted certified Level 1 Safeguarding and Child Protection training for Mosque leaders and Madrassah teachers at *Al Manaar Mosque* in London. The training, delivered by one of Faith Associates' trained Safeguarding experts, included male and female teachers and management staff of the community centre.

The course aimed to enhance knowledge, awareness, and the ability to address concerns regarding the safety and welfare of children and young people in Islamic institutions. It focused on identifying policies and best practices in Safeguarding, along with developing an understanding of reporting procedures. Key objectives of the training encompassed increasing awareness of indicators of child abuse, exploring the impact of abuse and

neglect on children and how to provide support, and gaining knowledge of professional roles and responsibilities in accordance with current guidelines and procedures.

The training covered various topics:

- Aims & Objectives
- Safeguarding in Islam
- National Safeguarding Agenda
- Definition of Abuse
- Preventing Radicalisation
- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
- E-safety (Social Media Policies & Safeguarding)
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- Child Development
- Reacting to Disclosure
- Roles and Responsibilities in Islamic Institutions
- Information Sharing and Confidentiality
- Allegations Against Staff
- Summary of an Islamic Institution

By addressing these crucial aspects, the training aimed to equip participants with the necessary tools and knowledge to ensure the safety and well-being of children within Islamic institutions.



## **Pillar 4: Legislative Approaches and Policy Frameworks to Combating Islamophobia**

There is no specific legislation explicitly prohibiting Islamophobia in the UK. Nonetheless, actions falling under anti-Islam activity may be addressed through broader legal frameworks concerning hate crime, online abuse, and equalities.

### **Hate Crime Legislation**

Legislation addresses hate crimes motivated by race or religion in three ways: offences of stirring up hatred, aggravated forms of certain criminal offences, and enhanced sentencing for offences driven by hate. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) acknowledges that case law considers persons associated with their religious beliefs as potentially part of a racial group. The CPS advises prosecutors to assess whether hostility arises from religious belief, racial group, or a combination of both.

Under Part III of the Public Order Act 1986, certain acts intending to stir up racial or religious hatred are criminalised. There's a freedom of expression defence for religious hatred offences. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 allows charging perpetrators with an aggravated form of specified criminal offences if motivated by hostility based on race or religion. Section 66 of the Sentencing Act 2020 mandates courts to consider racial or religious aggravation when sentencing offenders for non-aggravated offences.

### **Online Abuse**

Various criminal offences can be used to prosecute online Islamophobia, including sections of the Malicious Communications Act 1988, Communications Act 2003, and Protection from Harassment Act 1997. The CPS provides guidance on prosecuting social media communications. The Law Commission, in response to a government request, reviewed laws around offensive communications. Their recommendations include a new harm-based communications offence. The government is considering these recommendations, potentially incorporating them into the Online Safety Bill.

### **Strategic Goal 4.1 - Update the Equality Act Legislation to strengthen the Religion and Belief Public Equality strand and its enforcement through the EHRC**

The Equality Act 2010 brought together over 116 separate pieces of legislation into one single Act, setting out the personal characteristics that are protected by the law and the behaviour that is unlawful. Simplifying legislation and harmonising protection for all of the characteristics covered had the purpose of helping Britain become a fairer society, improve public services, and help business perform well, however, there are concerns with this.

The nine main pieces of legislation that have merged are:

- the Equal Pay Act 1970
- the Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- the Race Relations Act 1976
- the Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- the Equality Act 2006, Part 2
- the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007

While the Equalities Act (2010) and the Public Equality Duty (PED) cover faith and belief, these are not particularly well enforced in relation to faith and belief. The Act itself requires an update to incorporate the intersectionality of identity (for example, the intersection of faith and ethnicity for the identity of British Muslims) as well as acknowledging how processes of racialisation operate, in order to gain a better grasp of Islamophobia. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has also been an arena of party politicisation, with commissioners nominated by government, and not via independent bodies. For the EHRC to function in an unbiased manner and enforce equality strands, it will have to be completely operationally independent and better funded to undertake its responsibilities. More pressure in legislative terms needs to be applied to employers so they accommodate British Muslims. This would help mend the pipeline between education and work.

### **Strategic Goal 4.2 - Adopt guidance from ODIHR, UNESCO, ECRI and other international good practices**

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has done considerable work to address Islamophobic hatred. One recent output is the 2020 ‘Understanding Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes - Addressing the Security Needs of Muslim Communities: A Practical Guide’<sup>45.5</sup>. Since securitisation is a core driver of Islamophobia, promoting awareness of the insights in this guide can be useful. Similarly, UNESCO has provided guidance on addressing Islamophobia through education such as its 2011 guidelines to educators on countering intolerance and discrimination against Muslims<sup>45.5a</sup>. Further, the European Commission on Racial Intolerance (ECRI) has provided in 2021 an updated specific policy guidance to states on countering anti-Muslim racism and discrimination, drawing on ECRI’s extensive work on countering all forms of racism. In addition to making a number of clear and specific recommendations for institutional coordination, prevention, protection and law enforcement, ECRI recognises the institutional dimension of Islamophobia and the racialisation of Muslims—and uses the concept of ‘anti-Muslim racism’. Adopting these recommendations and applying them in the UK context would clearly be of benefit. In addition to expert-led initiatives, the UK government itself has led initiatives to develop frameworks to combat hatred at a global level, which the UK must also apply at home. A prime example is the Action Plan contained in Human Rights Council resolution 16/18 of March 2011 and the ‘Istanbul Process’ that the UK helped to launch in 2012<sup>45.5b</sup>. Beyond these frameworks, lessons and synergies may also be drawn from good practices at the international, regional and national levels to promote religious freedom.

### **Appointing an envoy to co-ordinate UK national and international efforts to combat Islamophobia**

Some countries have appointed special envoys or co-ordinators to address Islamophobia, such as the United States, Sweden and Canada, or have dedicated or relevant national action plans such as Norway and the Netherlands. Some international organisations such as Council of Europe, OSCE, European Commission and OIC have envoys or co-ordinators on anti-Muslim discrimination. Thus, the UK government should designate a specific individual, typically referred to as an “envoy,” to serve as a central coordinator for all initiatives aimed at addressing Islamophobia, both within the UK and in international contexts. This envoy would

have the responsibility of bringing together various stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organisations, international partners, and religious communities, to develop a comprehensive strategy for combating Islamophobia.

The appointment of such an envoy signifies a commitment to prioritise and address the issue of Islamophobia systematically. Their role may involve policy development, public outreach, advocacy, and international cooperation, with the aim of fostering a more inclusive and tolerant society within the UK and contributing to global efforts to combat discrimination and prejudice against Muslims. This recommendation emphasises the need for a dedicated and coordinated approach to combat Islamophobia, recognizing its significance as a social and diplomatic challenge.

In the United States, *Special Envoy, Rashad Hussain*, serves as principal advisor to the Secretary of State and advisor to the President on religious freedom conditions and policy. He leads the Department's efforts to monitor religious freedom abuses, persecution, and discrimination worldwide. The first Muslim to serve as America's religious freedom ambassador, Hussain came into the Obama administration as an attorney, later promoted to Special Envoy to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, focused on the protection of religious minorities, particularly in Muslim-majority countries. In July 2021, he was nominated by President Joe Biden to be the US Ambassador for International Religious Freedom.

- Hussain has dedicated his efforts to enhance the protection of religious minorities. Hussain has emphasised the need to eliminate dehumanising ideas and images, advocating for a more tolerant and inclusive narrative.
- He has consistently condemned blasphemy laws and other speech restrictions used to persecute religious minorities, including Coptic Christians in Egypt, in 2012.
- Hussain has undertaken journeys to various countries to address the persecution of Muslim communities, including the Central African Republic, Xinjiang, China (to advocate for Uyghur Muslims), India, Myanmar (to address the Rohingya population), and several European nations.
- The special envoy has also voiced concern about the persecution of Muslim minorities in India, citing the dangers of far-right ideologies.

- In May 2013, Hussain, along with the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, led imams from around the world on a trip to Holocaust sites in Auschwitz-Birkenau. This initiative aimed to combat Holocaust denial and address discrimination against religious minorities.

His commitment to fostering religious tolerance and combating discrimination is evident in his advocacy efforts on both national and international fronts.

### **Strategic Goal 4.3 - Employers should improve equality, diversity and inclusion within the organisation, particularly at senior levels**

Reports from Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) indicate an increase in Islamophobic incidents in the workplace, including verbal abuse and discriminatory behaviour. The 2017 report by the Social Mobility Commission highlighted employment disparities for people of different ethnic backgrounds, including Muslims, and a study conducted by the University of Bristol in 2019 found that job applicants with Muslim names were less likely to receive positive responses from employers. As well as this, instances of controversy regarding the wearing of religious attire, such as the hijab, in the workplace, or the lack of facilities for prayer breaks, have been reported, highlighting challenges related to religious accommodation in the workplace.

Employers should work to improve the inclusion and equality of their workplaces and diversify their workforce, including by promoting women, particularly women of colour, disabled women, LGBTQ women into senior leadership positions; and ensuring that they can thrive there. They can implement effective, evidence based Anti-Racism Action Plans with clear and measurable targets, and regular monitoring and evaluation of progress. These plans should include measures to tackle Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia within the workforce.

They should also have clear and transparent processes for reporting racism and Islamophobia, with multiple reporting routes, including options outside of line management structures, and set structures that ensure line managers deliver equitable and fair promotion outcomes for all

employees and make progression routes explicit and well-known rather than based on informal networks.

*The Fawcett Society* is the UK's leading membership charity campaign for gender equality and women's rights at work, at home and in public life.

- Their vision is of a society in which women and girls in all their diversity, are equal and truly free to fulfil their potential creating a stronger, happier, better future for us all.
- They publish compelling research to educate, inform and lead debates on women's rights and gender identity issues, centering the voices of women. They bring together politicians, academics, grassroots activists, and wider civil society to develop innovative, practical solutions to the various problems plaguing women and girls today. To bring all of their work together, they campaign with women and men to bring about change.
- They push for equal pay, power and representation, ending harmful gender stereotypes and improving access to the workplace for women.
- The Fawcett Society have campaigned for misogyny to be included within the hate crime framework since 2018, when our sex discrimination law review called for its inclusion in both recording and sentencing frameworks.

#### **Strategic Goal 4.4 - Britain's counter-extremism and counter-terrorism policy should not be ideologically driven**

The police and security services need to have a free hand to follow the threats, from whichever ideology they come from. Not only is this more likely to catch violent extremists, but it will create some trust in a system that ultimately requires public and community support. The Prevent strategy in the UK marks one of the initial large-scale soft-power approaches to counter-terrorism in history. Despite its innovative nature, questions about its effectiveness and apprehensions regarding its disproportionate impact on British Muslims have persisted since its initiation. There are ongoing concerns that it may contribute to the rise of anti-Muslim bias, influencing both civil society and state-level dynamics.

Most of the literature addressing this topic tends to concur that Prevent categorises British Muslims as ‘suspect communities,’<sup>46</sup> aligning with historical patterns of fear mongering and persecution against an internal ‘enemy.’ Anti-Prevent activism has also coalesced around this concept.

*HOPE not hate* is a non-partisan, non-sectarian advocacy group founded in 2004, which campaigns against racism and fascism. They have been instrumental in exposing Islamophobia in the far-right.

- The organisation promotes voter support for alternatives to far-right extremist movements and releases allegations of violent activities by Islamophobic organisations, such as the English Defence League.
- Their recent efforts have been concentrated on fostering "community resilience" and launching initiatives supporting British foods, participating in Hate Crime Awareness Week, and extensively reporting on the activities of the Islamophobic counterjihad movement, including figures like Robert Spencer, Pamela Geller, and bloggers like "Fjordman."
- In 2012, the organisation conducted original research that explored the attitudes of voters toward far-right political parties in the UK. This research revealed that nearly half of those surveyed in a Populus Ltd poll supported the creation of an English nationalist political party with Islamophobic views.
- In 2013, following a 26,000 signature petition presented to the UK Home Secretary, the organisation succeeded in preventing US-based Islamophobic bloggers Robert Spencer and Pamela Geller from entering the UK for an English Defence League march in Woolwich, south London.
- In the same year, HOPE not hate played a pivotal role as one of the founding organisations in the formation of CAASE (Community Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation), an initiative aimed at addressing child sexual exploitation, led by the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB) and involving various Muslim organisations, victim support groups, and local community networks.
- More recently, HOPE not hate exposed the New Issues Group (NIG), a prominent counter-jihad network operating from the House of Lords which brings together businessmen, journalists, and Islamophobic activists to advocate for legislation and fund Islamophobic street activism.

- Recently, the organisation has turned its attention toward addressing issues related to Islamist extremism and communal division, including grooming.



## **Pillar 5: Government Engagement with Civil Society to Combat Prejudice and Discrimination**

The UK government abandoned efforts to establish an official definition of Islamophobia, last year, a commitment made more than three years ago. This decision has sparked concerns and criticism over inaction on the issue, especially given that Muslims are the most frequently targeted group for religious hate crimes in England and Wales. The government had pledged to create a formal definition of Islamophobia to address the issue, but the initiative was halted after Boris Johnson became prime minister. Critics argue that successive prime ministers have failed to take effective action against Islamophobia, despite promises made since 2018<sup>47</sup>.

Conservative MP Nusrat Ghani, the first Muslim woman to speak from the Commons dispatch box, reported in the Sunday Times (2022)<sup>47.5</sup> that her “Muslimness” was raised when she was removed from a ministerial job in 2020, and said she was told it was “making colleagues uncomfortable”. Serving as a minister, Ghani revealed she had been bombarded with emails from a Conservative activist and constituent praising Enoch Powell’s “rivers of blood” speech and was stalked for two years by a man she said eventually made clear that he had targeted her because she was a female MP, Asian and a Muslim. This was a bold allegation that led to the Conservative Party to undertake an independent investigation.

In May 2021, the Singh Investigation was launched<sup>48</sup>, looking into racism in the Conservative Party. The Investigation recognised that Islamophobia has been a serious issue for the Party and that concerns had too easily been denied and dismissed. Some important recommendations from the report included:

- A completely revamped and transparent complaints process
- Upgrade to the Code of Conduct
- The importance of reopening cases that have fallen short of the expected standards, albeit without an appeals process for historic cases not covered in the Investigation
- A community outreach strategy with a particular focus on improving meaningful engagement with Muslim communities

The recommendations from the Singh review are yet to be implemented in full.

Islamophobia in the Conservative Party is not confined to elected officials. A HOPE not Hate survey (2021) found that 57% of Conservative members held negative attitudes towards Muslims, with nearly half (47%) believing that Islam is “a threat to the British way of life”.

Some might highlight the independent investigation conducted by the Conservative Party into various forms of prejudice as evidence of ongoing efforts. However, journalists discovered that the investigation selectively approached individuals for evidence of Islamophobia, overlooking high-profile cases. Without establishing a definition of Islamophobia and allowing victims to define their experiences, the government perpetuates the idea that expressions of hatred and racism against Muslims are open to debate.

For many British Muslims, the government's decision to abandon efforts for a new definition of Islamophobia fails to address the rising hatred and prejudice against Muslims.

### **Strategic Goal 5.1 - The government must define Islamophobia**

In order to confront and counter Islamophobia, Britons must recognise and understand it. Far too many do not. Without awareness of Islamophobia and education about the threat it poses, British citizens across society cannot identify and address Islamophobia. If we cannot name, identify, and admit a problem, we cannot begin to solve it.

Islamophobia is a stereotypical and negative perception of Muslims, which may be expressed as hatred of Muslims. It is prejudice, bias, hostility, discrimination, or violence against Muslims for being Muslim or Muslims institutions or property for being Muslim or perceived as Muslim. Islamophobia can manifest as a form of racial, religious, national origin, and/or ethnic discrimination, bias, or hatred; or, a combination thereof.

However, Islamophobia is not simply a form of prejudice or hate. Not only does it conflate Islam and terrorism, but Muslim men are predominantly viewed from an Orientalist lens as racially and culturally inferior, an unassimilable savage prone to violence; while Muslim women are viewed as oppressed and inferior in intellect (ECRI, 2021)<sup>48.5</sup>. There is also an emerging stereotype, with the rise of Daesh, of disloyalty to their hosts.

There are several definitions of Islamophobia, which serve as valuable tools to raise awareness and increase understanding of Islamophobia. Various groups have advocated for a formal definition to assist in addressing Islamophobia. The Runnymede Trust, in 1997, introduced the term “Islamophobia” with a definition focusing on unfounded hostility towards Islam and its practical consequences in unfair discrimination and exclusion. The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims initiated an inquiry in 2018 to develop the following definition:

*Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness*

In 2019, Theresa May’s Government rejected an Islamophobia definition that had the support of more than 900 Muslim organisations, several political parties and many local councils, citing security and free speech concerns. While the Labour Party, Scottish National Party, Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru, the Green Party, and the Scottish Conservative party have accepted the definition, the government is yet to do so, preferring to formulate its own definition, a process which appears to have abandoned. . There have been some debates around whether the definition is legally enforceable – but it is important to consider the APPG’s definition was always billed as a ‘community definition’ and was never intended to be legally enforceable. The definition can play an invaluable role in education and awareness-raising and enable various duty-bearers and stakeholders to document and monitor acts of hatred towards Muslims as Muslims, on a sliding scale of harm from microaggressions to mass atrocities. Naming the phenomenon is essential to mobilise action that can instigate a cultural shift across the public sector. The use of any definition that identifies any form of hatred must recognise that hate speech is contextual, that not all expressions of hatred would reach the threshold of criminality, and that most forms of prejudice require a response based on civic engagement including awareness-raising. The Rabat Plan of Action of 2012, developed by human rights experts and cited in international jurisprudence, including by the European Court of Human Rights highlights the contextual nature of hate speech and provides a six-part threshold test that can aid the legitimate use of the APPG working definition as well as definitions of other forms of hatred.

According to the working definition by the United Nations, *“Islamophobia is a fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims that leads to provocation, hostility and intolerance by means of threatening, harassment, abuse, incitement and intimidation of Muslims and non-Muslims, both in the online and offline world. Motivated by institutional, ideological, political and religious hostility that transcends into structural and cultural racism, it targets the symbols and markers of being a Muslim.”*

The absence of a formal definition on Islamophobia recognised by the government has a profound impact on the ability to tackle it head on.

### **Why should adopting a working definition of Islamophobia be a top priority for the Government?**

- It is crucial to comprehend how Islamophobia manifests in various spheres, including education, employment, politics, policing, and other areas. This encapsulates the diverse manifestations of Islamophobia that might otherwise evade detection, offering a comprehensive understanding of the issue.
- Recognised working definitions of terms like sexism, racism, and antisemitism have proven essential in addressing and combating various forms of discrimination that were previously unchallenged. Effectively addressing Islamophobia requires a clear understanding of its meaning and implications. Without a working definition, perceptions of the issue remain highly subjective.
- Adopting a working definition of Islamophobia would signal to British Muslim communities that local councils acknowledge the challenges they face and prioritise efforts to combat Islamophobia.
- Adopting a working definition will assist regulatory bodies such as ofcom, and law enforcement agencies to recognise the spectrum of Islamophobic speech acts and hate and respond to them as appropriate and as required by law. This will also help capture better data collection on this subject, especially in the form of hate crimes.

#### **Adopting the APPG definition**

In collaboration with the *Aziz Foundation*, London Metropolitan University has achieved the distinction of being the first UK university to officially embrace the definition of

Islamophobia at the institutional level. This initiative aligns with the university's broader efforts to enhance accessibility to higher education for Muslim students. The Aziz Foundation applauds London Metropolitan University's commitment to inclusivity and encourages other universities in the UK to follow suit. This move is particularly timely in the wake of the recent report from Universities UK (UUK) on 'Tackling Racial Harassment in Higher Education,' underscoring the imperative for ongoing efforts to foster genuine inclusivity within universities.

**Public officials should refrain from using terms such as “islamists” and “jihadists” when referring to criminals who claim to be motivated by Islam**

Language matters, especially when it comes from our elected officials. On Armistice Day in 2023, 2000 far right activists descended on London during pro-Palestine protests. The then Home Secretary Suella Braverman branded these pro-Palestine demonstrations as "hate marches", arguably inciting division and emboldening far-right sentiments. This, coupled with the surge in Islamophobia, is gravely concerning and warrants urgent action.

Public officials should refrain from using terms like “Islamists” and “jihadists” when referring to criminals who commit any form of crime, to promote responsible and non-discriminatory language. Using these terms to describe criminals can lead to stigmatisation and the unjust association of an entire religious or cultural group with criminal behaviour. Instead, public officials should opt for more precise and neutral language to describe criminal activities. By doing so, they can avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes and help maintain a more inclusive, fair and informed public discourse. Policymakers and public figures should strive to balance security concerns with the need to protect the rights and dignity of individuals from diverse backgrounds while addressing criminal behaviour through appropriate legal channels. Such approaches have also proved to be more effective in policing than those that result in horizontal discrimination and alienate communities. However, numerous studies, including the Lammy Review, highlight the disproportionate policing and punishment faced by the UK's BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) communities.

It was revealed by the Times in 2020<sup>48.5a</sup> that police forces were exploring dropping terms such as “Islamist terrorism” and “Jihadis” when referring to attacks carried out by people who claim to be motivated by Islam. Proposed alternatives included “faith-claimed terrorism,” “adherents of Osama bin Laden’s ideology,” and “terrorists abusing religious motivations”; however, these discussions never materialised into action. However, given the overwhelming evidence that acts of hatred including violence always spike following acts of terrorism, the public interest case against the use of labels that stigmatises whole communities is very strong. The National Association of Muslim Police has recommended a cultural shift away from using terms directly associated with Islam and jihad, emphasising that such terminology hinders community relations and public confidence. To overcome unconscious bias and stereotypes, active engagement between police forces and minority communities is crucial. The language used by police forces, echoed in the media, has a significant impact, influencing how local officers perceive and understand the communities they serve. Addressing structural Islamophobia within the Criminal Justice System requires ongoing investigation. However, the police taking the initiative to reevaluate and adjust their terminology is a positive step toward fostering healthy relationships based on trust and understanding between law enforcement and minority communities. Such actions could set an example for media outlets to follow in their portrayal and treatment of minority communities.

### **Strategic Goal 5.2 - Take proactive measures to invigorate the Istanbul Process including hosting the conference in 2025**

One promising opportunity is the Istanbul Process that grew out of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution of 16/18, an outcome of a joint initiative in 2011 by the UK, US, Canada, Turkey and Pakistan<sup>48.5b</sup>. This shifted the framing of concerns over Islamophobia from ‘defamation of religions’ to one of addressing incitement to discrimination and violence, within the remit of Article 20(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

16/18 proposes actions to promote societal resilience and multi stakeholder engagement to promote inclusion. Several rounds of meetings have been held with varying results, and the UK appears to have lost interest in this platform. However, this remains the most promising framework and platform at the international level to foster domestic change. This is especially so since the UN annually invites governments to report on their implementation of resolution 16/18.

The UK should step up to host the 10th meeting of the Istanbul Process due in 2025. The importance of doing so is underscored by the spiralling hate both in the UK and elsewhere, and also in the service of the UK's foreign policy goals that seek to promote respect for human rights around the world, especially in the aftermath of HRC resolution 53/1 adopted last July in response to the 'Quran burning' incidents in some countries<sup>48.5c</sup>. However, we call on the UK to include full participation of civil society actors in such a meeting.

### **Strategic Goal 5.3 - Support the UNAOC to develop a global action plan to combat Islamophobia**

The UK government should endorse and collaborate with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) to create a tailored action plan to combat Islamophobia within the country. This plan would involve measures such as educational initiatives, public awareness campaigns, and legislative actions to address Islamophobia in the UK. By supporting such an initiative, the UK can tackle the specific challenges and manifestations of Islamophobia within its borders while contributing to a more inclusive and tolerant society for its Muslim population.

Supporting UNAOC in developing a global action plan to combat Islamophobia is a call for international collaboration and coordinated efforts to address the issue. It would be a strategic and collaborative approach to addressing a complex issue that transcends national borders, which leverages the resources, expertise, and influence of the international community to work collectively towards a world free from discrimination and prejudice based on religion or belief. Here are some reasons why such support is important:

- **Multilateral Approach:** The United Nations provides a platform for multilateral cooperation, allowing countries from around the world to come together to address common challenges. Combating Islamophobia requires a united front, and the UNAOC serves as a valuable mechanism for fostering international collaboration.
- **Global Perspective:** Islamophobia is not limited to specific regions; it is a global issue that affects Muslims in various parts of the world. A global action plan would acknowledge the widespread nature of Islamophobia and provide a comprehensive approach that considers different cultural, social, and political contexts.

- **Share Best Practice:** By developing a global action plan, the UNAOC can facilitate the exchange of best practices among countries and organisations. This sharing of experiences can allow nations to learn from each other's successes and challenges.
- **Normative Framework:** The United Nations can help establish a normative framework that emphasises the importance of protecting religious freedom. A global action plan could contribute to the development of international norms and standards that discourage Islamophobia.
- **Resource Mobilisation:** The UNAOC, with support from member states, can mobilise resources to implement initiatives aimed at combating Islamophobia, including funding for educational programs, awareness campaigns, and projects that promote inclusivity and diversity.
- **Political Will and Advocacy:** By garnering international support, the UNAOC can help generate political will to address Islamophobia at a global level. This advocacy is crucial for encouraging states to take concrete actions to combat discrimination and intolerance.

#### **Strategic Goal 5.4 - The Government should improve community cohesion strategies**

Community cohesion is the cornerstone of a secure and resilient community. Effective community cohesion not only addresses societal divisions that could lead to conflict but also ensures that the positive changes brought about by evolving communities become sources of strength for local areas. The benefits of building cohesive communities are extensive, fostering a society where individuals from diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds can coexist and collaborate in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. Cohesive communities are better equipped to address common challenges, offer mutual support, and collectively work towards a positive and shared future.

Research from MOPAC and the London Assembly (2015) has found that improving community relations may be the best way to isolate the far right and undermine its narrative. Data<sup>49</sup> indicates a lack of funding for the cohesion team at the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Dept, leading to delays in reacting to tension and a lack of resources to help with initiatives to promote cohesion, also found in local governments. Local governments can also develop strategies that not only leverage the diversity of their communities but also combat the types of messages that can create the basic 'fight or flight' response. Other examples include:



1. Work in partnership with voluntary sector expert organisations to create connections with local groups, including faith based organisations; black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) networks and other community groups, sharing a collective vision of what ‘community cohesion’ looks like for them.
2. Create an inclusive communications strategy that includes working with local media organisations to help reflect local opinions and challenge mainstream negative stereotypes.
3. Work with schools to embed the principles of diversity within a wider context, where pupils are encouraged to show respect for others and form groups that are not homogenous.
4. Create opportunities for social mixing between people from a wider range of backgrounds by introducing cultural events and targeted activities.

## Pillar 6: The Importance of Monitoring and Data Collection in Anti-Islamophobia Efforts

There is inadequate data collection on Islamophobia and methods to counter it. Monitoring and data collection play a crucial role in the effective implementation of anti-Islamophobia efforts.

Data and evidence are the foundation for understanding a problem and addressing it. The UK cannot effectively counter Islamophobia if we lack robust data on how it manifests online and in the physical world, and its intersections with other forms of hate.

Furthermore, official crime statistics alone do not capture unreported bias crimes and non-criminal incidents of bias, discrimination, and harassment. Hate crime and incident surveys, data collection, and analysis from nongovernmental organisations such as Hope Not Hate and TellMAMA provide additional information but still only a patchwork understanding of the problem.

Understanding the prevalence, patterns, and underlying causes of Islamophobia is essential for developing targeted strategies, shaping public policy, and fostering societal awareness. Here are key reasons highlighting the importance of monitoring and data collection in combating Islamophobia:

- **Identifying Trends and Patterns:** Systematic data collection allows for the identification of trends and patterns related to Islamophobic incidents. This information helps in recognizing hotspots, specific forms of discrimination, and emerging issues within different communities.
- **Measuring Impact and Effectiveness:** Monitoring enables the assessment of the impact of anti-Islamophobia initiatives and policies. By tracking changes over time, stakeholders can evaluate the effectiveness of various interventions and adjust strategies accordingly.
- **Resource Allocation:** Data-driven insights assist in the allocation of resources where they are most needed. By understanding the geographical and contextual variations in Islamophobia, organisations and policymakers can allocate funds, personnel, and support to address specific challenges faced by different communities.

- **Advocacy and Awareness Building:** Comprehensive data helps in building a strong case for advocacy against Islamophobia. Reliable statistics can be used to raise awareness among the general public, policymakers, and stakeholders, fostering a better understanding of the issue and the need for concerted efforts.
- **Policy Development:** Accurate data is essential for shaping evidence-based policies. Policymakers can draw on this information to develop targeted strategies that address the root causes of Islamophobia, implement preventative measures, and create a legal framework that protects the rights of Muslim individuals.
- **Understanding Intersectionality:** Monitoring efforts allow for a nuanced understanding of the intersectionality of Islamophobia. Data can reveal how other factors such as gender, race, and socio-economic status intersect with religious identity, providing a more comprehensive picture of the challenges faced by individuals.
- **Global Comparisons:** Comparative data on Islamophobia at an international level can offer insights into global trends and variations. This information is valuable for shaping international collaborations and initiatives to counter Islamophobia on a broader scale.

Monitoring and data collection are indispensable tools in the fight against Islamophobia. By providing a factual foundation for understanding the problem, these efforts contribute to the development of targeted interventions, informed policies, and a society that actively rejects discrimination based on religion.

### **Strategic Goal 6.1 - Carry out an independent audit of how the UK Foreign Office has engaged with combating Islamophobia internationally**

There should be an objective and thorough evaluation of the UK Foreign Office's efforts and strategies in addressing Islamophobia on a global scale. This audit would assess how the Foreign Office has interacted with other countries, international organisations, and initiatives to combat Islamophobia, aiming to ensure transparency, accountability, and effectiveness in its diplomatic and foreign relations activities.

The goal is to identify areas of improvement, evaluate the impact of current approaches, and enhance the UK's role in fostering international cooperation against Islamophobia. This

recommendation emphasises the importance of actively addressing this issue in the global diplomatic arena and making informed, evidence-based decisions to improve the UK's contribution to combating Islamophobia worldwide.

### **Strategic Goal 6.2 - Collect more data on the British Muslim community, particularly Muslim women**

Female exclusion from the labour market, underemployment, and the gender pay gap are key priorities regarding the intersectional discrimination faced by certain groups of women due to the interplay of race, gender, religion, and other protected characteristics. Muslim women in Britain encounter some of the highest pay gaps and barriers to employment within the country<sup>50</sup>. The Fawcett Society emphasises the need for any comprehensive inquiry into the economic experiences of Muslims to fully account for and reflect the distinct challenges faced by Muslim women. Acknowledging the intersectionality of their identities, the society also urges the Women and Equalities Select Committee to advocate for measures that enhance Muslim women's access to economic participation and to deepen our understanding of the multiple disadvantages they confront.

The Muslim population cannot be equated to one or two ethnic groups. However, the lack of available data specifically focused on religious belief poses a challenge. In the absence of such data, the society suggests that considering the experiences of ethnic groups may offer tentative insights into the broader experiences of Muslim women. This data gap is a critical issue that requires attention, with a call for more comprehensive data to be provided by official sources such as the Office for National Statistics. The society also stresses the importance of improving data collection at the intersection of gender, race, and religion to inform effective policies and interventions that foster economic equity for all women.

#### **Using Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims as a statistical proxy**

The practice of using Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims as a statistical proxy for the entire British Muslim community also has limitations. While historically these groups have been the largest Muslim communities in the country, it has become increasingly inaccurate as the British Muslim population has grown and diversified. Currently, Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims constitute only 53% of the British Muslim population<sup>51</sup>. Relying solely on data from Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims as a proxy fails to adequately capture the experiences of

the remaining 47% of the British Muslim population. For instance, insights into the economic experiences of Indian Muslims are notably absent from this approach. A striking observation is that Indian Muslims, unlike their Bangladeshi and Pakistani counterparts, do not seem to experience a pay gap relative to white British individuals.

Data collection efforts must move beyond a narrow focus on specific groups and include a more comprehensive representation of the diverse Muslim population in the country. By doing so, the goal is to ensure that analyses and conclusions drawn from the data are more reflective of the experiences of all British Muslims, including those from varied ethnic and national backgrounds.

### **Strategic Goal 6.3 - The Office for National Statistics should calculate BME gender pay gaps in an intersectional manner**

From our current understanding the ONS does not currently calculate the BME gender pay gap. This work is being completed separately by organisations like The Fawcett Society, The #EthnicityPayGapCampaign, Runnymede Trust and others. In UK legislation, there is currently no statutory requirement for employers to collect this data. With regards to the ethnicity pay gap advice the Government issued through their Race Disparity Unit, the guidance for employers is to consider collecting data on employee's national identity, ethnicity and religion.

#### **The gender pay gap**

Research conducted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in 2007, based on the Annual Population Survey, sheds light on the multiple disadvantages faced by Muslim women in the realm of employment. The findings illustrate that not only do ethnic minority women, on the whole, experience pay gaps compared to white British men, but Muslim women are also likely to face significant disparities compared to Christian men. At the time of the research, Muslim women were reported to have a pay gap of 22.4% when compared to Christian men, marking the highest pay gap among religious groups. Additionally, Muslim women experienced a notable gap relative to Muslim men, amounting to around 9%. These figures underscore the unique challenges faced by Muslim women in the labour market.

However, the nature of these pay gaps may have shifted significantly since the research was conducted. This highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of economic disparities and the need for ongoing and updated research to capture the current state of affairs. The call for



improved data availability, especially concerning Muslim women, serves as a crucial step in fostering a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by diverse communities in the workforce, allowing for targeted interventions and policy initiatives to promote greater economic equity.

## The Way Forward

The Anti-Islamophobia Working Group (AIWG) stands as a united front against the pervasive issue of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred in the UK. Our apolitical coalition has made significant strides in fostering understanding, tolerance, and inclusivity and, as we navigate the complex landscape of hate crimes, institutional prejudice in sports, education, the workplace, and against women, and misrepresentation, our commitment to address this discrimination remains unwavering.

Increasing awareness and understanding of Islamophobia must be coupled with a commitment to broadening appreciation of the contributions and rich heritage of British Muslims. We must tell the positive story of Muslim contributions to the United Kingdom.

Our efforts aim not only to raise awareness but also to catalyse tangible change. We have come together during Islamophobia Awareness Month, conducting a series of events to encourage dialogue and engagement across the UK. This report, a testament to the collaborative efforts of our diverse membership, showcases the collective expertise and tireless contributions of civil society groups, NGOs, and experts. By sharing best practices and policy recommendations, we strive to ensure enduring change that counters the rising tide of Islamophobia. Our recommendations for lawmakers and civil society underscore the need for a concerted effort to combat this insidious hatred.

We call for all actors—from state and local governments to community and faith leaders, and from civil society to the private sector—to raise awareness about Islamophobia and British Muslim heritage, safeguard Muslim communities, reverse the increasing normalisation of Islamophobia, and build allyship among diverse communities against all forms of hate. Everyone has a part to play in this effort. This strategy sets clear goals, commits to new actions, and seeks to mobilise all of British society to counter Islamophobia. Implementation and sustained focus on countering Islamophobia is imperative if we, as a society, are to stem the tide of this hate and protect our democracy.

Strengthening democracy and accountability for hate in the UK is the ultimate long-term bulwark against rising Islamophobia and other forms of hate. All governments should strive



to value and support diversity and in which citizens feel empowered, in turn creating an antidote to Islamophobia, hate, and discrimination.

This strategy represents a detailed plan to counter Islamophobia in the UK as well as a foundation to tackle other forms of hate in our society, and to protect our greatest strengths of unity, tolerance and advocacy.



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