Workshop on synergies and good practices on tackling anti-Muslim racism and discrimination

SUMMARY REPORT

Madrid, 25 June 2019

The workshop has been a joint initiative by the Spanish Ministry of Labour, Migrations and Social Security and the European Commission, under the leadership of the Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred and the Spanish Observatory on Racism and Xenophobia (OBERAXE).

1. Objectives

The objective of the workshop was to identify and foster concrete forms of cooperation between public authorities and civil society organisations in order to:

- Step up recording of anti-Muslim hate crime data and support to victims;
- Raise awareness and respond to anti-Muslim rhetoric and Islamophobic narratives in public opinion, politics and in the media, in particular online;
- Address discrimination of Muslims or individuals perceived as being Muslim in access to jobs and services, and the intersectional dimension of discrimination affecting in particular Muslim women.

2. Agenda and participants

The workshop was attended by 114 participants. Approximately half of these represented public authorities (i.a. Ministries of Interior, Justice, Employment and social affairs, Equality bodies, law enforcement agencies) from 20 Member States, and the other half were representatives of civil society organisations. ODIHR/OSCE, FRA and the European network of equality bodies (EQUINET) were also represented. The agenda of the workshop and the list of participants are available by clicking on the hyperlinks.

3. Setting the scene

The meeting was hosted in the premises of the Secretary of State for Migrations, and the State Secretary, Ms Consuelo Rumí Ibañez, gave the welcome address jointly with Etienne Perier, from the Representation of the European Commission in Madrid. Both stressed the importance of prioritising the fight for an open and intercultural society, where the rights of minorities and the right to freedom of religion are fully respected, and where any form of racism or xenophobia is rejected.

After the introduction to the works by Tommaso Chiamparino, the Commission Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred and the Director General for Integration and Humanitarian Attention

in the Spanish Ministry, Estrella Rodriguez Pardo, a series of opening speeches set the scene for the workshop.

Prof. Farid Hafez from Salzburg University/Georgetown University warned about the risks for the stability of pluralistic and democratic societies deriving from the spread of white supremacism and far right extremism and the need to take a clear stand against the Islamophobic narratives these groups are spreading. He also warned about the mainstreaming of Islamophobia in other sectors of society and in politics. Prof Hafez stated that an agreed working definition on Islamophobia/anti-Muslim hatred rooting it in racism would be needed to ensure effective and targeted responses.

Hande Taner, head of the advocacy of the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Students Organisations, spoke on behalf of a coalition of civil society organisations and recalled the recent attacks in Christchurch (New Zealand) as the most violent manifestation of a pervasive anti-Muslim hostility. Recalling the climate of suspicion against all Muslims following the terrorist attacks since 9/11, she referred to the conditions of vulnerability of Muslim women, the need for clear commitment by policy makers as well as by the higher political sphere against Islamophobia and in support of the fundamental rights of all Muslims in Europe. National authorities should enact national plans against racism and make sure that security measures do not disproportionately affect Muslims. The coalition of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) issued a joint statement in the occasion of the event.

Karoline Fernandez de la Hoz, Director of the Spanish Observatory for Racism and Xenophobia (OBERAXE) and Ines Mazarrasa, Director of the Fundación Pluralismo y Convivencia presented the recent respective initiatives on combating anti-Muslim hatred taken in the Spanish context, which build on an enhanced dialogue with civil society organisations as well on research work to map the phenomenon in Spain.

In a Q&A session, participants raised the issue of "normalisation" of Islamophobia as well as the importance of avoiding amalgams and simplified categorisations which mix different conditions and identities (such as the often made association between migrant/refugee status and Muslims, or between Muslims and Islamic extremism). Some spoke about the growing phenomenon of a form of “Islamophobia without Muslims”, flagging the discriminatory and derogatory narratives against Muslims and Islam even in countries where the Muslim population is (nearly) absent. The Finnish authorities referred to a process of consultation with Muslim associations in the area of tackling hate crime which is bringing fruitful results. Italian authorities referred to work done with police officers jointly with civil society organisations on recognising Antisemitism that could be extended to anti-Muslim biases. A call was made to relaunch the European day against Islamophobia with a view to increase awareness by the wider public.

4. Working sessions

The workshop continued with discussion in groups, organised in two working sessions. A first working session was focused on responses to hate crimes against Muslim, while the second on responses to discrimination in the workplace or in the access to jobs, education and services, in particular affecting Muslim women. The discussion was inspired by the short presentation of key good practices: a) the Barcelona municipal plan against Islamophobia; b) the Federal programme “Demokratie Leben!” and the cooperation with the network of civil society organisations (CLAIM and Minor) in Germany; c) the cooperation between civil society organisations (CCIB) and the equality body UNIA in Belgium, with the aim to help the lodging of complaints and to enact mediation strategies; d) the campaigns and platforms for cooperation and to enhance victims’ report

initiated in the Netherlands by civil society organisations such as EMCEMO and SPIOR. The discussion in the groups was aimed to identify key challenges, actions needed, partners and tools.

The main input provided by the participants in the groups can be summarised as follows:

Key issues challenges

In relation to hate crimes:

- Under-reporting of racist crimes targeting Muslims, in particular of micro aggressions;
- Islamophobia is a form of racism and should be recognised as such, an operational/working definition of Islamophobia / anti-Muslim hatred is lacking
- Victims' mistrust vis a vis public institutions and law enforcement;
- Lack of spaces for dialogue between civil society organisations and public institutions
- Lack of representation of Muslims in the policy- and decision-making spheres
- The migration status is often preventing reporting racist crimes, as victims may fear to be identified and returned;
- Lack of vetting and training of police officers and prosecutors on how to recognise Islamophobic hate crimes;
- Structural deficiency lack of funding for civil society organisations working against anti-Muslim racism and discrimination on the ground.
- Limitation of the mandate of equality bodies in the area of hate crimes.

In relation to discrimination:

- Multiple grounds of discrimination increases vulnerability in particular of Muslim women and girls;
- Dress restrictions caused exclusion from education and from access to the job market;
- Islamophobia is gendered, Muslim women and men are affected in different ways;
- Children are often victims themselves, of discrimination in school or as a consequence of hostility towards the parents;
- Lengthy legal proceedings for litigation or access to justice, including lack of implementation of court judgements;
- Lack of trust and support to Muslim communities by the non-Muslim population;
- Suspicion about Muslim civil society organisations and lack of safe space to operate;
- Lack of trust by authorities which refrain to engage;
- Deficient support by schools and the education system;
- Deficient implementation of court decisions;
- Neutrality laws or policies are disproportionately affecting Muslims
- Perception of discrimination perpetuates dynamics of (self) exclusion.

Actions needed

- Support the application of hate crime cases to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), including third-party interventions, to help recognition and prosecution of anti-Muslim offences;
- Support strategic litigation before the ECtHR and the European Court of Justice (CJEU), as well as at national level;
- Support legal aid and provide financial support to CSOs for legal counselling, in order to enhance access to justice for victims of anti-Muslim racism and discrimination;
- Support the lodging of complaints to Equality bodies in cases of discrimination or hate speech;

- Promote balanced and non-discriminatory language and terms in particular by the media;
- Elaborate counter arguments and counter narratives to those hostile to Muslims;
- Develop a common working definition of Islamophobia;
- Dedicated policies to address Islamophobia a specific form of racism;
- Build a network of strategic partners at the international level to respond promptly and effectively to issues happening on the ground;
- Raise awareness and campaign, including through social media, to foster reporting and data collection on hate crimes targeting Muslims
- Establish dedicated email addresses at the police to foster reporting and/or dedicated complaint mechanisms at local level
- Elaborate guidance for prosecutors on anti-Muslim hate crimes;
- Training of police officers, judges, as well as other relevant civil servants on Islam, Muslims and Islamophobia
- Ensure that prosecution of cases leads to adequate sanctions, including alternative restorative measures;
- Promote the exchange of good practices and peer-to-peer learning among public authorities and law enforcement;
- Empower Muslim women and youth, and enhance political participation of Muslim communities in particular at the local level,
- Intensify the dialogue with Imams and community leaders to ensure they raise awareness within communities on the importance of reporting episodes of anti-Muslim hatred;
- Education and awareness raising at school and dedicated trainings for teachers and educators;
- Promote codes of conduct for businesses and employers to promote (religious/ethnic) diversity at the workplace;
- Civil society organisations to act in coalitions and in solidarity, and enable victims of Islamophobic attacks to speak up.
- Monitor the implementation of anti-discrimination legislation in the Member States, in particular in relation to access to education for adult Muslim women.

Partners

- Equality bodies
- A wide spectrum of anti-racism civil society organisations and European networks;
- Media outlets and journalists, observatory of the media;
- Mosques, Imams, Muslim community centres
- Representatives of other faiths and religions
- Role models and equality "champions"
- School establishments, teachers, parents committees and associations, social workers
- Academics, researchers
- Employers and trade unions
- Advertisement companies
- Public authorities in charge of fighting racism and any form of intolerance, including at the local level.
- National/regional ombuds persons

Tools

- 2-year plan of action to tackle anti-Muslim hatred at European level
- Training with journalists on balanced story-telling
- Training on intersectionality involving also Muslim communities

- Toolkit for victims' support which should be disseminated within police and other public institutions and a toolbox for victims on how to report
- Toolkit for professionals (police officers, prosecutors, lawyers) to raise awareness on the phenomenon of anti-Muslim intolerance, with a focus on hate crimes.
- Platform for policy dialogue and anti-Muslim hate crime reporting, involving civil society organisations and public authorities
- ODIHR and *Facing Facts!* project (online) resources on recognising anti-Muslim hate crime and guidance on diversity and bias indicators for police officers
- A European day against Islamophobia and social media campaigns
- Petitions, letters to politicians, recommendations, resolutions and strategic litigation
- Local, regional action plans against Islamophobia (inspired by the example of Barcelona)
- Increased EU funding for projects tackling Islamophobia
- Mediation to resolve cases of discrimination and promote good practices
- Spaces for dialogue with Muslim communities
- Studies and reports, to be made available also in schools
- Training on advocacy targeted to CSOs to step up their capacity to advocate effectively in the local, national or European contexts.

5. Follow up identified by the participants

The main possible follow up in the short to medium term suggested in plenary are the following:

- Seminar/workshop with participation of academics, law enforcement agencies, other public authorities and inter-governmental organisations, civil society organisations to define Islamophobia / anti-Muslim hatred;
- National workshops/training involving civil society organisations and law enforcement on stepping up hate crime data collection, with a possible support by the European Commission and other relevant EU/international organisations (e.g. FRA/ODIHR).
- EU level workshop with equality bodies to discuss their experience, challenges and good practices and increase their focus on combatting anti-Muslim discrimination.
- Creation of a repository for existing tools and good practices (to be possibly centralised in the webpage of the Coordinator and/or of the existing FRA database)
- Starting from the initiative of “champion” cities like Barcelona and Amsterdam and through the support of networks such as EUROCITIES or other EU associations of local governments, promote and support the development of local action plans against racism and discrimination and for the inclusion of Muslim communities
- Establish a day of awareness raising against Islamophobia (e.g. re-launching the 21 September or building on other national days), to be leveraged by the Commission, the European Parliament, national authorities, and international organisations
- Within existing EU funds (e.g. in the Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme) prioritise projects that support active citizenship of Muslim communities and capacity building of grassroots NGOs, in particular in the area of strategic litigation and support to victims of hate crime and discrimination
- Broaden the coalition and alliances against Islamophobia to additional human rights NGOs or organisations from other communities or faith groups.