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More Equal
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MEET

More Equal Europe Together

EU Manual to prevent anti - Muslim hatred against women and girls

Other European partners:



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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Why is the Project MEET needed?

The Project MEET stems from the awareness that the issue of Islamophobia is an urgent issue in Europe that must be addressed.

Hate crimes and racist attacks against the Muslim communities have been reported in different European countries, although the majority of episodes are not reported to the authorities (under reporting). Moreover, social media amplifies hate speech thanks to anonymity and the use of fake news and hoaxes.¹

In this framework, Muslim women and girls suffer from intersectional discrimination, based on multiple grounds, namely gender, religion, ethnicity, and when wearing the headscarf, they are visibly Muslim and thus even more discriminated.

Significantly, Muslim women are usually monolithically portrayed, failing to consider them as a diverse and heterogeneous group, and the stereotypical image of them, depicted in public discourse as oppressed or dangerous, is a fertile ground for discrimination and violence.²

Discrimination occurs in access to vocational training and employment, as well as in the workplace. At the same time, Muslim women are the main targets of Islamophobic violence, especially if they wear a headscarf, both offline and online (online hate speech). This may result in the social exclusion of Muslim women and girls in Europe.³

1.2 The Project: partnership, objectives and main actions

The Project MEET – More Equal Europe Together. Preventing Islamophobia against women & girls,⁴ is co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union and it involves 6 European countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Italy and Poland) and 9 partners:⁵

- Fondazione L'Albero della Vita (project coordinator)
- FEMYSO
- Lab 80 Film
- Partners Bulgaria Foundation
- Pistes Solidaires
- Polish Migration Forum
- Pour La Solidarité
- Progetto Aisha
- Subjective Values Foundation

¹ Racism and discrimination in the context of migration in Europe, ENAR Shadow Report 2015-2016: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/sites/default/files/2017-05/shadowreport_2015x2016_long_low_res.pdf

² ENAR, *Forgotten women: the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women*, 2016: https://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/forgottenwomenpublication_lr_final_with_latest_corrections.pdf

³ Ibid.

⁴ The Project's implementation started in September 2019 and due to the pandemic its length was extended to November 2021.

⁵ To learn more about the partners visit <https://meet-project.alberodellavita.org/partners/>

The Project aims at contributing to the prevention of Islamophobia against women and girls by:

- Empowering key actors both at local and European level to build a culture of tolerance and respect
The need to achieve mutual understanding and dialogue among different stakeholders is essential in ensuring all citizens in a European society, especially the most vulnerable, the access to fundamental rights and equal opportunities.
- Fostering a positive narrative of Muslim women and girls targeting youth and young leaders
Youth are the key actors able to develop critical thinking and promote the importance of breaking stereotypes.

The project works on multiple levels to create a European society free from discrimination in which nobody is left behind due to gender and religious affiliation. It fosters cooperation between public authorities, religious communities, grassroots organizations and youth. In particular, the project works on preventing Muslim hatred deconstructing stereotypes, boosting dialogue and mutual learning. Particular attention has been given to engaging the youth and encouraging their critical thinking. The crucial role of education in non-formal context has been recognized as a milestone to build a welcoming, tolerant and multicultural European society.

The main actions of the project are the following:

- Set-up of Local Observatories on Islamophobia to monitor racism and discrimination acts and to propose action plans to Local Authorities;
- Workshops on video making and debate education to create a pool of young Equity Defenders;
- Advocacy activities through the engagement of European institutions on the enforcement of EU legal framework;
- Spreading a counter narrative campaign to fight Islamophobia against women and girls.

1.3 Outcomes of the Project MEET

In this paragraph we are sharing some of the Project's main outcomes, with the aim of disseminating the work done by the Project and providing possible tools to prevent and fight Islamophobia, with a particular reference on women and girls.

As part of the project's work package "Step up collective action in Europe", Local Observatories on Islamophobia, engaging key stakeholders, have been set up in each of the 6 countries with the task of monitoring acts of discrimination and racism against Muslim women and girls. Each of the six LOI met five times and finally produced an action plan to prevent Islamophobia at local level, addressing root causes and proposing concrete steps towards integration and equality for Muslim women and girls, and presented it to local authorities.

A survey on Islamophobia against women and girls has been conducted which will be described in Chapter 2.3. In each partner country, two focus groups have been held, with more than 120 participants in total, to enquire on the level of discrimination

suffered by Muslim women and the perception of Muslim women within the society.⁶ In the six partner countries, 13 events have been held with the aim of fostering dialogue and social cohesion among communities. Such events, held both offline and online (due to the pandemic) have been organised as virtual tours, cooking sessions, trips in the mountains, picnics, etc.

At EU level, the project activated an advocacy action towards Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and key EU stakeholders bringing the discussion, started at local level, to the European one. In particular, some MEPs signed a joint statement committing themselves to the enforcement of EU legal framework and on the promotion of an EU Directive to fill the gap in legal protection from discriminatory acts on the ground of religion, sexual orientation, age and disability in all areas.

As part of the Project's advocacy action an advocacy toolkit for the prevention of Islamophobia has also been drafted with indications on how to build an advocacy strategy.⁷

Moreover, EU Policy Talks took place in Brussels on September 21st 2021, the European day against Islamophobia, to address future EU policies with key actors.

One of the project's work package has been dedicated to the prevention of Islamophobia among young people. In each of the six partner countries young people aged 12-18, Muslim and non-Muslim, with the help of experts in film storytelling techniques, and thanks to the women and girls who shared with them their stories and experiences, were encouraged to reflect on the stereotypes and prejudices faced by Muslim women and girls and to create a counter-narrative capable of preventing and combating Islamophobia.⁸ The youth took part in video making laboratories and finally produced the episodes of a European web series.⁹

Moreover, in the six countries the youth participated in debate education activities aimed at developing their soft skills and in particular their ability to communicate and to discuss in public. Finally, some of the youth involved in the counter-narrative path and trained on the practice of the debate as a tool for youth participation, have become Equity Defenders, standing against racism and Islamophobia and promoting a positive narrative on social media with their peers.

Furthermore, webinars were organized in the partner countries for the capacity building of youth organisations, with the aim of promoting an active commitment by other young people in combating anti Muslim hatred. It has also been produced a document containing guidelines to support youth organisations and groups in raising awareness against the risks of islamophobia and in building concrete actions to counteract it.¹⁰

Finally, as part of the work package "Scaling up the counter narrative campaign", a counter narrative campaign, named "Look Beyond Prejudice" aiming at preventing Islamophobia by deconstructing stereotypes has been promoted in the 6 countries

6 The MEET Survey analysis report is available at this link: https://meet-project.alberodellavita.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/FADV_Survey-analysis-report.pdf

7 The MEET Advocacy toolkit is available at this link: <https://meet-project.alberodellavita.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Advocacy-Toolkit.pdf> 8 See in Chapter 2.2 the list of stereotypes and misconceptions on Muslim women and girls elaborated within the Project in order to discuss with the youth and promote a counter narrative.

9 The web series has been released on MEET Project's YT channel: <https://www.youtube.com/c/MEETProjectEU>

10 The English version of the Guidelines is available at this link: https://meet-project.alberodellavita.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/FADV_LineeGuida_Meet_EN.pdf

targeting youth as well as the general public. The campaign was launched with a video illustrated by cartoonist Takoua Ben Mohamed, graphic journalist and illustrator, who, with comics and irony, has chosen to talk about integration and dialogue between cultures, thus fighting the discrimination linked to her decision to wear the veil. Within the campaign the EU web series produced by the youth engaged in the project has been promoted.

1.4 Methodology and use of the Manual

The first chapter is an introductory chapter. Paragraph 1.1 is devoted to explain why the Project MEET is needed, starting to address the issues of Islamophobia and especially Islamophobia against women and girls, which will be the subject of Chapter 2.

In paragraph 1.2 the Project itself is described, from the partnership to the objective and the *modus operandi* of the Project with its main actions. In the following paragraph (1.3) the outcomes of the Project are outlined as of November 2021 (when this Manual has been drafted).

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the focus of the Project and of this Manual, which is gendered Islamophobia, starting from the concept of Islamophobia (2.1) to specific manifestations of Islamophobia against women and girls (2.2), supported by some data. A list of the main stereotypes and misconceptions against Muslim women elaborated within the Project is presented (2.2), as well as the Project's survey on Islamophobia against women and girls from the methodology to the main findings (2.3).

The third chapter is devoted to the country case studies, which provide information and data on Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia in the partner countries, with particular reference to legislations and practices affecting women in girls and actions to prevent and combat such discriminations. The paragraphs are contributions collected from the Project's partners, that also mention the work done by the Local Observatories on Islamophobia, as well as the focus groups conducted for the survey, which are among the activities that have been implemented within the Project.

The content of the Chapters 4 and 5 is a contribution from the partner FEMYSO, addressing policy interventions and providing resources and information tools.

This Manual has been designed for civil society organisations, youth organisations and human rights activists fighting against racism and discrimination, providing with some information and data on Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia in particular, in order to support them in their work of preventing and combating such phenomenon by raising awareness, promoting counter-narratives and, in general, designing action to counter it. The work done by the MEET project offers examples of actions that can be implemented, as well as provides some data related to the issue in the six partner countries that can be of help to organisations and activists working in the field.

CHAPTER 2

ISLAMOPHOBIA AND GENDERED ISLAMOPHOBIA

2.1 Definitions and conceptual framework

The European Network Against Racism, ENAR, defines Islamophobia as follows: Muslims or those perceived to be Muslim suffer from discrimination, stigmatisation and exclusion in all areas of life such as employment, education, vocational training, services and political participation, but also from racist violence and speech, especially on the internet. Islamophobia is a specific form of racism that must be tackled.¹¹

Runnymede provides both a short definition of Islamophobia as “anti-Muslim racism” and a longer one which builds on the United Nations definition of racism generally:

Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.¹²



¹¹ <https://www.enar-eu.org/Islamophobia>

¹² Farah Elahi and Omar Khan, Introduction: What is Islamophobia?, p. 7, *Islamophobia: Still a challenge for us all, a 20th anniversary report*, edited by Farah Elahi and Omar Khan, Runnymede, 2017: <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Islamophobia%20Report%202018%20FINAL.pdf>

As shown by recent studies, intolerance and discrimination against Muslims are persistent phenomena in European societies, where Muslims are often associated with terrorism and extremism and the presence of Muslim communities is often perceived as a threat to national identity, leading to hate crimes against them.¹³

Evidences of the unfavourable views of Muslim immigration in Europe has been reported, by showing public opposition to further migration from Muslim countries, as well as demonstrating how the Muslim population is significantly overestimated.¹⁴

The anti-Muslim hatred has been amplified by some media and political discourses and a high percentage of Islamophobic attacks in most Europe occur via the internet, with social media amplifying hate speech by relying on anonymity and the use of fake news and unfounded news.

The results of the monitoring exercises on the implementation of the European Commission Code of conduct on countering hate speech online show that anti-Muslim hatred, jointly with xenophobic hatred against refugees and migrants, features regularly on top of the list of the most widespread grounds of intolerance.¹⁵

As underlined in the second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (Muslims – Selected findings), which examined the experiences of more than 15.000 self-identifying Muslim immigrants and their descendants in 15 EU Member States, Muslims face discriminations in different contexts and especially when looking for work, at work, as well as when they try to access public or private services.¹⁶

The name, the colour of the skin and the wearing of religious symbols such as the veil may prompt discrimination and harassment, as highlighted by the survey.¹⁷

Significantly, the issue of Islamophobia in Europe is underreported. Based on the EU-MIDIS Survey, only one out of 10 Muslim respondents reported the most recent episode of hate-motivated harassment to the police or other organisations or services. At the same time, just 4% of all Muslim respondents who experienced discrimination reported the incident to an equality body, institution for human rights or ombuds institution.¹⁸

Among the reasons for non-reporting, there is a low awareness of the existence of these bodies, as well as dissatisfaction with how the police dealt with the case. Significantly, the main reason Muslim respondents gave for not reporting incidents is that nothing would change or happen as a result of reporting.¹⁹

13 *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, edited by Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez, SETA: https://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EIR_2019.pdf; *Eastern and Western European differ on importance of religion, views of minorities, and key social issues*, Pew Research Center, 2018: <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/10/29/eastern-and-western-europeans-differ-on-importance-of-religion-views-of-minorities-and-key-social-issues/>

14 *What do Europeans think about Muslim immigration?*, Chatham House, 2017: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2017/02/what-do-europeans-think-about-muslim-immigration>; *Perils of perception 2018*, Ipsos MORI: <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2018-12/ipsos-mori-perils-of-perception-2018.pdf>

15 COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT *Countering racism and xenophobia in the EU: fostering a society where pluralism, tolerance and non-discrimination prevail*, March 2019: [https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD\(2019\)110&lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD(2019)110&lang=en) See also: *Fifth monitoring on the application of the Code of Conduct for countering illegal hate speech online*, European Commission Directorate General for Justice and Consumers, June 2020: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/codeofconduct_2020_factsheet_12.pdf

16 *EU-MIDIS II, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, Muslims - Selected findings*, 2017, p. 7: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2017-eu-minorities-survey-muslims-selected-findings_en.pdf

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

2.2 Manifestations of gendered Islamophobia

In this scenario, Muslim women and girls in Europe experience discrimination on more than one ground, the so-called multiple or intersectional discrimination.

The intersectionality aspect is key when it comes to the issue of discrimination against Muslim women. Crucially, as noted by the FRA, "addressing discrimination from the perspective of a single ground fails to capture or tackle adequately the various manifestations of unequal treatment that people may face in their daily lives".²⁰

Muslim women may be discriminated against on the basis of gender, religion, ethnicity, dress code and so on. When Muslim women wear the veil they are even more subjected to discrimination since they are visibly Muslim.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) reports in its findings that Muslim women are more likely to suffer discrimination and harassment in particular if wearing religious symbols: more than one third of Muslim women wearing a headscarf or niqab in public experienced inappropriate staring or offensive gestures in the 12 months before the survey.²¹ The then European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality expressed deep concern over these results.²²

Stereotypes and prejudices are often at the root of discrimination and violence against people of Muslim faith and this is particularly true when it comes to Muslim women.

Muslim women are represented in the media and perceived by general public as submissive and, at the same time, perpetrator of a conservative view of women. Researcher Laura Navaro states that Muslim women are represented as "victims of their own culture and a threat to ours".²³

The following is a list of some of the stereotypes and misconceptions on Muslim women and girls, which has been elaborated by the MEET Project's coordinator, by also relying on the Project's focus groups results. The list has also been used during the video making laboratories with the youth, a key activity of the MEET Project, to discuss over the existing stereotypes on Muslim women and girls and promote a counter narrative.²⁴

20 FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights), *Fundamental Rights Report, 2017*, p. 68: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2017-fundamental-rights-report-2017_en.pdf

21 EU-MIDIS II.

22 Muslims in the EU: high levels of trust despite pervasive discrimination, FRA Press release, 21 September 2017: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/pr-2017-muslim-trust-despite-discrimination_en.pdf.

23 L.Navaro, *Islamophobia and Sexism: Muslim Women in the Western Mass Media*, *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*: Vol. 8: Iss. 2, Article 10.

24 The list comes with some suggested readings: *Debunking myths on women's rights, Muslim women, feminism and Islamophobia in Europe*, publication within the ENAR Project "Forgotten Women: the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women": https://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/debunkingmyths_lr_final.pdf; Naaz Rashid, "Everyone is a feminist when it comes to Muslim women: Gender and Islamophobia", pp. 61-64, *Islamophobia: Still a challenge for us all, a 20th-anniversary report*, edited by Farah Elahi and Omar Khan, Runnymede, 2017: <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Islamophobia%20Report%202018%20FINAL.pdf>; *Islamophobia. The nature of anti-Muslim prejudice*, pp. 4-12, *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all*, Runnymede Trust, 1997: <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/companies/17/74/Islamophobia-A-Challenge-for-Us-All.html>



STEREOTYPES AND MISCONCEPTIONS ON MUSLIM WOMEN & GIRLS: A COUNTERNARRATIVE

☑ **Muslim women & girls are oppressed, submissive and have no agency**

The image of Muslim woman which prevails in the public discourse is that of an oppressed and submissive woman with no agency. See in particular the following three stereotypes.

☑ **Muslim women & girls are forced to wear the veil**

Although some Muslim women are forced to wear the veil, others freely choose to wear it. Each woman wearing it has a different story. There is the wrong assumption that covering the body cannot be synonym of freedom, within the bigger framework of controlling women's body. Forcing women to unveil is as violent as forcing them to veil. Moreover, not all Muslim women wear the veil.

☑ **Muslim women & girls are uneducated and economically dependent**

Many Muslim women are empowered and play active roles in their society, however this is rarely made visible.

Patriarchy affects Muslim women as any other women in the world, and it affects them not only within the Muslim communities but also outside them, with the result of causing difficulties in the access to paths of emancipation such as education and employment.

☑ **Muslim women & girls are subjected to domestic violence, forced marriage, 'honour'-based violence (HBV), female genital mutilations (FGM)**

Violence affects all women around the world. Although there are misinterpretations of Islamic sacred texts that are used to justify domestic violence, this is not the case for all Muslim women. Additionally, 'honour'-based violence and female genital mutilations are wrongly associated with Islam and forced marriage is against Islamic principles.

☑ **Muslim women & girls are dangerous, they support violence and terrorism**

The veil (niqab and burka in particular) has raised security concerns and it has been associated with extremism, leading to Muslim women being seen as potential extremists.

☑ **Muslim women & girls are conservative**

Muslim women are not all conservative and "backward" just because they follow a lifestyle based on religious values. There are different interpretations of Islam. There are Muslim women with progressive views, reading Islamic sacred texts from a woman's perspective and showing that Muslim women can see their rights recognised within an Islamic framework (Islamic feminism).

☑ **Muslim women & girls are foreigners/migrants/refugees**

Muslim women are not necessarily foreigners, migrants or refugees, as they are often seen to be.

☑ **Muslim women & girls are a monolithic bloc**

Recognising the diversity among Muslim women, by resisting to simplistic narratives

Significantly, the stereotypical image of Muslim women in public discourse is a fertile ground for acts of discrimination and violence against them. Muslim women are often monolithically portrayed, failing to consider them as a diverse and heterogeneous group.²⁵

As underlined by the ENAR report "Forgotten women", "women are the first to pay the price of Islamophobia in Europe".²⁶ Indeed, in most countries they are more likely to be victims of hate crime and speech than Muslim men, especially if they wear a headscarf.²⁷

Employment is one of the main areas of discrimination, being Muslim women subject to three types of penalties: gender penalties, ethnic penalties and religious penalties. The veil is an additional obstacle in finding a job and keeping it.²⁸

As the ENAR report highlights, Muslim women suffer from the same inequalities as other women (in employment and in relation to verbal and physical violence), but they are compounded by additional factors of (perceived) religion and/or ethnicity, however, very little is done to collect comprehensive data and tackle this intersectional form of racism.²⁹

2.3 Survey on Islamophobia against women and girls³⁰

Within the Project MEET Work Package "Step up collective action in Europe", a survey on Islamophobia against women and girls has been conducted, contributing to the achievement of the following objectives:

1. to foster dialogue and coalition building among communities in Europe;
2. to promote a reinforcement of EU legal framework on Islamophobia.

Two focus groups have been held in each of the six countries involved in the project. One focus group targeted Muslim women and girls and the other one non-Muslims (women and men), in order to enquire on the level of discrimination suffered by Muslims and Muslim women in particular and their perception within the society.³¹

The main areas of investigation were the following:

1. Views and opinions of Muslim women and girls on Islamophobia and discrimination, with a focus particularly on: discrimination at school, discrimination at work, discrimination among civil society;
2. Stereotypes linked with Muslim women and girls and brainstorming on how to deconstruct them.

²⁵ ENAR, *Forgotten women*.

²⁶ *Women are the first to pay the price of Islamophobia in Europe*, ENAR Press release, 26 May 2016: <https://www.enar-eu.org/Women-are-the-first-to-pay-the-price-of-Islamophobia-in-Europe>

²⁷ ENAR, *Forgotten women*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ The MEET Survey analysis report is available at this link: https://meet-project.alberodellavita.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/FADV_Survey-analysis-report.pdf

³¹ In Hungary the focus group with Muslim women and girls was split into two sessions in order to accommodate conflicting participant schedules. Additionally, SVF created an online survey in order to reach more people.

As part of the guidelines for the facilitators in each partner country, a set of questions (see below) has been outlined by the coordinator and shared with partners, with a view to also facilitating the collection of answers and the elaboration of the analysis.

When necessary questions were reviewed and adjusted according to the specific context.

The focus groups have been held between November 2019 and June 2020. With the outbreak of the pandemic, the activity moved online, by using video conference tools, in order to ensure safety of participants.

In a few cases, questionnaires have been sent to the participants.

There has been an average of 10 participants per focus group and a total of more than 120 participants.³²

The coordinator has collected survey reports from partners in order to produce the analysis.



³² In addition to this, SVF has continued to collect responses to the online survey: 42 people participated in this survey (last update October 2020).



QUESTION SET FOR THE FOCUS GROUPS WITH MUSLIM WOMEN & GIRLS

1. What does Islamophobia mean to you?
2. Have you (or people you know) have ever been victims of discriminatory acts as Muslim women/girls? (your experience, feelings... was it due to the hijab?)
3. If so, of what kind (insult, assault...) and in which context (workplace, school/uni, in the streets, in shops, on social networks through hate speech)? If not, what would annoy you?
4. What are the causes of Islamophobia according to you?
5. Which are the stereotypes on Muslim women according to you?
6. Do you think that the national education system helps in transmitting your culture and values? Do you feel that your culture and religion are respected?
7. Do you feel free to express your opinion in the public space?
8. What are the consequences of Islamophobia according to you?
9. What do you think could be useful to combat this phenomenon? What are your efforts to change the current situation (possible solutions)?
10. Why did you accept to participate in this focus group? What do you think could be the added value of such focus group within your context?



QUESTION SET FOR THE FOCUS GROUPS WITH NON-MUSLIMS

1. What does Islamophobia mean to you?
2. Have you (or people you know) have ever witnessed to discriminatory acts against Muslim women/girls? (your experience, feelings...) Did you do anything?
3. According to you what kind (insult, assault...) of discriminatory acts Muslim women and girls may face at workplace, school/uni, in the streets, in shops, on social networks?
4. What are the causes of Islamophobia according to you?
5. Which are the stereotypes on Muslim women according to you?
6. Do you think that the national education system helps in transmitting the value of diversity, respect among cultures and information about Islam?

7. What are the consequences of Islamophobia according to you?
 8. What do you think could be useful to combat this phenomenon? What are your efforts to change the current situation (possible solutions)?
 9. Why did you accept to participate in this focus group? What do you think could be the added value of such focus group within your context?
 10. Do you think that more respect for the other cultures and religions could bring an improvement for the whole society?
 11. Could you think of positive contributions of Muslims to the society?
-

The following are the main findings and conclusions of the Project's survey analysis.

When asked what Islamophobia means to them, in both types of focus groups participants believe that Islamophobia means fear of Islam and that it stems from lack of information and knowledge about Islam leading to social exclusion. Significantly, within the Muslim women's focus groups along with the term fear the term hatred was also mentioned, highlighting that what Muslims and Muslim women experience is more hostility.

With the proliferation of fake news and hate speech, the role of media and political propaganda in feeding anti-Muslim hatred is seen as key by participants in both types of focus groups.

Interestingly, in identifying the causes of Islamophobia conversation within the non-Muslims' focus groups focused also on the migration issue and the perceived threat to one's identity. Indeed, in some countries political propaganda feeds hatred towards Islamic communities and facilitates the false overlap between Muslim people and migrants, thus endorsing the equation: "Muslims are foreigners who want to invade our country and distort our culture".

A number of stereotypes and misconceptions on Muslim women and girls emerged during the focus groups sessions that can be summarised as follows:³³

- Muslim women & girls are oppressed, submissive and have no agency
- Muslim women & girls are forced to wear the veil
- Muslim women & girls are uneducated and economically dependent
- Muslim women & girls are subjected to domestic violence, forced marriage, 'honour'-based violence (HBV), female genital mutilations (FGM)
- Muslim women & girls are dangerous, they support violence and terrorism
- Muslim women & girls are conservative
- Muslim women & girls are foreigners/migrants/refugees
- Muslim women & girls are a monolithic bloc

³³ This list has been elaborated by the MEET Project's coordinator, by also relying on the Project's focus groups results, in order to be used during the video making laboratories with the youth to discuss over the existing stereotypes on Muslim women and girls and promote a counter narrative.

Concerning the discriminatory acts that Muslim women and girls experience, from both types of focus groups it emerged that these take place in the public space in general, including workplace, schools and universities, sports, public offices and facilities, streets, shops, public transport, social media, state propaganda, and that they mainly occur verbally. Significantly, Muslim women who wear the headscarf are more subjected to discriminations because they are visibly Muslim.

From the Muslim women's focus groups it emerged that the majority of women do not feel free to express their opinions publicly, as well as that Muslim women have to justify their actions and their choices all the time.

When the participants are asked if national education systems promote diversity and convey Islamic culture and values, both types of focus groups revealed how the national education systems of the countries involved in the survey are in deficit in this regard, with participants stating that there is little-to-no information on Islam in schools, as well as negative narratives which pave the way for discriminations, within a system that keeps on separating communities, with the result that there is "them" and a "us". Moreover, in some cases Muslim women and girls cannot even access the educational system when they are obliged to take off their headscarf in order to join it.

Among the consequences of Islamophobia participants mentioned the lack of social cohesion, a closure towards Islam and Muslims, as well as the escalation of discrimination and violence. In particular, discrimination at the level of employment has been highlighted in both types of focus groups.

In the Muslim women's focus groups the sense of isolation suffered by Muslims has been mentioned, as well as the "surprise effect" when one finds out that Muslim people may have important positions in the society.

Reinforcement of stereotypes and exploitation by some political parties have been mentioned within the non-Muslims' focus groups.

Finally, when it comes to how to combat Islamophobia, in all focus groups participants have underlined how dialogue and direct interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims are important, agreeing that meeting can help to deconstruct stereotypes on Islam and Muslims and in particular on Muslim women.

A change in the way media present Islam and Muslims is also needed. It is important to highlight positive contributions of Muslims and Muslim women to the society. Indeed, when asking participants to the non-Muslims' focus groups about positive contributions of Muslims to the society a few answers have been collected.

From the focus groups, it emerged that measures in the education systems to embrace diversity are necessary, as well as encouraging youth's ability to think critically.

In conclusion, the focus groups conducted have been the occasion for sharing experiences and feelings among participants, to collect inputs to work on how to deconstruct stereotypes and combat Islamophobia against women and girls in particular. Moreover, the need of a real encounter between communities and of mutual support among women emerged as essential.

CHAPTER 3

COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

3.1 Belgium

" Islamophobia is a phenomenon whose existence can no longer be denied: from its impact on employment, access to housing or even school, to acts of hatred such as vandalism against mosques, the facts are there to remind us. However, this takes different forms in different parts of the world or in Europe"³⁴.

In the Brussels Region, a multitude of communities live side by side, including Muslim communities. However, they find themselves stigmatized and locked into stereotypes that are strongly anchored in the mentalities. So much so that people internalize the discrimination of which they are victims. This can be explained by a biased image of Islam and Muslims conveyed by the media and social networks. Misunderstanding and misinformation combine to feed prejudices against Muslims, and girls and women in particular, because of the visibility of their religious beliefs when they wear the headscarf. The work of CRACIS³⁵ and the consultations carried out in this context have revealed an alarming fact: the education system in the Brussels Region, far from promoting inclusion, seems to reinforce existing prejudices by adopting a relatively European-centric teaching. Based on a progressive argument calling for values such as equality, emancipation, freedom and secularism.

Presumption of non-conformity to these values as soon as the person concerned is Muslim.

Just this year, students wearing the veil and wishing to enroll in a university in Brussels were refused enrollment because of the university's rules prohibiting the wearing of religious or philosophical symbols.

As a result, they filed an action for interim relief to obtain the cessation of this prohibition. The president of the court put a preliminary question to the Constitutional Council: does the decree of 31 March 1994 of the French Community defining the neutrality of education comply with articles 19, 23 and 24 of the Constitution (freedom of religion, the right to lead a life in accordance with human dignity and the neutrality of education) insofar as it allows an organizing authority to provide for such regulations? The students argued that the regulation constituted an interference with their fundamental rights not provided for by law and that it prevented them from pursuing their studies in accordance with their religious convictions³⁶.

The university and the City of Brussels, as the organizing authority, argued that freedom of religion is not an absolute freedom and that respect for the principle of neutrality may require a ban on the wearing of religious and philosophical symbols in educational institutions. The Constitutional Court decided that the constitutional texts did not prohibit the organizing authorities from adopting regulations in order to guarantee the proper

³⁴ <https://www.bepax.org/publications/l-islamophobie-dans-le-champ-francophone.html>

³⁵ [pls_islamophobie-sexiste_recommandations_bruxelles.pdf](https://www.diversite-europe.eu/pls_islamophobie-sexiste_recommandations_bruxelles.pdf) (diversite-europe.eu)

³⁶ <https://droit-public.ulb.ac.be/port-du-voile-a-lecole-une-solution-typiquement-belge/>

functioning of education and the realization of their pedagogical project, according to their philosophical or confessional projects.

In the French Community, a decree of March 31, 1994 is the founding text enshrining the neutrality of education, but neutrality may result in an organizing authority taking measures to preserve common values by enacting a regulation. Therefore, the ban on wearing the veil at the university in question was not found to be contrary to the freedom of education. The many regulations that promote "neutrality" de facto lead to the exclusion of some women, who are prevented from continuing their education because of their religious conviction.

But then, would women students wearing the veil be denied the right to education? While the Constitution guarantees the freedom to manifest one's religion in public and in private, according to the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights, the right to hold religious beliefs is absolute, but this does not prevent the right to manifest one's religious faith from being subject to restrictions.

Therefore, insofar as a legal provision permits, the competent authority, in this case a university, may issue internal regulations containing a specific prohibition, such as the wearing of religious or philosophical symbols. The testimonies indicate a feeling of injustice on the part of Muslim citizens who are particularly targeted regarding the regulations aimed at neutrality. The application or even the conception of these regulations is particularly aimed at people of the Muslim faith, less other religions. Several witnesses reported differences in treatment between Islam and other religious or philosophical beliefs.

"Why don't we apply the constitutional framework without ambiguity or exceptions? We know that the "convictional signs" are aimed at Muslims! The proof is that my director walks around with a cross in a chain but no worries because according to her it is a jewel"³⁷.

The victims who reported an Islamophobic fact are for the great majority of Belgian nationality.

The call for reports has made it possible to collect many testimonies of discrimination or insults made to Belgians because of their religious conviction. There is very little mention of violence against foreigners in this appeal to the Muslim community in French-speaking Belgium. But all the cases of Islamophobia towards Belgian citizens listed here are not without racist connotations. Several testimonies refer directly to the origins of the victims. "The teachers who say clearly in front of the headmistress that if we want to wear the headscarf outside, let us go back to our country" without anyone reacting!

Employment is also one of the sectors in which facts of discrimination based on religious beliefs (96 cases recorded by Unia in 2019) or gender (332 cases recorded by the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men in 2019) are noted. Unlike the teaching sector, these complaints are shared, almost equally, between women wearing headscarves and those who do not. Recall that in teaching, more than 90% of female reports come from women wearing headscarves. In the professional sector, it is "only" 58% of female reports. The headscarf, the name and the origins of the person are a factor of discrimination.

³⁷ https://www.brudoc.be/opac_css/doc_num.php?explnum_id=830

"We just want to be considered as Belgians and not as foreigners who want to impose the religion of Morocco. I am Belgian and my religion is my choice."

During the Brussels Week of Actions against Hate and Islamophobia (SBAHI), PLS and CRACIS joined forces to produce a list of 25 recommendations for the Brussels authorities based on 7 themes and several observations:

- To be able to act effectively against a phenomenon, it is necessary to understand it and to put in place **an efficient data collection and monitoring system**.
- Although there is already a body of law on discrimination, it is necessary to **improve the regulations** in order to work towards more equality in practice and not just theoretical equality.
- The **educational system** in the Brussels Region must be rethought and focused on openness to interculturality.
- In one of the sectors in which discrimination based on religious beliefs is most numerous is, **employment**, it is recommended **that companies and their employees be made aware** of this issue.
- The **awareness** of all the components of the Brussels society (citizens, managers, public and private services, ...) is **essential** to fight effectively against Islamophobia towards Muslim girls and women.
- It is urgent to act at the level of the **media** (written press, online, social networks) because they have **an important role to play**.
- Touching on issues related to **Equal Opportunities**, a transversal competence in the Brussels-Capital Region, the issues related to the fight against sexist Islamophobia **require a collaboration between all stakeholders**³⁸.

3.2 Bulgaria

Bulgaria is the EU member state where indigenous Muslims form the largest proportion of the population. The community formed following the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans in the fourteenth century and largely remained in the territory when Bulgaria declared full independence in 1908. According to the most recent census (2011), Muslims comprise 10% of all inhabitants. According to the 2011 Census, the total number of Muslims in Bulgaria stood at 577,139, corresponding to 7.8% of the population. According to a 2017 estimate, Muslims make up 15% of the population. About 50% of them are women. Ethnically, Muslims in Bulgaria are Turks, Bulgarians and Roma, living mainly in parts of north-eastern Bulgaria (mainly in Razgrad, Targovishte, Shumen and Silistra Provinces) and in the Rhodope Mountains (mainly in Kardzhali Province and Smolyan Province).³⁹

Islamophobia is a form of discrimination, against the Muslim community, which has been increasing in recent years in Europe. While many believe that Bulgaria remains a model of ethnic tolerance, a sufficient number of cases of aggression and discrimination, on the grounds of ethnicity and religion, has been documented. A survey of the Partners Bulgaria Foundation, conducted in the end of 2019 with Muslim women and girls reveals that they

³⁸ *pls_islamophobie-sexiste_recommandations_bruxelles.pdf (diversite-europe.eu)*

³⁹ *Bulgaria census 2011.*

think discrimination of women in education, employment, and other fields of social life exists in reality and they have experienced it.

The results of a study, conducted by Alpha Research (published in March 2020)⁴⁰, investigating the attitudes of the Bulgarian majority towards the "different ones", or other ethnic and religious communities in the country, show that as a whole there is an attitude of tolerance towards the minorities, with the exception of the attitude to the Roma community, which is definitely negative. The larger part of the respondents emphasize they have a positive attitude to Muslims, in particular to the Turkish community in Bulgaria. The majority trust all the communities - Muslims, Armenians, Bulgarian Mohammedans, Protestants, Catholics, etc, and are willing to work with them and to live together in the same country and community; friendship exists as well.

The researchers, however, note that the attitude to Muslims has changed due to the influence of various factors, such as the politics of the coalition in power, propaganda through media, or global nationalism. Manifestations of *"growing islamophobia, which is continuously putting the equal sign between religion and ideology, and between religious practices and terrorist attacks"* are observed. The values obtained by the Bulgarian survey, though, are lower compared to those in other countries in this line. The study of Alpha Research reveals as well that men tend to be less tolerant to Muslims than women. Besides, the tolerance to Muslims is less common among young people below the age of 30, compared to other age groups, and it is stronger among the residents of Sofia than the residents of the country. Finally, it increases among those with better income and education. The authors highlight that this being tolerant "in general" could be very fragile, and it becomes possible that specific events and social or political conditions can bring to the surface the hidden charge of nationalism and aggression which can be directed towards the Roma community in particular.

Both Bulgarian and foreign researchers provide sufficient evidence that Muslims in Bulgaria are rather secular and the differences between them and the majority of Bulgarians, who are Christian or atheist, in terms of culture and way of life and thinking, are insignificant. At the same time, there are deficits in the education system and media with regards to studying the nature of religions across the world. The concept of Islam is still perceived as vague; besides, it is associated with fears and negative feelings. This is so mainly as a result of the news and publications in the media, concerning life in the Middle East or terrorist attacks abroad, that do not distinguish clearly between radical Islam and secular and open Islam, professed by a million of the Bulgarian citizens whose culture and traditions remain unfamiliar to the majority.

The culture of Islam and the topics, related to it, are still poorly covered at national level by the TV channels, news websites and newspapers. Apparently, this fact does not contribute neither to increased understanding of Islam and Muslims, nor to reducing the fears of Bulgarians.

MUSLIM WOMEN

Some interventions by the nationalists have been aiming to restrict the rights of the Muslim minority and especially of women. For example, in 2016, a ban on the wearing of face-covering clothing in public was adopted by the Bulgarian parliament.⁴¹ The Bulgarian ban on wearing a burqa at public places was followed by incidents such as expelling female Muslim

40 "Majority and minorities. Attitudes towards the different ones", Alpha Research, 2020.

41 Bulgaria MPs Ban Burqa in Public, Balkan Insight, September 30, 2016.

students from school because of their clothing which in fact fuelled confrontations and fears than served to prevent radicalization. Some local councils like Pasardjik also banned women wearing full-face veil such as public offices, streets, and schools.⁴²

Considering the number of incidents against Muslims in recent years, together with the relentless threat the spread of hate crimes poses, it is crucial for both local and national political powers to develop a strategy for social peace protection and conflict prevention. It is important to introduce measures to support mutual knowledge of different groups and enhance social cohesion, rather than divide and instill fear, mistrust, and hatred.

Partners Bulgaria study among Muslim women in 2019 have shown that Muslim women from Turkish community suffer similar forms of discrimination as the women from most of the population. They shared more often as a source of discomfort *"the very distinct male dominated world - a patriarchal mentality and manifestation of superiority of men in almost every respect. This stereotype contributes to the dominance of men in all walks of life."*

There were strong clues about perception of domestic violence, but the topic was not deeply explored during the interviews.

Muslim women perceive discrimination in public life, workplaces and education. *"Men are the majority in central and local government, they set the rules, they forge laws, they make decisions, neglecting women's needs, problems and rights, they have more opportunities for expression and realization, they usually have much higher wages."*

Regarding educational system, women think that the education system does not convey the values of Islamic culture and religion, so majority of population is not aware about them.

Regarding the freedom of expression, women do feel insecurity and fear to speak out about their needs and issues. Women felt that despite democratic changes, they still feel insecure, and fear continues to reign in their hearts. In support of this, none of the participants provided an e-mail address during the interviews.

There were clues that domestic violence with discrimination towards women, and rather making strong relationship between them. It can be said that the went into a relaxed atmosphere, despite the apparent concern of most participants.

Bulgaria is one of the few EU member states that have not ratified the Convention on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence and Violence against Women (the Istanbul convention). In 2018 the parliament members requested a ruling on the convention's compatibility with Bulgaria's Constitution, amid claims that the convention's calls for gender equality aim to encourage homosexuality, and warnings that it could lead to "questioning traditional values of Bulgarian society." Unfortunately, Bulgarian women – Muslim and non-Muslim - are paying the price for such misconceptions about women's rights. Bulgaria fared worst in a 2017 European Institute for Gender Equality analysis of the prevalence, severity, and underreporting of violence against women. Partners Bulgaria foundation study in 2016

Reinventing Eastern Europe: Imaginaries, Identities and Transformations, edited by Evinç Doğan, London, 2019, page 121.

has shown that over 30 percent of Bulgarian women in reported experiencing domestic or other gender violence.⁴³

Bulgarian NGOs have been active to point out these multiple levels' discrimination of women from minority communities, including Muslim women. Various initiatives are addressing the issue and providing set of measures to increase public awareness and engage key stakeholders in preventative programs that combat discrimination. Such initiatives include training programs, educational activities with young people, human rights initiatives, public campaigns, and thematic discussions. Still the problem needs much more attention from local and public authorities in order to increase the culture of tolerance and acceptance of diversity.

3.3 France

According to a study conducted by the Inter-Ministerial Delegation for the Fight against Racism, Anti-Semitism and Anti-LGBT Hatred (DILCRAH) and the Jean Jaurès Foundation on discrimination and aggression against Muslims, 42% of Muslims believe that they have been victims of discrimination linked to their religion at least once in their life, including 46% of women against 38% of men.⁴⁴

In January 2021, the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) recorded, for the year 2020, "235 anti-Muslim acts against 154 for the year 2019, that is to say 53% more acts".⁴⁵

These figures are underestimated and "do not reflect reality because many leaders of places of worship do not wish to file a complaint, considering, rightly or wrongly, that investigations are rarely successful".

On the labour market, several studies show that candidates perceived as Muslims are between two and three times less likely to get an interview in France than candidates perceived as Christians. Thus, for Muslims, and in particular women, the first obstacle in accessing employment is to get an interview.

Sometimes because of their headscarf, but also because of their supposed religious or ethnic affiliation, Muslim women are discriminated against in recruitment, or even excluded from the labour market⁴⁶. Some give up searching for a job or take under-qualified ones. Others see this barrier as an opportunity to start their own business.

In relation to housing, discrimination against Muslims and in particular women is also present. Some of these are related to the fact that the person consciously or unconsciously associates a series of stereotypes with the identity of a candidate, which represent a cost or risk for them. For example, it is the belief that because a person has a foreign-sounding

43 National study on Domestic and Gender Based Violence, Partners Bulgaria Foundation, 2016 https://partnersbg.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Analytical-Report-EN_web.pdf

44 <https://www.leparisien.fr/societe/les-testing-le-confirment-les-musulmans-sont-surexposes-aux-discriminations-06-11-2019-8187189.php>

45 <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/journal-de-lislamophobie/france-les-actes-islamophobes-en-hausse-de-53-en-2020-/2126454>

46 https://www.francetvinfo.fr/societe/debats/l-angle-eco-quand-le-voile-eloigne-les-femmes-musulmanes-de-lemploi_1276395.html

name, he or she has a lower income and will therefore be less able to pay the rent. The other explanation is outright racism⁴⁷.

Examples of action against Islamophobia in France:

1. The International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism (Licra) and the Great Mosque of Paris (GMP) signed a partnership agreement in May 2021 to "better fight against anti-Muslim racism" and "accompany and support citizens who are victims of it"⁴⁸

The cooperation between these two organizations aims to provide concrete support to victims by benefiting from the voluntary assistance of about one hundred LICRA lawyers. This agreement also allows the implementation of joint educational and training actions in the field around Laicity, universalism, and Republican values.

2. Every year in France, from 21 to 28 March, the Week of Education and Action against Racism and Anti-Semitism⁴⁹ promotes the commitments of all institutions and their partners in favour of the values of freedom, equality and fraternity and the fight against all forms of discrimination including Islamophobia.

Raising pupils' awareness of the problems of racism, intolerance and exclusion can take several forms: meetings and debates, artistic and cultural activities, educational workshops, forums, production of content for all types of media (written, audiovisual, online, etc.), sporting events, etc.

Testimony of a Muslim woman shared during the focus group:

Habiba* shared that when she was looking for a job at the end of her higher education studies, her Mission Locale* counsellor warned her that jobseekers with an Arabic sounding name and who come from popular neighborhoods will have much more difficulty finding a job that corresponds to their level of study.

* *Fictitious first name*

* *Mission Locale: an institution that support NEET in France*

3.4 Hungary

The denial of access to different services (for example, access to housing, shopping, leisure activities, sports, etc.), as well as the labour market, is a reality for many people who are perceived as Muslim. Indeed, discrimination and aggression are often a daily occurrence for people who either are Muslim or are perceived to be Muslim. They face many acts of violence and discrimination throughout Europe. Although Hungary has only a small Muslim community - 5,579 persons (2,012 females and 3567 male) identified as Muslim in the census of 2011, from which 2524 live in Budapest (KSH data⁵⁰) -, Hungary is reported to

47 Podcast *What is Islamophobia - 01/06/2019, France Culture*

48 <https://www.licra.org/parteneriat-entre-la-licra-et-la-grande-mosquee-de-paris>

49 <https://www.education.gouv.fr/la-semaine-d-education-et-d-actions-contre-le-racisme-et-l-antisemitisme-5204>

50 https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/nepsz2011/nepsz_10_2011.pdf

have one of the highest rates of Islamophobia in the EU. Researchers found that 43% of the population would not accept Muslims or Arabs on any level on a Bogardus scale⁵¹ (Simonovits, 2013⁵²).

Among those confronted with Islamophobia, women and girls are particularly affected: in 2019 research reported a rise in the number of verbal attacks against women and girls in particular, since those wearing a headscarf or head-covering are the most visibly identifiable Muslims (Bayrakli, Hafez, 2019⁵³). Furthermore, SVF's research demonstrated that women and girls suffer discrimination in three main spheres: education, public spaces/reporting, and Media.

The high level of Islamophobia in Hungary can be explained by the lack of contact (between Hungarian natives and the Muslim population) and reliable information about the culture and practices of Islam. Moreover, the way Islam and Muslims are discussed in the educational curriculum is always in the context of violence and the threat of occupation. To be sure, Hungarians preserve a painful memory of Turks: even almost half a decade after the Ottoman occupation, children sing nursery rhymes about a ladybug tortured by the Turks and a stork who gets wounded by a Turkish kid and healed by a Hungarian one.

Another highly significant factor that has increased Islamophobia is the way Muslims are portrayed in the media. Over the course of a 2018 election campaign, the issue of migrants became conflated with a growing fear of Muslims. Social media exploded with xenophobia and click-bait websites that published fake news about Muslim refugees.⁵⁴ Most recently, the way the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus was framed in the media was by saying that the first official cases were Iranian students and since they were not Hungarian, it fits into the larger narrative of foreigners associated with Muslim-majority countries as bringing evil and chaos into Hungary. As a result of well-planned and funded attacks on migrants (often depicted as Muslims) using a diverse array of state-controlled media platforms, there has been a reported spike in open hostility towards anyone deemed to be Muslim.

Muslim girls and women are especially affected as they experience 'intersectional discrimination,' which is a process by which aspects of a person's social and political identity combine to create different modes of discrimination.

SVF has identified the main issues and has developed a list of recommendations for action. This action plan is built around themes in which it has become a priority to adopt concrete actions to prevent and fight against gender-based Islamophobia. The focus of the action plan was on education, and awareness-raising and reporting.

Promoting respect, equality and diversity amongst children at a young age is crucial when working towards an open and tolerant society. The educational recommendations of the Hungarian action plan focus on implementing programs in primary school curriculums which promote human rights-based critical thinking, gender equality, and exposes youngsters to the history of Islam in Hungary. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of personal contacts at an early age - when children have not yet internalized biases - which

51 "The Bogardus scale is a social distance scale that measures prejudice—or, more precisely, the degrees of warmth, intimacy, indifference or hostility—between an individual and any social, racial or ethnic groups." (Glen, S., 2018).

52 Simonovits, B. 2013. *Bevándorlók diszkriminációja - kisebbségi és többségi szemmel. [Discrimination of immigrants - from a minority and a majority perspective]* In: Kováts, A. ed. *Bevándorlás és integráció. Magyarországi adatok, európai indikátorok. [Immigration and integration. Hungarian data and European indicators]*.

53 <http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/HUNGARY.pdf>

54 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311557615_Why_an_anti-Islam_campaign_has_taken_root_in_Hungary_a_country_with_few_Muslims

can contribute to fighting prejudices, stereotypes, and racism.⁵⁵

In order to reduce discrimination and violence, it is also important to create a central reporting mechanism which encourages wide-spread knowledge of how to report cases of Islamophobia/discrimination. The Subjective Values Foundation and its partner organizations have created a platform to report hate crimes which is currently available in English, Polish and German. As it has been pointed out, lack of knowledge and understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim residents in Hungary feeds into the creation of stereotypes and prejudices. Raising awareness of all components in Hungarian society is essential to effectively combat Islamophobia against Muslim girls and women. To fight the Islamophobic views, the action plan underlines the urgent need to shift the current dominant anti-Muslim narratives by tackling stereotypes and disinformation. It is needed to give Muslims a space to shape their own narrative and to tell their stories in their own words.

'I won't go out with you, if you're wearing a headscarf.' To be a Muslim and to commit to becoming a Muslim takes a lot of courage. Many people believe that there are no female Hungarian Muslims that follow Islam by choice. The reaction given to their decision even in their family is often not *'darling, I am glad you have found your way in life,'* but rather *'why are you following the religion of terrorists?'* Many people think that those who decided to become Muslim were brainwashed, or fell in love with a Muslim man for whom they would do anything. This assumes that they have given up their autonomy, their ability to make their own judgements, and ultimately, themselves. This is often something that Hungarian family members accuse those in their family who have converted to Islam. In some cases, when some Hungarian Muslim women go home to see their families, they would rather lie about their beliefs than be honest with their families, for fear of judgement. For example, there are Muslim women who told their families that they had indigestion when asked if they would like to eat pork for dinner, rather than explain to their families that due to their religion they cannot eat pork. Such disclosures may seem trivial (it's just about diet, after all), but it is actually quite harmful that small differences like a religious-lead diet are kept secret out of fear of discrimination.

Those Muslim women who participated in SVF's focus groups pointed out that one major misconception among Hungarians is that Islam is foreign. They reported constantly feeling like outsiders in their own countries. Hungarian Muslim women are confronted by the anti-migrant posters and billboards all over Hungary telling them they are not wanted and to 'go home'. Participating in public spaces/transport was cited as very difficult at times due to the constant attention. Thanks to these ubiquitous difficulties, some women choose not to wear the headscarf because they do not want to expose themselves to this discrimination.

For Muslim women and girls, their native country, religion, ethnicity, and gender are just a few of the aspects that interact and make them particularly vulnerable to discrimination and violence in the Hungary. A multipronged effort is needed to combat Islamophobia against girls and women by addressing its root causes and taking concrete action for the inclusion of all. These actions must include political action and participation on both the local and national level. Muslim women must be consulted and heard, and treated as being apart of a diverse community. In order to tackle the complex problem, we must acknowledge that the community that we are trying to assist is not a monolith.

⁵⁵ Allport, G. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley Blackwell.

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3.5 Italy

A research conducted by the ISMU Foundation in 2017 estimates that about 2,520,000 Muslims are resident in Italy, equal to 4% of the entire resident population. In Italy Islam is the second most widespread religion in the country, with 2.5 million faithful; over a million are of Italian citizenship.⁵⁶

In the territory of Milan, the main area of action of the project, the ISMU as of January 1, 2017 estimated 115.000 foreign Muslim residents within the metropolitan area of Milan, to which are added about 95,000 Muslims of Italian citizenship; a highly significant numbers, the Islamic minority, composed of over 200.000 people and representing 6.5% of the total population of the Metropolitan area of Milan. In addition, it is recorded that 45% of Muslims are Italian, a number that denotes how the Italian component over the years has been gradually increasing within a religious minority initially composed of foreign citizens, and how the growth of Muslim communities is less and less linked to migratory flows but has developed an increasingly structured and widespread rooting in the Milanese territory. As for the female component, this corresponds to about a third of the 210.000 Muslims: 70.000 Muslim women, divided equally between foreigners and Italians.

According to the map of intolerance elaborated by VOX rights⁵⁷ in 2020, 65% of Italian Muslims declare that they have suffered episodes of violence, prejudice, or discrimination; 57% of Italians surveyed would not accept a Muslim as a member of

⁵⁶ https://www.ismu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Immigrati-e-religioni-in-Italia-2017_27.3.2018-1.pdf

⁵⁷ *Mappa dell'Intolleranza 5: islamofobia- Vox Diritti*

their family and 35% would not want a Muslim as a neighbors. Moreover, Islamophobia is confirmed in pole position in the ranking of online hatred⁵⁸, mainly in the cities of Bologna, Turin, Milan, Venice. Instigated by international events, such as the attacks, and instigated by a certain political narrative, intolerance against people of Islamic faith diminishes in communities where their presence is more integrated.

Muslim girls and women are, even in Italy, among the most affected, especially when wearing the veil or religious symbols outside and in social spaces.

This is confirmed by what emerged from the focus groups carried out with Muslim and non-Muslim children within the MEET project. Muslim women and girls are considered: oppressed, submissive, without any capacity to take an active role within the society, they are always forced to wear the veil, they are not educated, and they are not economically independent. At the same time, however, they are considered dangerous, they support violence and terrorism. They are also always foreigners/migrants/refugees.

In the face of these stereotypes, the discrimination suffered is many and falls on all aspects of social life, from school to work, from health to public services, from leisure opportunities to the use of public transport. These are the main discriminations underlined during the focus groups:

- Being insulted for wearing the veil
- Receive questions about why you do not remove the veil / receive requests to remove it
- Discrimination in the workplace and difficulty in finding a job (hijab)
- Being told to return to one's own country
- Different treatment in schools and universities (hijab, name)
- Difficulties in renting a house
- Discrimination in sport
- Insults on social media
- Negative portrayal by the media.

On top of that, the participants in the focus groups recognized the important role of the education system in shaping a tolerant attitude, knowledge, and culture of diversity in a given society but at the same time, they express their negative opinion on the capacity of the national education system in conveying the value of diversity and teach knowledge about Islam. One of the youth stated "religion lesson in schools is mainly about catholic religion and crucifixes are hung in all classrooms, sending the message that the true Italian is Christian."

In the MEET project, the work of the Local Observatory against Islamophobia has materialized in a proposal for an Action Plan for the Municipality of Milan aiming at a synergistic action to combat the growing discrimination against the Muslim citizens. The main points that this Action Plan would like to activate on the territory are the improvement of institutional communication and awareness of the Islamic community and of the entire citizenry, aimed at the prevention of Islamophobic acts, the support of victims and the importance of reporting.

⁵⁸ Mappa dell'intolleranza 4: musulmani = terroristi- Vox Diritti

The steps that are proposed therefore concern:

- 1. Analysis of the context**, with a research aimed at collecting information on the composition of the Islamic community, obstacles and discrimination in place;
- 2. Awareness and prevention** with training and information with schools and entrepreneurs, and exchanges with the Islamic community,
- 3. Support of victims** of Islamophobic acts with strengthening of help centres, anti-discrimination number and fight against under-reporting,
- 4. Monitoring and systematization** of data concerning Islamophobic acts and finally
- 5. Evaluation of the effectiveness** of the application of current laws and actions taken.

3.6 Poland

It is hard to say how many Muslims are there in Poland. According to 2015 official census, 5100 inhabitants of Poland declared themselves as Muslim. At the same time Muslim organizations estimate the Muslim population to exceed 41 thousand.

The population is very diverse. Poland hosts a Muslim community of Tatars, who have lived in Poland since XVII century. There are also more recently arrived groups, of many different backgrounds. Sex-generated data is not available.

The Muslim community is undergoing a major change right now. In August 2021 Poland evacuated 1000 predominantly Muslim Afghans from Kabul. Recent weeks also brought a migration crisis on the border between Poland and Belarus. In result, the population of Muslim asylum seekers and migrants has increased by several hundred in the most recent weeks.

Considering Poland as a country of 38 million people, the Muslims still constitute a very small number in the society. Yet, the public perception of this group is negative. With only 14 percent of population declaring to have ever met a Muslim person, islamophobia is an issue.

According to public opinion polls, the Muslims are the least liked from all the religious groups in Poland.⁵⁹ Polish people view Muslims as violent and hostile (nearly 40 percent) and unwilling to integrate (66 percent).

In reality, it is often the Muslims who themselves experience hostility. According to the report submitted in 2019 to the United Nations Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) by the Polish Ombudsman, "Since 2016, Muslims have been the group most frequently targeted by hate crime in Poland." In 2019, CERD requested an additional report from Poland which is a highly unusual measure indicating an urgent need for addressing hate crime arising in Poland.

Hate speech is an important difficulty faced by the Muslims, particularly migrants and particularly the women. Participants of MEET focus group confirm this.

⁵⁹ CBOS Public Opinion Poll, 2019: https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2019/K_148_19.PDF

"[Muslim] Women wake up every day expecting that something unpleasant will happen. Nasty comments on the street, being poked, bad looks – for many women this is an everyday experience",

MEET focus group participant

Access of Muslim women to labor or education is not legally limited. There are no regulations on the dress code, for example, and wearing a scarf in a school or workplace is legal. Yet, the problem is with practice.

"For all my life I have worked as a teacher. But even if I learn the language perfectly, in contemporary Poland to have a teacher wearing a headscarf is unthinkable"

One of MEET's counterparts in Poland.

A 2018 report on religion-based discrimination in workplace⁶⁰ reports that many Muslims complain about discrimination at work. Issues pointed out include difficulties to celebrate religious holidays or obtain days off for holidays other than Christian, and discrimination of individuals who "strongly" declare their religion. Some respondents of the research pointed out that migrants are scammed by employers: wages are not paid, longer hours expected, staff is threatened that the legal work status will be revoked if they do not follow excessive requirements.

MEET focus group participants also point out that they often face discrimination not as workers, but as clients – trying to deal with various issues in offices and institutions. Many Muslim women stated that life is easier for them in bigger cities, where populations are more diverse and they do not feel that they stand out so much.

Some Muslim women complain about public indifference, when unpleasant or discriminatory incidents take place. Some describe this lack of public reaction as "painful". Many report they feel disregarded or not taken seriously by the police. Often, complaints about discrimination or hate speech are left unreported. Often they are reported as hooligan acts, not hate speech or race-based crime. On many occasions women say they are treated by the police as perpetrators or "provokers" of trouble – because they represent a religion other than the predominant one in the country.

Quality of legal protection is a big issue in Poland, together with awareness raising. The Local Observatory on Islamophobia created within MEET project called for complex awareness-raising activities and efforts aimed at bringing diverse local communities together. The more contact, the less fear, the authors summarized their call for action. More local space for dialogue, hearing each other and making space for interaction results in everyone feeling safer and more included. Establishing platforms for discussion between Muslim and non-Muslim on the level of local administration is a good first step, they say.

⁶⁰ Elżbieta Cizewska-Martyńska, Marcin Jewdokimow, Mustafa Switat and Bartłomiej Walczak, "Rynek pracy a równe traktowanie ze względu na wyznanie. Raport z badania", (Warsaw University, Warsaw: 2018): https://siecobywatelska.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Raport_rynek-pracy-a-r%C3%B3wne-traktowanie-ze-wzgl%C4%99du-na-wyznanie.pdf

CHAPTER 4

POLICY INTERVENTIONS

4.1 EU Legal Framework

In line with principles of dignity and equality inherent in all human beings, as declared in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969) and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000), the European Union rejects all form of racism and operates to dismantle obstacles to ensure that citizens have full access to rights and support of the victims of hate crimes.

In particular the 2008 [Framework Decision on combating certain forms of expressions of racism and xenophobia](#) by means of criminal law, prohibits public incitement to violence or hatred based on race, color, ethnicity and religion. All EU Member States had to implement these rules into their national criminal laws. This means that those who preach hate or call for violence, based on anti-Muslim prejudice, can be brought to justice by national authorities.

In addition, relevant pieces of EU legislation to combat racism, discrimination and other kinds of intolerance include:

- the [Victims Rights Directive](#) which establishes minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of all victims of crime, paying particular attention to victims who have suffered a crime committed with a bias or discriminatory motive;
- the [Audiovisual Media Services Directive](#), banning incitement to hatred in audiovisual media services and the promotion of discrimination in audiovisual commercial communications;
- legislation in the area of [non-discrimination](#), in particular the [Race Equality Directive](#) prohibiting discrimination on grounds of racial or ethnic origin in several walks of life, and the Employment Equality Directive prohibiting discrimination on several grounds in the field of employment

However, the current EU anti-discrimination legislation beyond the spheres of employment, occupational and vocational training only applies to sex and racial or ethnic origin. There is no horizontal approach covering all grounds of discrimination and this results in a lack of legislation to protect this group.

To close such gaps in protection against any form of discrimination – including gendered islamophobia – the Council of Europe has presented in 2008 a Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The proposal supplements the existing EC legal framework under which the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation applies only to employment, occupation and vocational training.

The adoption of the “EU-anti racism action plan 2020-2025: a union of Equality” adopted by the European Commission in September 2020 is a step forward in tackling racism by strengthening synergies among CSOs and European institutions.

4.2 EU Action Plan Against Racism

Following the tragic killing of George Floyd, mass mobilizations across the globe united minority communities to challenge racism across society. The EU commission published A Union of Equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020–2025. The publishing of the action plan was a landmark moment for the EU, as the plan acknowledged the existence of structural, institutional and historical dimensions of racism in Europe and the need to address them through wide-ranging, proactive policies. The action plan outlined that the plan would work on three levels – Local, National and Global.

As part of the plan the European Commission acknowledged that action would be taken in the following key areas:

- EU legal framework
- Fair policing and protection
- Education and remembrance
- Economy, employment, housing, healthcare
- Extremism and hate speech
- Better data collection
- Diversity in the European Commission

With regards to work done to challenge Gendered Islamophobia, the EU Action Plan provides an opportunity for human rights defenders to actively engage with local, national and European bodies to tackle this specific form of racism. As the plan makes a specific mention of the need for mainstream racial equality to be centered in an "**intersectional approach**".

Furthermore, the plan outlines the need for equality data collection to be disaggregated by race, this should provide the specific opportunity for human rights defenders to

establish clear understanding regarding the specific challenges faced by racialised groups. The analysis of this data should provide a basis for robust equality policies addressing discrimination faced by Muslim women and girls.

4.3.1 Cross European Policy Recommendations

- The adoption of guidelines to implement an intersectional approach to religious dress restrictions by recognising these restrictions mostly target Muslim women and are against full gender equality. These guidelines could promote non-discriminatory approaches to enable full inclusion of all Muslim women in all areas of life.
- Develop and strengthen funding programmes enabling civil society working against Gendered Islamophobia to develop long-term projects for capacity building, advocacy for equality and educational programmes aimed at advocating against this specific form of racism.
- The creation of a European Institutional working group focusing on the creation of effective non-discriminatory media guidelines, to ensure that reporting on Muslim women and girls is in adherence with European equality law.

4.3.2 Examples of Effective National and Local Policy initiatives

Defining Islamophobia and Creation of a Cross Party Consensus – United Kingdom

Following an extensive cross-party inquiry to develop a working definition of Islamophobia in 2018, after two years of consultation, on 27th November 2018, the APPG on British Muslims published a report titled "Islamophobia Defined: the inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia."

The definition was presented as the following:

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

The definition published by the group included contemporary examples of Islamophobia that organisations that adopted the definition would recognise as specific form of prejudice, in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in encounters between religions and non-religions in the public sphere.

Examples included:

"Calling for, aiding, instigating or justifying the killing or harming of Muslims in the name of a racist/ fascist ideology, or an extremist view of religion."

"Applying double standards by requiring of Muslims behaviors that are not expected or demanded of any other groups in society, e.g. loyalty tests."

The following UK Political Parties have formally endorsed the definition:

- The Labour Party

- Liberal Democrats
- Plaid Cymru
- Scottish National Party
- Scottish Conservatives
- Scottish Greens

Since the publishing of the statement by the APPG, over 21 Councils and Metropolitan Authorities have passed the definition including in the cities of London, Manchester, Birmingham and Newcastle.

Following pressure by the APPG the UK Government set up a parallel independent policy group to establish a definition that could be utilized as part of a UK definition of Islamophobia. The UK Government definition of Islamophobia remains unpublished.

The Barcelona Municipal Plan Against Islamophobia - Spain

In 2016, the City Council of Barcelona conducted a study on "The religious practice of the Muslim communities of Barcelona. Expressions and Problems". The study clearly pointed to the severe discrimination suffered by Muslim women carrying hijab in fields such as education or the labour market, and the need to raise awareness about Islamophobia as a root cause of these forms of discrimination. After a broad consultative process, the "Municipal Plan against Islamophobia" was launched in January 2017, involving Muslim people and associations, human rights defenders, municipal civil servants, experts and scholars.

The plan contains 28 concrete measures based on an integrated, preventative and flexible method and inspired by an intercultural and human rights approach. It also has a diverse and participatory monitoring commission that adapts the plan to new needs detected. The plan, among other measures, has set on the local agenda the 12th December as the international day on the fight against Islamophobia. The plan reinforces the municipal safeguards mechanism through the Office for Non-Discrimination for victims of discrimination, and this has led to prosecution of several cases.

After two years of implementation, up to a total of 1872 municipal employees have received training on human rights and diversity. The European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMED) has created an observatory on the narratives about Muslims in the media, and the first report on discrimination in the city of Barcelona, drafted jointly between the City Council and human rights activists, was published.

CHAPTER 5

RESOURCES AND INFORMATION TOOLS

5.1 Useful Resources and Research

RESOURCES:

- ENAR - Counter-Islamophobia Kit project
- EU Fundamental Rights Agency, Factsheet: Experience of Discrimination, Social Marginalization and Violence among Muslim and non-Muslim Youth
- MEET project website: Meet Project – More Equal Europe Together (alberodellavita.org)
- Center for Race & Gender, UCLA Berkeley- Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project
- Muslim Council of Britain: CfMM Special Report: How the British Media Reports Terrorism
- Muslim Council of Britain: Muslims in the Workplace: A Good Practice Guide for Employers and Employees (UK)
- Muslim Engagement and Development: School Resources
- The Bridge Initiative: Today in Islamophobia
- Open Society Foundations, Explainer: Islamophobia in Europe

RESEARCH:

- European Islamophobia Report
2019
2018
2017
2016
2015
- EU Fundamental Rights Agency, Reactions to the Paris attacks in the EU: fundamental rights considerations (2015)
- EU Fundamental Rights Agency, EU-MIDIS Data in Focus Report 2: Muslims (2009)
- Amnesty International, Choice and prejudice: Discrimination against Muslims in Europe (2012)
- Dokustelle: Anti-Muslim Racism Report (2020)
- Bi, S. 2018. Panopticons, Power and Pleasure: Why the Hijab is not a problem. Journal of Muslim Minority Studies, Vol.38 (1), pp.1-3
- Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Muslims – Selected findings (2017)
- Ligue des droits de l’homme Les interdictions de port du foulard visant des femmes adultes - Analyse de la Ligue des droits de l’Homme (2017)
- Forgotten Women: The Impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women (2016)
- INSSAN - Amicus Curiae - Comment Network against Discrimination and Islamophobia (Inssan e.V.) in the case C 157/15 Samira Achbita and Centrum voor gelijkheid van kansen en voor racismebestrijding versus G4S Secure Solutions NV - Evaluation of the Opinion of the Advocate General Juliane Kokott from the perspective of the antidiscrimination consultancy practice (2016)
- Zempi, Irene. "Veiled Muslim Women’s Responses to Experiences of Gendered Islamophobia in the UK." International Review of Victimology: 26.1 96-111 (2020)
- Runnymede Trust – Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All (2018)
- Dr James Carr - Expressions of Islamophobia: Living with Racism in the Neoliberal

- Era, Abingdon: Routledge (2018)
- National Union of Students (UK) - The Experience of Muslim Students (2018)
 - Chatham House - What Do Europeans Think About Muslim Immigration (2017)
 - Allen, C. 2017. Towards a working definition of Islamophobia: A briefing paper. University of Birmingham, School of Social Sciences, pp. 1-11
 - Restrictions on Women's Religious Attire. (2016). Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project
 - Gawlewicz, A. & Narkowicz, K. (2015). Islamophobia on the move: circulation of anti-Muslim prejudice between Poland and the UK. In: Muslims in the UK and Europe (Suleiman, Yasir ed.), Centre of Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, pp. 90-10.
 - Open Society Foundations, Muslims in Europe: A Report on 11 EU Cities (2009).

5.2 Key Organizations in Europe

- European Forum of Muslim Women (EU)
- Collectif pour l'Inclusion et contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique (BE)
- Fundación Al Fanar para el Conocimiento Árabe (ESP)
- European Network Against Racism (EU)
- European Network on Religion and Belief (EU)
- Progetto Aisha (IT)
- Dokustelle (AUT)
- Open Society European Policy Institute (EU)



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