



SUMMARY REPORT

This report summarises the main points raised during the high level conference on tackling intolerance and discrimination against Muslims that took place in Brussels on 3 December 2018, upon the initiative of the European Commission. The report focuses on key data and figures shared during the event, illustrating the major challenges and obstacles faced by Muslims or people perceived as such in terms of intolerance, discrimination, and racism and the possible responses to foster diversity and social inclusion, at the different levels.

Data and trends

- A study by [the European Parliament Research Service](#) (EPRS) referred to the European Social Survey data, showing that the share of Muslims who perceive discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief has increased from 12% in 2010 to 25% in 2016.
- The [FRA EU-MIDIS II report](#) from 2017 was repeatedly referred to, in particular for its findings showing that almost a third of Muslims reported experiences of discrimination in the area of employment.
- Evidence provided by the Horizon 2020 [research project on Growth, Equal Opportunities, Migration & Markets](#) (“GEMM”) showed that individuals perceived as having origins from Middle Eastern and North African countries had to put in 30-90% more effort in applying for a job. The research also found that applicants were specifically penalised when hinting at a possible Muslim identity. GEMM compared CVs sent to employers including photos of women with and without a headscarf and found that the first group of women were 40% less likely to receive a call-back.
- ECRI provided [information](#) on its regular monitoring of 47 countries, including all 28 EU Member States, noting that some of the most prevalent problems include intolerant political discourse, inflammatory anti-Muslim headlines in the media and extreme anti-Muslim content on the internet.
- [The Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique \(CCIB\) provided data](#) on the situation of anti-Muslim hatred in Belgium in 2017, noting that 76% of victims of hatred and intolerance were women, and that such hatred was especially manifested in the media and on the Internet (29%).
- The Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union (FRA) launched on the day the [online repository](#) of case law and reports on anti-Muslim hatred, which will be supplemented with additional data and research/evidence available.

- Equinet's report on [Faith in Equality: Religion and Belief in Europe](#) demonstrated the high prevalence of discrimination against Muslims, as well as the particular forms of discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of wearing religious clothing.

Challenges highlighted by participants

- There is a lack of adequate recognition of the seriousness of discrimination and of racism against Muslims. Consequently, the issue is not a high priority for public policies in many Member States, and the institutional or systemic forms of racism and intolerance are not adequately recognised.
- Prohibitions on religious clothing and symbols may have triggered discrimination and exclusion in employment, access to basic services and education. This has particularly affected Muslim girls and women.
- Discrimination in access to the workplace affects women (often wearing headscarves) but also men identified as Muslims. Discrimination is both a reality and a widespread perception by the affected community.
- There is too little knowledge, including in schools, about Muslims and Islam.
- Law enforcement agencies have insufficient knowledge and capacity to recognise crimes motivated by anti-Muslim hatred. This leads to systematic under reporting and consequent underestimation of the magnitude of hatred targeting Muslims.
- The online sphere is where hatred is spreading in a particularly pervasive way: politicians as well as journalists have a responsibility to avoid generalisations and simplifications that foster negative stereotypes about Islam and about Muslims. The spread of hoaxes and false news regarding Muslims and Islam are contributing to derogatory narratives and distorted perceptions among the majority population. Hate speech targeting migrants is also often associated with anti-Muslim hatred.
- In certain contexts, security measures to counter terrorism are perceived as disproportionately targeting Muslims, leading to stigmatisation and to the spread of stereotypes, creating diverse challenges in their everyday lives.
- Some kind of suspicion often precludes a constructive dialogue between NGOs working on tackling intolerance against Muslims and national authorities. There is a lack of systematic consultation and engagement by public authorities with NGOs working on the ground and supporting victims of hate crimes and discrimination.
- There is often a lack of promotion by public authorities of cultural spaces for socialisation for Muslim communities, a lack of Islamic burial places or mosques and a lack of adequate recognition on the importance of teaching Islamic religion in schools.

Possible responses discussed during the conference

- Currently, EU law only protects from discrimination in the area of employment. The adoption of the horizontal equal treatment Directive proposed by the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council in 2008 has become particularly important and could help tackle intersectional discrimination more meaningfully.
- EU funds could foster initiatives aiming to tackle intolerance, hatred and discrimination against Muslims (e.g. within the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme or the Erasmus+ Programme).
- The European Commission could have a pivotal role in bringing together national authorities, international organisations and civil society groups to discuss challenges and possible responses to anti-Muslim hatred.

- National authorities should take the initiative of creating space for dialogue and for sharing good practices, and ensure the involvement of civil society organisations working on tackling anti-Muslim hatred. The Spanish national authorities volunteered to take this discussion forward and host a follow up meeting in Spain in the course of 2019.
 - National authorities should scale up the recording on equality data as well as data on hate crime and incidents, in particular by including a breakdown on bias motivations and other social characteristics of the victims (highlighting gender, for example). Without data, policy urgency cannot be proved and this will result in a continued shortage of appropriate responses. Law enforcement agencies should enforce legislation and make better use of trainings, learning tools and online courses available for recognising crimes and prohibited speech motivated by hatred against Muslims. NGOs working on countering anti-Muslim hatred are often best placed to provide training to law enforcement based on their relevant research and expertise.
- *Relevant documents and material*
- The FRA is working [with Member States to improve hate crime data collection](#) and published a [report](#) in June 2018 on hate crime recording and data collection practices across the EU, including a comparative overview of the situation at a national level.
 - OSCE/ODIHR recently disclosed its [2017 Hate Crime Data](#) from 124 civil society organisations, 47 participating states and international organisations.
 - [OSCE/ODIHR produced a leaflet on how to recognise anti-Muslim hate crime](#).
 - The *Facing all the Facts!* project made available [69 online courses](#) on hate crime and hate speech in several languages, including one on anti-Muslim bias which will soon be available.
 - Additional resources by ODIHR:
 - [Training against hate crime for prosecutors](#)
 - [Training against hate crime for law enforcement](#)
 - [Information for civil society organisations on how to recognise, report and record hate crimes](#)
 - ECRI published a [General Policy Recommendation on combating hate speech](#)
- Further education on countering intolerance and on Islam (as well as general religious literacy) and the systematic incorporation of values of diversity and inclusion, within the scope of citizenship, should be promoted in school curricula.
- *Relevant documents and material*
- ODIHR [Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims](#)
 - Education and awareness raising on the use of language and terminology should target journalists and commentators in particular, to ensure balanced narratives and storytelling (e.g. in the description of facts such as those relating to suspected terrorists). Campaigns on alternative positive narratives, including online, must be promoted.
 - Diversity policies including trainings on unconscious biases and prejudices against Muslims should particularly target human resources staff in both public establishments and private enterprises, as well as recruitment and career progression processes.
 - Coalitions must be built among the following actors:
 - National authorities and civil society should partner to ensure a better understanding of the phenomenon, quick and effective responses (investigation and prosecution) and more effective support and protection for victims of hate crime and discrimination.

- Civil society organisations working in different areas of discrimination and intolerance should collaborate to tackle anti-Muslim hatred from an intersectional, inter-generational, and cross community perspective.
 - Partnerships between civil society, national authorities and the private sector should be explored (e.g. with social media platforms) in the areas of promoting diversity in the workplace and on positive narratives.
 - Equality bodies can serve as a source of independent assistance to victims of discrimination.
- Public authorities at different levels should elaborate guidance on an intersectional approach to racism and discrimination, with a key focus on the situation of Muslim people and women in particular.
 - Local authorities (cities, regions) should be directly involved in the work on combating discrimination, intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, in light of their direct competence on public services, education, and schools.
- *Examples of good practices:*
 - [The Barcelona Plan on countering Islamophobia](#)
 - [European coalition of cities against racism – 10 points action plan](#)

Overview of the conference

The conference was attended by 90 participants: 18 national authorities, 30 civil society organisations (primarily grassroots groups but also European networks), international organisations (OSCE/ODIHR, ECRI/CoE, and OIC), representatives of the EP (and EPRS), different Commission services, and the EEAS. The European Commission hosted the conference under the leadership of the European Commission coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred.

The Commissioner for Justice and Consumers, Věra Jourová, addressed the conference with a keynote speech, stressing the importance of fostering equality and diversity in current times of division. The Commissioner underlined the urgency of eliminating discrimination affecting especially Muslim women, particularly regarding access to the job market. Commissioner Jourová conveyed a message on the importance of empowering voices of tolerance from within the Muslim community, and advocated for tolerance, equality and inclusion in line with core EU values.

The aim of the meeting was to identify effective responses to persistent intolerance and discrimination against Muslim communities in the European Union by bringing together civil society, national authorities, international organisations and EU agencies. These discussions also fed into the reflection on the achievements of EU policies on countering racism, xenophobia and discrimination and on the challenges ahead.

The meeting consisted of a side event in the morning, and a main event in the afternoon. The setting of the side event included members of civil society organisations and experts, and was chaired by the European Commission Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred. The objective of this session was to discuss and reach a consensus on key challenges and priorities facing the Muslim community in the EU, as well as possible actions to be taken by the European Commission, international organisations, and national authorities on tackling anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination.

The main event welcomed the addition of delegates from national authorities, in addition to civil society representatives and representatives of key international organisations. The objectives were to share good practices of cooperation between civil society and public authorities and highlight research findings to orient policy work in the following areas: i) hate speech and hate crime against Muslims, and ii) structural forms of discrimination of Muslims (or perceived as such) in access to employment and services.

Useful links:

- [The agenda of the conference](#)
- [The press release](#)
- [The Commission's webpage on combating anti-Muslim hatred.](#)
- [Recommendations from a coalition of civil society organisations following the event](#)