

# British Muslim Perspectives at the 2019 General Election



**MCB**

The Muslim Council of Britain

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) is a national representative Muslim umbrella body with over 500 affiliated national, regional and local organisations, including mosques, charities and schools.

It is an independent, democratic body, established to promote consultation, cooperation and coordination on Muslim affairs in the United Kingdom.

The Muslim Council of Britain is a non-sectarian body working for the common good without interfering in, displacing or isolating any existing Muslim work in communities.

It is a broad-based, representative organisation of Muslims in Britain, accommodating and reflecting the variety of social and cultural backgrounds and outlook of Muslim communities.

The Muslim Council of Britain is pledged to work for the common good of society as a whole; encouraging individual Muslims and Muslim organisations to play a full and participatory role in public life.

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Authored by Zainab Gulamali

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# Introduction

**The forthcoming General Election is an important opportunity for a renewed national conversation on matters of great significance. With politics in the UK going through a time of unprecedented change, it is more important than ever that all Muslims who are eligible to vote do so and participate in the political process.**

In many respects, the issues that concern Muslims will be no different to those facing fellow Britons. In constituencies up and down the country, British Muslims will be just as impacted by Brexit, our health service and the state of the economy as anyone else. In a 2016 survey, 93% of Muslims said they felt they belonged to Britain, with more than half saying they felt this “very strongly”.<sup>1</sup>

Like other faith communities with a strong affinity to their religious identity, it is evident that Muslims in Britain are passionate about being both British and Muslim. In addition, there are serious concerns of the resurgence of the far-right together with growing Islamophobia from the governing party to sections of the media, which have shaped social attitudes about Muslims.

It is with this background and in this environment that *British Muslim Perspectives at the 2019 General Election* is published by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). It reflects a considered view from British Muslim communities and is offered for reflection by political parties, prospective parliamentary candidates and policymakers. This report is published with the hope that the recommendations outlined here will be taken

up by the next government, making a positive impact on British Muslims and indeed, society at large.

The MCB’s vision is to empower Muslim communities to engage in political and public life and contribute to achieving a just, cohesive and successful British society. The rich traditions and heritage of Islam urge Muslims to be concerned about and engage with the issues facing the society in which they live, whether it is the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) establishing the trade pact League of the Virtuous (*Hilf al-Fudul*) to enable respect of fairness in trade agreements, to Prophetic sayings (*hadiths*) urging people to conserve water when performing ablution (*wudu*) “even if you are at a flowing river” which should guide our approach to environmental stewardship.

Therefore, this General Election is a valuable opportunity for British Muslims to make their voices heard by exercising their civil obligation to engage with the political process. The MCB calls on British Muslims to participate in the political process and seeks to facilitate their engagement so as to ensure that every voice is heard in this election.





# Ten Key Pledges to Support Muslim Communities

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) has developed extensive experience through working for the interests of Muslim communities for over 20 years, with polling suggesting that a majority of respondents believe the Muslim Council of Britain does a good job of representing the views of Muslims.<sup>2</sup> The MCB has once again conducted a detailed survey of its affiliates and wider Muslim communities, including speaking to over 500 Muslims across Britain about the policies they want political parties and the next government to prioritise. The following represents a consensus view of those surveyed, which have been consolidated into key pledges the MCB seeks to obtain from political parties in the 2019 General Election.

These pledge requests are by no means exhaustive and are derived from this election policy platform. Through this policy platform, the MCB seeks to highlight the positive change needed to unlock the full potential of Muslim communities to play their full part in the success of our nation.

## **1 Tackle Racism and Islamophobia**

Adopt the APPG on British Muslims definition of Islamophobia across the UK, defining Islamophobia as being rooted in racism and as a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.

Combat Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, far-right sentiment and all forms of racism and bigotry in political parties, on our streets, online and in our media.

## **2 Religious Liberty**

Defend the right of Muslims – and people of all faiths – to express their faith, be that in religious clothing, food and reasonable accommodation of religious observance.

## **3 Engagement with Muslim Communities**

Commit to proactively engage with a broad and representative spectrum of British Muslim communities to ensure a plurality of views are being considered.

#### **4 Safety at Places of Worship**

Safeguard visitors at places of worship, by providing support and funding for any Muslim institutions to implement safety measures, in line with other faith groups.

#### **5 Effective Health and Elderly Care Services**

Focus policymaking on ensuring equity for all sections of society, recognising the gap in health and wellbeing standards, particularly between older and elderly Muslims and the general population.

#### **6 Refugees**

Encourage the resettlement of refugees across the UK, working with communities to address and tackle issues faced by refugees resettling in Britain.

#### **7 Full Economic, Social and Public Participation in British Life**

Enhance democracy by enabling increased participation of minorities and women in politics and public life, addressing the underlying socio-economic challenges in place.

#### **8 Criminal Justice**

Address the disparity of treatment and outcomes for BAME people within the criminal justice system. Rebuild trust with Muslim communities by ensuring all counter-terror legislation is evidence-led, non-discriminatory, and open to evaluation.

#### **9 Equality in Education**

Ensure a fair approach to educational provision for all children, with a syllabus that reflects the diversity of communities, with appropriate parent involvement.

#### **10 Ethical Foreign Policy**

Support a binding recognition of Palestine as an independent and sovereign state, and address human rights abuses abroad, including in Kashmir, Xinjiang and Myanmar.

# How British Muslim Votes Matter

As the Muslim Council of Britain's *British Muslims in Numbers* report observes, there are 26 parliamentary constituencies in England and Wales that have a Muslim population of 20% or more. In 2017, Muslim voters made up an estimated 10% or more of voters in 83 constituencies, 13% of all parliamentary seats. Across the UK, two constituencies, Birmingham, Hodge Hill and Bradford West, have estimated Muslim electorates of over 50%.<sup>3</sup>

## Parliamentary constituencies with over 20% Muslim population

Constituency	Majority Party in 2017 Election	Overall Population	Muslim Population	Muslims as % of Overall Population
Birmingham, Hodge Hill	Labour	121,678	63,417	52.1
Bradford West	Labour	114,761	58,872	51.3
Birmingham, Hall Green	Labour	115,904	53,990	46.6
East Ham	Labour	149,842	56,008	37.4
Bradford East	Labour	113,820	42,056	36.9
Blackburn	Labour	107,246	38,887	36.3
Bethnal Green and Bow	Labour	125,351	44,409	35.4
Birmingham, Ladywood	Labour	126,693	44,626	35.2
Ilford South	Labour	131,035	45,757	34.9
Poplar and Limehouse	Labour	128,745	43,287	33.6



Continued from page 8

Constituency	Majority Party in 2017 Election	Overall Population	Muslim Population	Muslims as % of Overall Population
<b>Manchester, Gorton</b>	Labour	111,198	32,010	28.8
<b>Leicester South</b>	Labour (Co-op)	119,287	33,152	27.8
<b>West Ham</b>	Labour	158,142	42,448	26.8
<b>Walthamstow</b>	Labour (Co-op)	111,263	28,207	25.4
<b>Luton South</b>	Labour	110,180	27,874	25.3
<b>Oldham West and Royton</b>	Labour (Co-op)	102,616	25,220	24.6
<b>Edmonton</b>	Labour (Co-op)	112,059	27,488	24.5
<b>Slough</b>	Labour	134,048	31,942	23.8
<b>Rochdale</b>	Labour	107,805	25,429	23.6
<b>Birmingham, Perry Barr</b>	Labour	107,090	24,268	22.7
<b>Leyton and Wanstead</b>	Labour	104,183	23,582	22.6
<b>Westminster North</b>	Labour	116,771	26,431	22.6
<b>Luton North</b>	Labour	98,947	22,142	22.4
<b>Brent Central</b>	Labour	137,438	29,198	21.2
<b>Birmingham, Yardley</b>	Labour	106,738	21,992	20.6
<b>Leicester East</b>	Labour	108,520	21,705	20.0

Taken from *British Muslims in Numbers: A Demographic, Socio-Economic and Health Profile of Muslims*

## Why it appears Muslims voting made a difference in high and medium impact seats in 2017

Analysis by the MCB ahead of the election identified 16 constituencies where the impact of Muslim communities could be “high”. In these seats, the swing in the majority towards Labour was 7,789 on average, equivalent to c.16% of the electorate, compared to the national swing of c.2%. Every one of these 16 seats are now held by the Labour Party, with the Labour majority increasing in 11 of the seats where it was the incumbent, and five previously Conservative seats being won by Labour.

The MCB also identified 23 constituencies where the impact of Muslim communities could be “medium”. In these, the swing in the majority towards Labour (or the Liberal Democrats in the Conservative-Lib Dem marginal of Kingston & Surbiton) was 6,839 on average (c.15% of the electorate, compared to c.2% national swing).

Of these “medium” impact seats, 16 seats in which Labour was the incumbent saw an increase in the Labour majority, with the exception of Bolton North East. Of the seven previously Conservative seats:

- In five seats, the Conservatives retained the seat with a smaller majority due to a swing to Labour.
- In one seat, the Liberal Democrats gained from the Conservatives.
- In one seat, the Conservatives increased their majority by 135 votes (Bolton West).

The 2017 General Election delivered an inconclusive result, with no party gaining a majority in the House of Commons. The Conservative Party gained the greatest number of seats with 317, but this was still 9 seats short of a majority.

Though the 2017 General Election failed to show overwhelming support for any

political party, it did appear to show the strength and impact of Muslim communities coming out to vote.

In this report, the MCB has identified 31 marginal seats where Muslim voters are expected to have a “high” or “medium” impact. This analysis compares the number of Muslims of voting age in each constituency, as





calculated by the MCB's Research and Documentation Committee, updated population-by-constituency data from June 2018 and the results of the 2017 General Election. There are 18 marginal constituencies which have been identified as ones in which Muslim voters may have a "high" impact and 13 constituencies which have been identified as ones in which Muslim voters may have a "medium" impact.

**The following metrics were calculated for all constituencies in the UK and Northern Ireland:**

- A. Margin of victory
- B. Estimated number of eligible Muslim voters
- C. Total size of electorate.

The number of Muslims above the voting age (above the age of 18) in a constituency was calculated by the Muslim Council of Britain's Research & Documentation Committee. The broad principle used the proportion of Muslims in each constituency (split by age band) in the 2011 Census, and the total population in each constituency as at June 2018 (ONS), with slight differences between England & Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The estimated number of likely Muslim voters was calculated by assuming Muslims above the age of 18 in the constituency vote in a similar proportion to the broader 2017 electorate in that constituency.

## High Impact

Constituency name	MP name	Party	Runner-up party	Margin of victory
<b>Kensington</b>	Emma Dent Coad	Labour	Conservative	20
<b>Dudley North</b>	Ian Austin	Labour	Conservative	22
<b>Richmond Park</b>	Zac Goldsmith	Conservative	Liberal Democrats	45
<b>Glasgow South West</b>	Chris Stephens	SNP	Labour	60
<b>Keighley</b>	John Grogan	Labour	Conservative	239
<b>Chipping Barnet</b>	Theresa Villers	Conservative	Labour	353
<b>Hendon</b>	Matthew Offord	Conservative	Labour	1,072
<b>Peterborough</b>	Lisa Forbes	Labour	Brexit	683
<b>Pendle</b>	Andrew Stephenson	Conservative	Labour	1,279
<b>Bedford</b>	Mohammad Yasin	Labour	Conservative	789
<b>Colne Valley</b>	Thelma Walker	Labour	Conservative	95
<b>Finchley and Golders Green</b>	Mike Freer	Conservative	Labour	1,657
<b>Harrow East</b>	Bob Blackman	Conservative	Labour	1,757
<b>Dewsbury</b>	Paula Sherriff	Labour	Conservative	3,321
<b>Putney</b>	Justine Greening	Conservative	Labour	1,554
<b>Cities Of London and Westminster</b>	Mark Field	Conservative	Labour	3,148
<b>Glasgow Central</b>	Alison Thewliss	SNP	Labour	2,267
<b>Watford</b>	Richard Harrington	Conservative	Labour	2,092

The MCB considers these 18 seats to be "High-Impact", because the current margin of victory is small (<5000), and the proportion of Muslim voters in the constituency is significant compared to the margin of victory (Muslim population > 5% and estimated number of Muslim voters > 5x margin of victory; or Muslim population > 2.5% and estimated number of Muslim voters > 10x margin of victory)

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Constituency name	Total size of 2017 electorate	% of voting age constituents who are Muslim (June 2018)	Estimated number of eligible Muslim voters* (June 2018)	Muslim electorate vs. margin
Kensington	60,588	9%	5,431	271.5x
Dudley North	62,043	4%	1,666	75.7x
Richmond Park	80,025	4%	3,213	71.4x
Glasgow South West	62,991	4%	1,430	23.8x
Keighley	71,429	9%	5,158	21.6x
Chipping Barnet	77,218	6%	4,087	11.6x
Hendon	76,522	12%	8,395	7.8x
Peterborough	70,199	11%	4,841	7.1x
Pendle	64,962	14%	6,519	5.1x
Bedford	71,829	6%	3,323	4.2x
Colne Valley	84,387	5%	3,393	3.7x
Finchley and Golders Green	73,329	8%	5,874	3.5x
Harrow East	71,755	10%	5,958	3.4x
Dewsbury	81,343	14%	8,632	2.6x
Putney	65,031	6%	3,557	2.3x
Cities Of London and Westminster	61,533	10%	7,113	2.3x
Glasgow Central	64,346	10%	5,016	2.2x
Watford	86,507	7%	4,275	2.0x

\*Estimate based on assuming proportion of Muslim voters equivalent to proportion of broader electorate.

## Medium Impact

Constituency name	MP name	Party	Runner-up party	Margin of victory
<b>Southampton, Itchen</b>	Royston Smith	Conservative	Labour	31
<b>Canterbury</b>	Rosie Duffield	Labour	Conservative	187
<b>Glasgow North East</b>	Paul Sweeney	Labour	SNP	242
<b>Thurrock</b>	Jackie Doyle-Price	Conservative	Labour	345
<b>Stoke-On-Trent South</b>	Jack Brereton	Conservative	Labour	663
<b>Chingford and Woodford Green</b>	Iain Duncan Smith	Conservative	Labour	2,438
<b>Crawley</b>	Henry Smith	Conservative	Labour	2,457
<b>Glasgow South</b>	Stewart Malcolm McDonald	SNP	Labour	2,027
<b>Enfield, Southgate</b>	Bambos Charalambous	Labour	Conservative	4,355
<b>Bolton North East</b>	David Crausby	Labour	Conservative	3,797
<b>Wolverhampton South West</b>	Eleanor Smith	Labour	Conservative	2,185
<b>Halifax</b>	Holly Lynch	Labour	Conservative	5,376
<b>Reading East</b>	Matt Rodda	Labour	Conservative	3,749

The MCB considers these 13 seats to be “Medium-Impact”. There are two sets of criteria for such seats. Either the margin of victory is small (>5000) but Muslim population is not big enough for it to be “High impact” but still material e.g. >1000 estimated Muslim voters and this is > 2x margin of victory). Or the margin of victory is relatively small (<10,000) and the Muslim population is large (> 5%) and greater than the margin of victory.

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Constituency name	Total size of 2017 electorate	% of voting age constituents who are Muslim (June 2018)	Estimated number of eligible Muslim voters* (June 2018)	Muslim electorate vs. margin
<b>Southampton, Itchen</b>	71,722	2%	1,245	40.2x
<b>Canterbury</b>	78,182	1%	1,055	5.6x
<b>Glasgow North East</b>	59,931	3%	1,010	4.2x
<b>Thurrock</b>	78,154	2%	1,244	3.6x
<b>Stoke-On-Trent South</b>	66,057	3%	1,358	2.0x
<b>Chingford and Woodford Green</b>	65,958	8%	4,032	1.7x
<b>Crawley</b>	73,425	6%	3,490	1.4x
<b>Glasgow South</b>	69,126	6%	2,820	1.4x
<b>Enfield, Southgate</b>	65,210	10%	5,912	1.4x
<b>Bolton North East</b>	67,233	9%	4,724	1.2x
<b>Wolverhampton South West</b>	59,971	5%	2,709	1.2x
<b>Halifax</b>	71,224	10%	5,709	1.1x
<b>Reading East</b>	75,537	6%	3,927	1.0x

\*Estimate based on assuming proportion of Muslim voters equivalent to proportion of broader electorate.

# British Muslims in our Democracy and Public Life

**With the UK going through unprecedented levels of change, this election is a chance to build a more inclusive society whose shared values are shaped through the participation of all people.**

This General Election is extremely important not just for Muslims, but for the wider society in responding to the changing face of Britain. As members of British society, Muslims are as invested in the way the country is run and how it prospers as anyone else.

Muslims are also affected by government just like everyone else, though there are many policies which impact Muslims disproportionately compared to other faith groups. In some instances, this impact is by virtue of many Muslims being in low socio-economic groups, thus making them more likely to be affected by changes to austerity measures and social security. Other policies, however, impact Muslims more explicitly because they are Muslim – from national security measures to policies around Islamic finance.

Muslims are not a homogeneous community. Muslims, as well as being ethnically diverse, also come from a number of socio-economic groups and professions, and do not all affiliate with one particular political party. Muslims vote for different reasons like all voters. Unfortunately there have been claims to the contrary that only seek to stigmatise

and undermine Muslims, like the claim that the Pakistani community (often used as a proxy for Muslims) “votes en bloc as directed by Imams”.<sup>4</sup> Such claims have proven to be false, with the Government’s own analysis confirming that “minorities are not a bloc vote that automatically supports Labour irrespective of Labour’s performance”.<sup>5</sup>

The Muslim Council of Britain continues to support local efforts to engage and participate in the political process and urges affiliates and other bodies to work to encourage British Muslims to vote at the next election, particularly young people and women.

The MCB urges leaders to be particularly vigilant against attempts to disenfranchise Muslims. Recent efforts to smear Muslims in elections have been entirely unacceptable.<sup>6</sup> The discrimination against Muslims and a call for the denial of their democratic rights is fundamentally opposed to British values and should be explicitly condemned by all political parties. Such interventions are deeply harmful to community relations, particularly during General Elections when tensions can already be heightened.



## Political Participation and Engagement

The 2017 General Election delivered a record number of Muslim MPs in the House of Commons, with 12 Labour MPs and 3 Conservative MPs. This only constituted 2% of Parliamentarians, even though the UK's Muslim population stands at 5%.<sup>7</sup>

Muslim communities are not only underrepresented in politics, but in many other areas of public life. This leads to a perception, and unfortunately reality, of disenfranchisement. There is also significant underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, both within British Muslim communities and society at large. Whilst Muslim communities must continue working to increase women's involvement in Muslim organisations, **political parties should also take concrete steps to encourage Muslims, and particularly Muslim women, to join political parties and seek selection in local, regional and parliamentary elections.**

In addition, **political parties should develop stronger links with their respective internal Muslim affiliates.** This would also help them to understand the needs of and strengthen relationships with the British Muslim population.

The UK has an ageing electorate, meaning young people are significantly outnumbered, resulting in an inbuilt bias against governments who plan for the future. To counter this democratic imbalance **the MCB supports the call to lower the voting age in parliamentary elections from 18 to 16.**

For political parties, this election should be seen as an opportunity to properly engage with Muslim communities across the UK. During the next few weeks, hustings will be organised by various mosques and Islamic associations: the MCB urges prospective parliamentary candidates and political parties to participate and engage with their local Muslim communities.

Finally, as the political debate heats up during the election campaign, **the MCB urges all political parties to avoid hateful and divisive rhetoric.** All voters, including British Muslims, will be looking for leadership that sets out a positive vision for a fairer Britain.

### Recommendations

- Lower the voting age for parliamentary elections to 16.
- Develop stronger links with Muslim groups within political parties and encourage Muslims, and particularly Muslim women, to seek election.
- Avoid divisive politics that panders to the far-right and resorts to scapegoating any group in general political discourse.

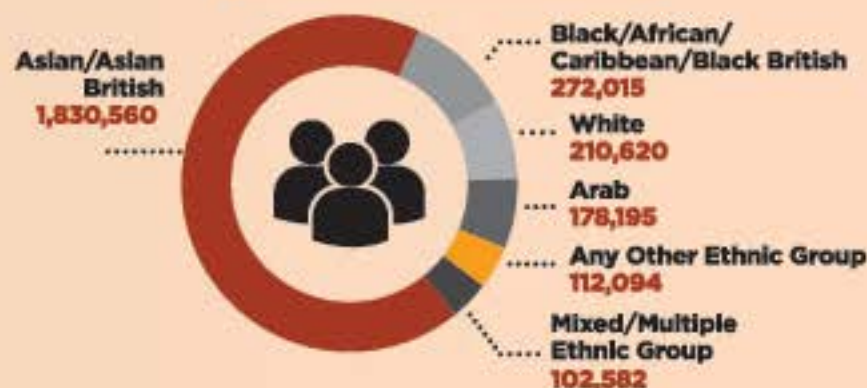


**OVER 2 MILLION MUSLIMS**

4.8% OF OVERALL POPULATION IN ENGLAND+WALES

1,409,290  
1,296,776  
**TOTAL=2,706,066**

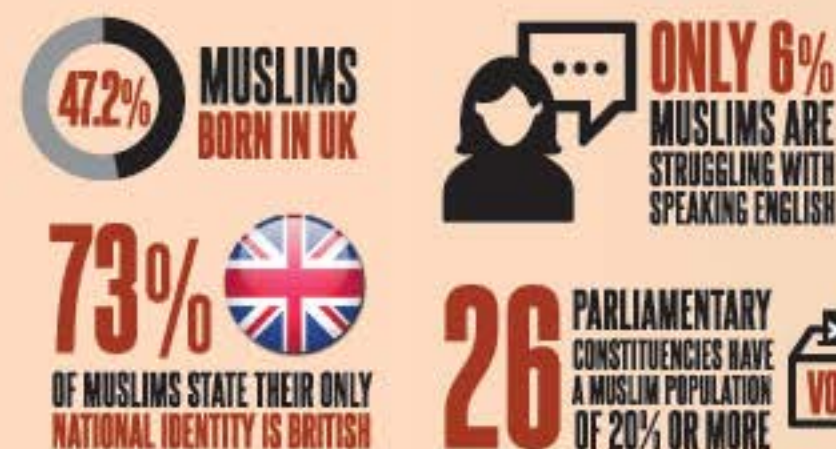
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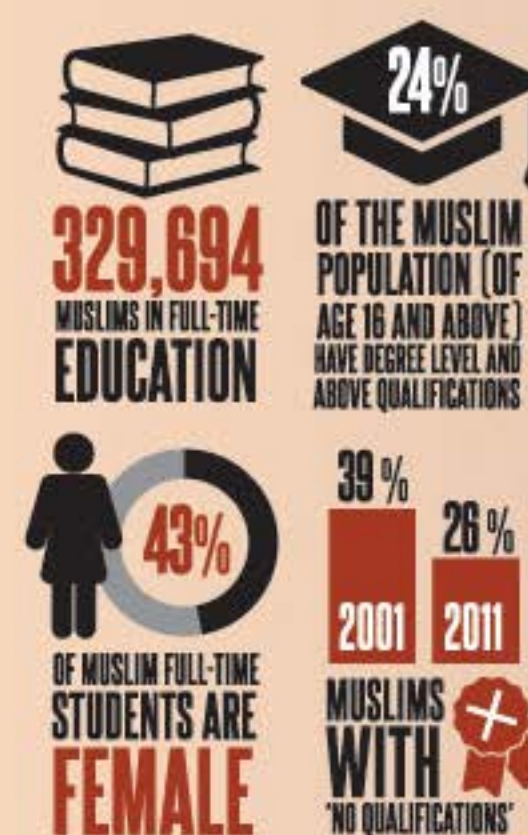
### AGE PROFILE



### BRITISH BORN & BRED



### EDUCATION



### HEALTH & DISABILITY



**MCB**

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# British Muslims in Numbers:

A Demographic, Socio-economic and Health Profile of Muslims in Britain drawing on the 2011 Census.

### MUSLIMS AT WORK



### HOUSING



### PRISON POPULATION



### DEPRIVATION







# Strengthening and Celebrating a Multifaith and Multicultural Society

Britain rightly prides itself as a nation that is inclusive of all faiths and cultures and accommodates those who wish to practice their faith. Enhancing pluralism and empowering a society rich in faith and cultural diversity will help to create a forward looking Britain.

## Britain as a Community of Communities

Since the 2016 referendum on European Union membership, Britain has been seen to become increasingly divided. Whatever the Brexit outcome, the next government must look at ways in which to mend the rift in society that appears to have been primarily caused by the Brexit debate. The next government should work proactively with all communities to better understand their needs, **and it is essential that the next government positively engages with wider Muslim communities.** Deeper community relations are vital in developing a more united, cohesive and stronger nation. Improving these relations between those of faith and those of no faith helps develop mutual understanding and strengthens communities.

**A focus on community cohesion must be prioritised, but an important part of the work required to achieve this is through addressing the underlying causes of inequality.** Inequality can be seen as a significant barrier to integration, and one of the reasons why many

communities in more deprived areas of the UK voted to leave the European Union. These barriers include the lack of opportunities, discrimination and the disproportionate impact of austerity on minority communities.

## The Religious Life of Muslims in Britain

Since the atrocities of 9/11, 7/7 and the multiple terrorist attacks in 2017, the religious life of Muslims in the UK has increasingly been called into question. Whether it is having the freedom to wear religious clothing, obtain halal food or access religiously mandated arbitration panels, the religiosity of Muslims is increasingly being presented as being incompatible with the oft cited “British values”.

Many British Muslims reject such notions, as Islam enables Muslims to make a positive contribution to British society. Attempts to curtail religious obligations go against the British values citizens are supposed to champion.

Animal welfare is at the heart of religious slaughter and those genuinely in favour of animal welfare should apply their standards across the board. **The next government should defend the rights of Muslims and Jews to practice slaughtering according to religious guidelines of Halal and Kosher respectively, and oppose the stigmatisation of religious minorities through pejorative labelling.**

When it comes to ‘Shari’ah courts’ or arbitration panels, it is important to realise that for those who choose them, they provide a valuable service for dispute resolution, as do religiously-mandated forums in other faiths.

The Muslim Council of Britain rejects notions that Muslims want ‘parallel legal systems’ or even a ‘Shari’ah state’. They must certainly operate within the law of this land, and Muslim communities must work together to ensure the services offered are of a high standard in modern Britain.

## Places of Worship

Places of worship and religious institutions are a key part of the day-to-day lives of many Muslims. With Britain promoting the freedom to practice religion, ensuring the safety of visitors and worshippers must be strengthened.

Mosques are a central feature of many Muslim communities, providing religious, cultural and social services – from Friday prayers and religious classes to recreational activities. Britain is home to an estimated 1,700 mosques, which

service well attended congregations and often open seven days a week.

The recent rise of far-right extremism in Britain, and the horrific terrorist attack on two mosques in New Zealand in March 2019 has meant that it is now more important than ever that the security of our mosques and Muslim institutions is maintained, especially during busy periods like Ramadan and Friday prayers. Following the attack in New Zealand, the UK Government announced additional funding and a widening of the scope for the Places of Worship Protective Security Scheme, which was welcomed by many Muslim communities across Britain.

The UK Government provides £14 million for the security of synagogues, schools and other Jewish centres.<sup>8</sup> **The next government should make available a proportionate level of funding for all faith communities with similar flexibility in its usage, engaging with mainstream Muslim organisations to ensure this is communicated to hard-to-reach communities, and to reassure and safeguard those communities.** Furthermore, funding to local police forces that can provide this level of support should be increased.

The overall Places of Worship Protective Security Scheme should be marketed and publicised to the widest range of places of worship, to allow all institutions to access this support. **The fund size should be reviewed in-line with the proportionality of the risks faced by faith communities, based on the latest hate crime data.**

Following consultation with a wide range of Muslim organisations both within and without their memberships for their views on issues of safety and security for mosques in the UK, the Muslim Council of Britain has produced a list of recommendations for the Home Office to improve the Places of Worship Protective Security Scheme.<sup>9</sup>

For the implementation of physical safety measures, places of worship should have the choice of selecting from a pool of approved contractors to perform the installation work, with the next government promoting an open and transparent scheme. Where places of worship feel particularly vulnerable to hate crime, local police and fire rescue services should be supported to deliver adequate and tailored training, for example, via a dedicated outreach officer in each region who understands the dynamics of local places of worship.

**However, the next government must also work closely with communities to avoid the over-securitisation of mosques and ensure that there is a balance between security requirements and continued openness and hospitality.** Regular consultation at the grassroots level directly with communities and institutions is central to this, and consultation should not be limited at purely a national level. The Places of Worship Protective Security Scheme is only available in England and Wales. **Therefore, a review should be undertaken as a matter of urgency to address the vulnerability to hate crime of places of worship in Scotland and Northern Ireland.**

## The Voluntary Sector

Faith-based voluntary organisations form a valuable and, in some cases, indispensable part of the Third Sector. British Muslims are heavily involved in volunteer work, with latest polling suggesting that Muslims give more in charity than any other faith or non-faith group.<sup>10</sup> The Muslim Charities Forum estimates that Muslims in Britain give an estimated £100million to charities in Ramadan alone.<sup>11</sup>

Over the last decade however, the Muslim voluntary sector has faced significant pressure from what is perceived to be a politicised Charity Commission. Though only 4.8% of charities in the UK are Muslim charities,<sup>12</sup> 38% of all disclosed investigations by the Charity Commission initiated between January 2013 and April 2014 were against Muslim charities.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, Muslim charities have found significant issues in accessing financial services, due to banks de-risking. This includes systematically closing or freezing accounts of charities, often without warning. This tends to be in response to governmental pressure to crack down on any potential of money laundering or other illegal activities. Muslim charities are disproportionately vulnerable to banks considering them to be higher risk because of their work in countries like Syria, Yemen and Somalia. For many charities, such action by a bank often results in damning and long-lasting reputational damage, as well as severely impacting humanitarian work being carried out on the ground.



The impact of this is particularly pertinent on smaller charities, which are often forced to pool resources and rely on the efforts of voluntary staff to retrieve access to accounts. Not only does this implicit discrimination cause extra work for charities to overcome the additional barriers faced, but also prevents critical financial aid to some of the most deprived places in the world.

This adds to a double bind where Muslim charities are unable to benefit because of religious and conscientious barriers to accepting lottery funding; and, as faith-based organisations, are not eligible for government funding because of the absence of a race element in their work. **It is essential that such bodies have greater access to alternative and equivalent funding.**

The MCB's *British Muslims in Numbers* report detailed a number of ways in which Muslim civil society needs to develop capacity and programmes to address social realities including loneliness, elderly care, homelessness and the high Muslim prison population. **The next government can help to ensure the Muslim voluntary sector has equal access to funding to address these issues.**

## Visit My Mosque Day

Visit My Mosque Day is a national initiative facilitated by the MCB, which encourages over 250 mosques across the UK to hold an open day to welcome in their neighbours from all faiths and none. This initiative is an important way of building bridges across communities and of creating opportunities to tackle negative stereotypes.

Islam is the second largest faith group in the UK with over 1,700 mosques (compared to circa 40,000 churches nationwide). With almost 90% of Britons having never visited a mosque,<sup>14</sup> the Visit My Mosque campaign, organised by local Muslim communities, is more important than ever in enabling members of the public to meet their local Muslim neighbours face-to-face.

Having started in February 2015 with 20 mosques, popular demand has led the initiative to expand to over 250 participating mosques nationwide in 2019. This has included visits from notable figures, including the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition and the Mayors of London and the West Midlands.

**The next government should show its support for campaigns like Visit My Mosque Day by encouraging ministers and MPs to take part.** Other places of worship should be encouraged to find ways to open their doors and their hearts to people of all faiths and none, in order that a tolerant, peaceful and integrated Britain is built.

## Recommendations

- Proactively engage with a broad and representative spectrum of British Muslim communities to ensure a plurality of views are being considered.
- Defend the right of Muslims – and people of all faiths – to express their faith, be that in religious clothing, food and reasonable accommodation of religious observance.
- Uphold the rights of Muslims and Jews to practice slaughtering according to religious guidelines.
- Support and fund security measures for faith communities and faith institutions.
- Review the size of the security fund in-line with the proportionality of the risks faced by faith communities.
- Avoid the over-securitisation of mosques and ensure a balance between security requirements and continued openness and hospitality.
- Review the vulnerability to hate crime of places of worship in Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- Facilitate equal access to government funding for the Muslim voluntary sector to tackle social issues.
- Support campaigns like Visit My Mosque Day and work with other places of worship to find ways to open doors to their communities.



# Islamophobia

Britain rightly prides itself as a nation that is inclusive of all religions and accommodates those who wish to practice their faith. However, enhancements to the quality of our pluralism are undermined by attacks, both on religiosity and religion, and outright religious hatred and discrimination.

## Defining Islamophobia

Muslim civil society has long been alert to racism, bigotry and discrimination against Muslims in its various manifestations. Three in five Muslims believe there is more prejudice against Muslims than other religious groups, a perception that is especially widespread among young Muslims and graduates,<sup>15</sup> and 70% of Muslims have reported that they have experienced religion-based prejudice in the last year.<sup>16</sup>

Islamophobia is still seen as an acceptable form of prejudice, demonstrated by many surveys including a YouGov poll which highlighted that 37% of the British public admitted they would be more likely to support policies to reduce the number of Muslims in Britain.<sup>17</sup> Whilst the term 'Islamophobia' has been used for decades, a formal, government-recognised definition of Islamophobia does not exist. In 2018, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, through extensive consultation, developed a definition of Islamophobia:

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

This definition allows a clear demarcation between unacceptable racist-like “othering” expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness, and critical discourse on the religion of Islam and Muslims which is part of healthy debate. A definition of Islamophobia is instrumental to the political will and institutional determination to tackle it.

This definition has now been endorsed and accepted by a cross section of Muslims, civil society, academics, political parties and councils. Regrettably, this definition was rejected by the last government, despite this definition having been endorsed by the Muslim communities that face Islamophobia. An overwhelming majority (88%) of respondents to the Muslim Council of Britain’s survey of its affiliates ahead of this General Election were in favour of the UK Government adopting this specific definition.

**It is imperative that the next government formally adopts the proposed definition of Islamophobia as the first concrete step towards tackling this form of prejudice and discrimination, which would positively impact upon British Muslim communities and reduce feelings of disenfranchisement.**

## Islamophobia in Political Parties

There has been a disturbing and dangerous rise in Islamophobic incidents and support of anti-Muslim sentiments within political parties. The MCB has been closely documenting such instances and reporting these to respective political parties. This is not an issue that is confined to a single political party, but has unfortunately been found across the board, though it is more widespread in some parties than others.

The MCB has raised highlighted issues with Islamophobia in the Conservative Party, Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Change UK, UK Independence Party (UKIP) and the Brexit Party. This includes Labour's former Communities Secretary claiming that going to the mosque five times a day is a sign of extremism,<sup>18</sup> a Liberal Democrat council candidate claiming Islamophobia "is not real",<sup>19</sup> and UKIP's former leader calling Islam a "death cult" and appointing the former EDL leader, Stephen Yaxley-Lennon as an "advisor" on grooming gangs and prisons.<sup>20</sup>

Islamophobia in the Conservative Party appears to be systemic and institutional, with anti-Muslim sentiments seen at every level in the party, including: the Prime Minister Boris Johnson, members of the Cabinet, the London Mayoral candidate in 2016, MPs, councillors and ordinary party members. The MCB has extensively documented the problem in the Conservative Party because of its prevalence and because it has been the party of government for almost a decade.<sup>21</sup>

Despite committing to an independent inquiry into Islamophobia in the Conservative Party during the Conservative Party leadership election,<sup>22</sup> Prime Minister Boris Johnson has since reneged on this commitment, instead holding a broad inquiry into prejudice and discrimination in the party.<sup>23</sup> Though an inquiry is needed to look at different types of prejudice across the party, Islamophobia appears to be so entrenched that a standalone inquiry is essential to begin to tackle the problem. The MCB continues to call for this inquiry, and strongly condemns the Party over its failure to address this issue, despite widespread condemnation, both internally and externally.

**All political parties must investigate thoroughly and independently the issues of Islamophobia within their parties, and ensure that internal party processes for dealing with disciplinary issues are fit for purpose.**

## Reporting Hate Crime

Since the 2016 referendum on European Union membership, there has been a rise in the following of far-right ideologies as a result of some political parties encouraging anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments, leading to an increasingly divided society.

Religious hate crime rose by 40% between 2017-18 across England and Wales to the highest levels ever recorded,<sup>24</sup> with data from the Home Office showing that more than half of religiously-motivated attacks were directed at Muslims.<sup>25</sup> Actual figures are likely to be much

higher, given some are categorised as racist rather than religiously motivated, and also because there is significant under-reporting within Muslim communities both to the police and to third-party monitoring agencies of Islamophobic hate crime. This is partially due to a trust deficit between the police and Muslim communities, which is not easily recoverable. **The next government should work within faith communities to understand the barriers to reporting hate crime and the culture of mistrust of the police and government institutions, and work with faith and cultural communities to overcome these barriers.**

## Impact of the Media

The majority of Britons polled believe “the media” is to blame for the prejudice Muslims face in daily life in Britain.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the MCB’s polling of British Muslims also found 74% of respondents identified the media portrayal of Muslims as the most important issue affecting Islamophobia. University of Cambridge/ ESRC Roundtable research has also concluded that mainstream media reporting about Muslim communities is contributing to an atmosphere of rising hostility towards Muslims in Britain.<sup>27</sup> Since 2006, academics have observed how media coverage on a global level has represented Muslims as underdeveloped, illiterate, homeless and orchestrators of failed states.<sup>28</sup>

The Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM), a project of the MCB, has been set up to improve the quality of reporting of Islam and Muslims in the media through constructive engagement.

Analysis conducted by the CfMM between October and December 2018 found 59% of all articles analysed associated Muslims with negative behaviours, over one-third of all articles misrepresented or generalised about Muslims, and 43% of all broadcast clips associated Muslims with negative behavior. Terrorism was the most recurring theme in reports relating to Muslims and Islam.<sup>29</sup> The way the media reports on Muslims and Islam affects many Muslims in their day to day lives.

By building an evidence base, CfMM is able to share areas of concern with the media, regulators, policy makers and politicians, as well as suggest ways forward. **The next government must work with the media and civil society to encourage more responsible reporting by journalists, and improvement in the standards of journalism when it comes to reporting on issues involving Muslims – and religion in general – and the tackling of unconscious bias.** With this, the MCB hopes to see improvements in the perception of Muslims in wider society.

The Leveson Inquiry, launched in the wake of the phone hacking scandal, sought to examine the culture, practice and ethics of the press. The first phase of the inquiry was completed, but in light of the press’s failure to engage in effective self-regulation, **the next government should ensure that the second part of the Leveson Inquiry is initiated as soon as possible and that Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 is speedily implemented.**



## Eradicating Racism

Britain should be a society free from all forms of racism, such as Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. Given the scale and growth of Islamophobia in the UK, the MCB believes **the next government should create a position for an Independent Islamophobia Advisor to mirror the newly created Independent anti-Semitism Advisor.**

Many Muslim communities also belong to different ethnic communities, including Asian, African, African-Caribbean, Arab, and others. Since the referendum on European Union membership, 71% of people from ethnic minorities report having faced racial discrimination.<sup>30</sup> **The next government must review current legislation to ensure that all forms of prejudice are put on an equal footing with equal protection under the law.**

Government, civil society and individuals must be committed to tackling the problem of racism faced by ethnic minorities. The Government's Hate Crime Action Plan (2016) has many important initiatives, but the progress report in 2018 demonstrates a serious failure in tackling Islamophobia in the same way as other forms of racism.

Some progress has been made on initiatives like tackling hatred against young people and educating young people as to what constitutes hate crime. On these initiatives, the Government has explicitly engaged a number of faith communities but has either failed to or failed to confirm engagement with Muslim communities on any of this work.

Furthermore, it appears the Government is yet to initiate any programme of work to meet its objective to assess the level of anti-Muslim bullying in schools, despite this being a prevalent issue amongst young people. In 2017, 4,509 students were excluded from schools in England, either on a fixed or permanent basis, for racist bullying.<sup>31</sup> Children as young as nine are contacting Childline about race or faith-based bullying, with Childline conducting more than 2,500 counselling sessions for Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Black and Sikh children in the last three years.<sup>32</sup>

A better approach to promote integration through mutual understanding and respect should be developed across the board, particularly in schools, to help tackle the problem of stigmatisation and mistrust among different communities in Britain. This should take place through policies and campaigns that aim to bring people of different backgrounds, race and status together to deal with issues of mutual interest like homelessness, poverty and domestic and community violence. The MCB's report on integration, *Our Shared British Future*, provides in-depth recommendations on improving community cohesion in the UK.

The next government should lead by example and seek to tackle racism, prejudice and discrimination within political parties and the public sector. **Efforts should be made towards making it easier for people to safely report instances of discrimination and racism at work, in schools, and in different civic institutions.**

## Recommendations

- Adopt the definition of Islamophobia, as proposed by the APPG on British Muslims, as the first step towards tackling this form of prejudice and discrimination.
- Investigate instances of Islamophobia within political parties thoroughly and independently, and ensure internal party processes on disciplinary issues are effective.
- Fund campaigns to increase the reporting of all crime, and specifically Islamophobic hate crime, as well as its impact on making communities safer.
- Work with faith and cultural communities to understand and tackle the barriers to reporting hate crime and the culture of mistrust of the police and government institutions.
- Encourage more responsible reporting by journalists through working with the media and civil society to improve the standards of journalism when it comes to reporting on issues involving Muslims and religion in general.
- Commence the second part of the Leveson Inquiry and implement Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013.
- Establish an Independent Islamophobia Advisor with funding for an organisation focused on tackling Islamophobia, to mirror the Independent anti-Semitism Advisor.
- Review current legislation to ensure that all forms of prejudice are put on an equal footing with equal protection under the law.
- Simplify the process for people to safely report instances of discrimination and racism at work, in schools and in civic institutions.

# Economy

While British Muslims make significant contributions to the UK economy through employment and entrepreneurship, there are still many structural socio-economic barriers that prevent Muslims and BAME communities from fulfilling their potential in society.

Muslims contribute hugely to Britain's economic vitality, from the thousands of Muslim owned businesses across the UK, to the number of successful British Muslim entrepreneurs and the requirements of the Muslim faith of creating new drivers for growth, like in the British halal industry. The report by the Muslim Council of Britain into the impact of Muslims on the economy, *The Muslim Pound*, highlighted the British Muslim spending power in 2007 to be at £20.5 billion, which would be equivalent to £28.2 billion in 2019 if adjusted for inflation (CPI index).

Whilst there are many examples of Muslims flourishing economically, public policy can have huge negative impacts on Muslim communities. The Government's Race and Disparity Audit in 2018 confirmed that there are disparities between ethnic groups in all areas of life affected by public organisations.<sup>33</sup> **The next government should ensure all fiscal policy should be subject to an equality impact analysis before implementation.** This would serve to stop policies being implemented that disadvantage particular sections of society, particularly Muslim, BAME communities and women who already face socio-economic challenges.

## Employment

Unemployment is a critical issue for British Muslim communities. While there are pockets of prosperity, the unemployment rate among Muslims is more than twice that of the general population (12.8% compared to 5.4%), and 41% are economically inactive, compared to 21.8% of the general population. British Muslims also experience the lowest earnings of any religious group, earning £350 less each month than the UK average.<sup>34</sup> The MCB supports the creation of the National Living Wage and the recent announcement to increase this to tackle wage stagnation and reduce the burden of debt on individuals.

With 89% of Muslims identifying themselves as being from a non-White census ethnic category (2011 Census), **it is vital to consider the economic disadvantages and barriers facing those from BAME backgrounds in particular.** Muslim immigrants who came to the UK decades ago started at the bottom of the social ladder, but many still remain there and belong to the most deprived economic and social groups in the country. With almost half of all Muslims (46%) living in the 10 most deprived areas in England,<sup>35</sup> Muslims are significantly impacted by the structural

disadvantages of living in areas with high rates of poverty. This includes higher crime rates, overburdened social services and comparatively worse educational institutions which serve to propagate structural disadvantages onto the next generation.

Evidence has shown that ethnic minority job applicants have to send, on average, 60% more job applications to get a positive response from employers compared to their white counterparts.<sup>36</sup> BAME job applicants often lack access to the sorts of advice, guidance and contacts to help them get into certain professions.

Given the importance of protecting the rights of Muslims in work and given that Muslims tend to be more vulnerable to discrimination in the work place, trade union membership should be promoted to Muslims and BAME communities. Support should be provided on how to get involved and the benefits of membership, including improving working conditions and providing more bargaining power for wages, should be emphasised.

With the British Muslim population being younger than the overall population with a much greater proportion aged 15 and under, developing these skills and providing opportunities for young people would be particularly relevant for creating skilled employment in the future.<sup>37</sup> This could include internships and work experience schemes specifically for particular faith groups and BAME candidates, or the partnering of

public sector organisations with Muslim faith schools to facilitate exposure and opportunities in the public sector.

**The next government should look to equip individuals (especially young people) with the skills necessary to compete effectively in a skills-based economy and labour market. In addition, employers should be encouraged to trial name-blank applications and tackle unconscious bias.**

Muslim women are more likely to be economically inactive than other women, with employment prospects often being hindered by a triple penalty of being women, being BAME and being Muslim. **The next government should work with faith-based and cultural communities to support delivering specific national outreach programmes to promote female role models within Muslim communities, and to provide mentoring and role modelling to help Muslim women overcome barriers to employment.**

**The Department for Work and Pensions should also integrate tailored peer-to-peer support into their back-to-work packages. The take up of government-funded free childcare should also be encouraged.** The next government should work with employers to ensure workplaces make reasonable adjustments to accommodate people of all faiths, including Muslims, to be able to practice, in terms of providing a private prayer space, considering dietary requirements and being conscious of religious holidays.

### Workplace monitoring of ethnicity needs to be expanded to include faith.

This will help to ensure workplaces are representative of the communities they serve, and that equal opportunity employers are inclusive of faith at all levels of their organisations. The next government must ensure this drive is led by the public sector and extended to all workplaces.

## Islamic Finance

Muslims are also making contributions to the UK economy through the growing Islamic finance industry. The principles that underpin Islamic finance could also have the potential of having universal appeal. Indeed, it is not necessary for a customer to be Muslim to benefit from these services. A number of landmarks in London have been acquired or developed with the benefit of Islamic finance, including five government buildings on Whitehall.<sup>38</sup> A growing Islamic finance industry is likely to attract further inward investment from economies in the Gulf and South East Asia that have significant Islamic finance industries.

Further to the high-level support HM Treasury has given the Islamic Finance sector, **a commitment by the next government to continue seeing the development of Islamic finance in the UK would be welcome.** This could be through financial products, identifying Islamic-compliant business activities and supporting business growth in the Muslim world. Building on the existing excellence of Britain's financial services

industry would allow Britain to enhance its competitiveness and export its expertise.

Islamic finance can also have a huge positive impact on individuals. As it does not rely on interest, the use of Islamic finance options over mainstream loans mitigates the impact of interest rapidly increasing debt. This can be particularly beneficial for Muslim homeowners if they pursue Islamic mortgages, given mortgages are one of the largest and most common sources of debt.

## Housing

According to the MCB's *British Muslims in Numbers* report, 28% of Muslim households live in social housing, compared to 17% of overall households. A disproportionately large proportion of Muslims also find themselves in temporary accommodation. The MCB found social housing to be the second most important issue (59%) to British Muslims in terms of social security.

Based on 2011 census data, 35% of Muslim households are overcrowded, lack at least one bedroom, and do not have central heating or have to share a kitchen or bathroom, compared to 13% of the total population. No other faith group has been found to have similar levels of deprivation.<sup>39</sup>

A much smaller proportion of Muslim households own their own property outright compared to the overall proportion – 15% as compared to 31% overall, with a much greater proportion of

Muslims living in privately rented accommodation – 30% of Muslim households as compared to 18% overall. This could be, in part, due to the interest rate element of mortgages. Further support for Islamic finance, and specifically Islamic mortgages, could encourage more home ownership amongst some groups of Muslims.

The availability of affordable housing is of shared concern for those on low incomes. The reasons for the low take-up of the ‘right to buy’ option amongst Muslims should be investigated, for example to see whether the avoidance of conventional mortgage-based house purchase is an issue.

There is a real demand for more affordable houses to be made available, especially in deprived areas. When deeming housing to be affordable, consideration should be given to the average income of the local population to ensure homes are truly affordable for the people they are built for. **The introduction of government schemes encouraging and providing those from low income backgrounds with the opportunity to get onto the property ladder would be welcome.**

## Welfare

Since 2010, the UK has undergone significant changes to the welfare system as a result of austerity measures introduced by successive governments. Some of these changes include the introduction of Universal Credit, changes to assessment and entitlement to incapacity and

disability-related benefits and the introduction of an intensified conditionality.

There is little evidence to show the exact impact these changes have had specifically on Muslims, but evidence does show that a number of reforms have had a disproportionate impact on ethnic minority households. Black households, in particular, have experienced average losses of around 5% of net income, and Asian households have also experienced large reductions in net incomes because they are already poorer on average.

Whilst the Government did conduct an equality impact analysis, which estimated that 40% of affected households would contain someone from an ethnic minority group,<sup>40</sup> this acknowledgement needs to lead to action to ensure policies do not disproportionately impact any specific group, and do not lead to greater levels of poverty.

One specific UK Government welfare policy impacts Muslim communities more than any other faith community: the two-child limit on support provided to families – whether through tax credits, Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. Subsequent children are no longer entitled to the “child element”, worth up to £2,780 per child per year.<sup>41</sup>

This impacts Muslims more than any other faith group for two key reasons: poverty levels among Muslims are high, and more Muslim children live in families with three or more dependent



children than any other faith group (60%).<sup>42</sup> This policy was introduced with the intention to encourage families to take financial means into consideration when family planning. With low levels of awareness and understanding of this policy – both among Muslim communities and wider communities – families tend to be faced to deal with reduced financial support once a child is already born.

With this policy, it is ultimately children who have to bear the brunt. With squeezed finances, families have to make significant sacrifices, which can include keeping less healthy diets, reducing activities for children, both parents working long hours leading to less time spent with children. These factors can put additional strains on family relationships and lead to an increase in mental health problems. **The next government must stop the implementation of the two-child limit and fully consider the implication this has on poverty levels and the quality of life for children.**

In surveying its affiliates, the MCB found the most important issue concerning welfare and social security was food poverty (66%). Food poverty in the UK has become a significant issue

since 2010, with few signs that show the burden is lessening. The UK's biggest food bank network, the Trussell Trust, gave 1.6 million packs of food supplies in 2018, which was more than ever before and represented a 19% annual increase on the previous year. Social security, be it due to benefit delays or changes to benefits, was cited as the main reason for food bank use (38%).<sup>43</sup> Whilst there are no specific statistics pointing to food poverty levels among Muslims, its prevalence among society, particularly in urban areas and among low socio-economic groups, indicates the extent of its impact on Muslims.

**The next government must ensure the welfare system is always geared towards improving living standards, alleviating poverty, and helping those most in need.**

## Recommendations

- Undertake equality impact analyses on all proposed fiscal policy measures to ensure no section of society is discriminated against.
- Tackle the high rate of unemployment amongst Muslims, taking into consideration the economic barriers faced by those from BAME backgrounds.
- Develop programmes to equip individuals, particularly young people, with the skills necessary to compete effectively in a skills-based economy and labour market.
- Encourage employers to trial name-blind applications and tackle unconscious bias.
- Work with faith-based and cultural communities to support delivering specific national outreach programmes to promote female role models within Muslim communities and thereby help Muslim women in overcoming barriers to employment.
- Stop the implementation of the two-child limit on support provided to families.
- Expand workplace monitoring of ethnicity to include faith in order to ensure that workplaces are representative of the communities they serve.
- Develop Islamic finance in the UK to build on the existing excellence of Britain's financial services and enhance its competitiveness.
- Introduce schemes to provide those from low income backgrounds with the opportunity to get onto the property ladder.
- Gear the welfare system towards improving living standards, alleviating poverty and helping those most in need.



# The United Kingdom and the European Union

There was no clear ‘Muslim vote’ in the referendum on European Union membership. Different Muslim communities will be impacted by leaving the European Union, just as in wider society.

Muslims were motivated by numerous factors when voting on European Union membership, from immigration and the impact of globalisation, to security co-operation and educational opportunities. **As Britain prepares for Brexit, all political leaders must engage in**

**responsible dialogue, one that seeks to heal divisions and does not scapegoat minorities. It is also imperative that steps are taken to mitigate any negative effects on vulnerable communities of Brexit.**

## The Referendum

Since the 2016 referendum on European Union membership, British society has become increasingly divided. This has been fuelled by a rise in the following of far-right ideologies as a result of some political parties encouraging anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments, and tenuously linking this with European membership.

In the referendum, it is estimated that 70% of Muslims voted for Remain.<sup>44</sup> This can, in part, be put down to the Leave campaign pledging to reduce migration and playing on Islamophobia by conflating free movement with flows of refugees from the Middle East and sparking fears of Turkey joining the EU. Research by HOPE not Hate into why people voted to leave the European Union found people frequently merging support on controls over immigration with anti-Muslim prejudice.

For the sizable proportion of British Muslims who voted to leave, research has not identified one clear reason. For some, immigration may have been a driver. Whilst some people held concerns over the rate of immigration from the European Economic Area, others felt that by restricting European freedom of movement, this would give more opportunities, or at least level out the playing field, for immigration from other countries. Others in Muslim communities, like so many in wider society, decided to vote to leave the European Union based on proposals for more money available to the NHS and public services.<sup>45</sup>

## Deal or No Deal

It is increasingly likely that the UK will not leave the European Union without a negotiated deal, though not enough research has been conducted to understand the impact of the various Brexit options on different sections of society, particularly Muslims. It is evident that any form of leaving the European Union, whether with a negotiated deal or with no deal, will have a negative impact on poorer households, and with 46% of Muslims living in the 10 most deprived areas in England, it is clear that the financial impact of Brexit will disproportionately be felt by poorer sections of British society.<sup>46</sup>

A no deal Brexit is believed to be much more detrimental for vulnerable and lower income groups – and by extension, many BAME and Muslim communities. A large number of ethnic minority groups are in low paid work, spend a large proportion of their income on rent and have very little disposable income for meals and other goods. With a no deal Brexit expected to increase food prices, it is therefore likely to have a much larger impact on ethnic minority families with lower incomes.

A no deal Brexit would also mean that manual workers would be particularly vulnerable to job losses in the face of rising production costs, increased global competition and greater tariffs on exports. British Pakistani and Bangladeshi men are twice as likely as White British men to work in these sectors, and are less likely to have skills transferable to other sectors,<sup>47</sup>

so become much more prone to job losses as a result of leaving the European Union without a negotiated Brexit deal.

**The next government must conduct equality impact analyses on all potential Brexit outcomes to understand the full extent of its impact on various sections of society. Extra consideration should be given to the impact of any outcome on sections of society which are already disadvantaged, including faith minorities, BAME communities, and low socio-economic groups.**

## Shifting Opinions

The Muslim Council of Britain, in its surveying of affiliates and wider Muslim communities ahead of this General Election, found that respondents overwhelmingly back remaining in the European Union (77%). When it comes to leaving the European Union, 8% prefer to leave in line with the initial referendum result, 5% on the deal negotiated by Theresa May, and 2% without a deal. Almost 8% of respondents were still unsure of their preferred Brexit outcome. This is not exhaustive polling of Muslim communities, and only shows a snapshot of the opinion of respondents who are British Muslims.

When asked about whether another referendum should be held on European Union membership, which is the policy of every political party in the House of Commons, except the Conservatives

and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), affiliates of the MCB overwhelmingly supported this (77%).

Polling by HOPE not Hate suggests that BAME leave voters are among the most likely to have changed their minds on Brexit, especially Muslims. For example, in a 2018 poll, only 27% of those of Pakistani heritage who voted to leave the European Union said they would vote the same way if there was a referendum today.<sup>48</sup> The expectation is that this is the case for a number of minority communities.

The issue of European Union membership is not one which will be resolved any time soon. **The next government should ensure that the public is kept informed of the next government's plans, and the impact these plans will have on specific sections of society, as well as society as a whole.** Engagement with the public is essential to ensure informed decision making by the electorate in the upcoming General Election, and any potential further referendum on European Union membership.

## Recommendations

- Stamp out divisive rhetoric which was widely used during the referendum on European Union membership from the debate.
- Consider the impact of the language used in the Brexit debate on community relations.
- Conduct equality impact analyses on all potential Brexit outcomes to understand the full extent of the impact of any decision on various sections of society.
- Keep the public informed of the next government's plans, and the impact of these plans on specific sections of society, and society as a whole.





# Education

**The 2011 Census shows that 329,684 Muslims are in full time education, with 8.1% of all school aged children being Muslim. Education is both a national and a British Muslim priority.**

The education system in Britain must be of a standard to empower all students to reach their full potential. Education provision should cater to the needs of all children, ensuring equality and facilitating the religious lives of Muslim students, and students of other faiths. Given statistics are available at ethnicity level, looking at the significant academic progress of British Pakistani and Bangladeshi students will cover c.70% of Muslim students. By 2013, British Bangladeshi students achieved above the White British average, despite British Bangladeshi students being one of the most socio-economically deprived communities in England. In addition, British Pakistani pupils have improved substantially, having achieved parity with White British students in 2011 on attaining five or more A\*-C grades at GCSE level.<sup>49</sup>

## Curriculum

An inclusive National Curriculum should reflect the diversity of communities in the United Kingdom in terms of culture, ethnicity and belief. With the unfortunate rise in hate crime against religious minorities and Islamophobia, teaching young people about different values, beliefs and cultures is essential to aid social cohesion as young people go

forward within our society. Religious Education can help foster greater understanding and sensitivity between individuals and communities and can help to combat prejudice and racism.

The curriculum should include the contribution of different faiths and cultures to British history, for example the impact of the British Empire and colonialization on other countries around the world, and the efforts of Commonwealth countries to assist Britain in the World Wars. It is also imperative that the atrocities at Srebrenica are included as part of the National History Curriculum. This would educate students on this genocide, which had a significant impact on many young British Muslims and help to teach all young people to remain vigilant and to challenge hatred and intolerance wherever it is found. This will help counter discrimination and build stronger community relations.

**The next government should continue to support the teaching and existence of Religious Education as a priority subject, and to provide appropriate resources. The Department for Education should continue to consult religious organisations when shaping the syllabus for the National Curriculum.**

The introduction of a new statutory curriculum on Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) has caused concern among some parents who feel their beliefs have not been taken into consideration.

Schools must ensure all children are taught about the importance of respect for one another's beliefs and backgrounds, and care should be taken to ensure all children are made to feel comfortable at school. Schools should respect the religious background of all pupils, which should be considered when planning teaching, and recognise the natural right of parents to educate their children in line with their values and beliefs. **The next government must ensure schools engage constructively with concerned parents in the policy making process.**

The MCB encourages parents to engage positively with the school policy making process, as the statutory guidance enshrines the rights for parents to have an influence on the written RSE policy of the school their children attend. Concerned parents should read a copy of the school's RSE policy and request to speak to the RSE lead at the school, constructively feedback their views on the contents of the policy, and considering becoming a school governor, joining a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) or volunteering their professional skills to input into the school's strategic direction and participate in the school's senior leadership team.

In addition, parents should take an active involvement in the teaching of topics

related to relationship, sex and health education to their children – rather than consider this a subject taught to their children in schools only – and to ensure their children are empowered and feel comfortable discussing relationship, sex and health issues at home.

## School Provision

At present, 1 in 3 schools in Britain are faith schools, reflecting the cultural diversity of British society with significantly less than 1% of these being Muslim faith schools, according to the Department for Education.<sup>50</sup> In 2019, four Muslim schools were among the top 10 Progress 8 schools nationwide, making them the best schools in improving the progress pupils make between the end of primary school and the end of secondary school.<sup>51</sup>

The assertion is made that they hinder integration, but the supporting evidence is not brought forward. **The next government should support the continuation of faith school provision and develop a fair and transparent process that is representative of local community needs when considering applications for faith schools to be established.**

The politicisation of education must be avoided by ensuring that schools with Muslim-majority children are treated as equally as other faith schools, and not unfairly scrutinised on the basis of unfounded suspicions. The “Trojan Horse” scandal involving claims of an alleged conspiracy that there was an organised

attempt by some individuals to take over schools in Birmingham has been shown to be a ‘fake Islamic’ plot. To prevent such incidents occurring again, **the next government should review with Ofsted how to develop a more informed approach to school inspections, one that does not conflate religious conservatism with extremism.**

British Muslim parents should be encouraged to participate in their child’s education and in school governance structures to promote the local proportional representation of communities on school boards. Local provisions, through a local authority governing body unit, for training on governance, alongside the establishment of governance standards would go a long way towards promoting diversity.

## **Access to Education**

Over a quarter of the Muslim population (26%) have no qualifications, which hinders employment opportunities and the ability to be active and integrated members of British society. **Government should promote life-long learning to adults in all communities. There should be equal focus on both academic and vocational courses, with Further Education colleges working with local communities to identify demand and offer suitable courses.** Greater focus should be given to adult education, allowing individuals to re-skill which would improve social mobility and employment opportunities. **This should be made free at the point of use to allow for**

**those otherwise unable to afford further education to access it.**

Tuition fees for domestic students were trebled in 2012, and maintenance grants have been replaced with loans. University tuition fees are problematic to most students, and the high levels of graduate debt can play a significant part in influencing the decision to go to university for those from low socio-economic backgrounds. Given the majority of Muslims are from low socio-economic backgrounds, the cost of university, coupled with the lack of Shari’ah compliant student loans can act as a deterrent for many Muslims from going to university. Reducing the cost of university by reconsidering the levels of tuition fees and reviewing the impact this has on accessing higher education may help to encourage more Muslims to consider going to university.

70% of Pakistani/Bangladeshi students, which make up the majority of British Muslims, cited the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) as very important in their decision to remain in full time education.<sup>52</sup> The majority of these are Muslim students living in deprived communities in Britain. **It is important to reintroduce EMA in England and preserve it across the UK. There should also be continued research on the feasibility of introducing Shari’ah finance and other alternatives to student loans for tuition fees.**



## Universities and Further Education

The 2011 national census showed there were 329,694 Muslims in full time education, 43% of which were women.<sup>53</sup>

While 24% of the Muslim population aged 16 and above have a degree-level and above qualification,<sup>54</sup> there is still much more that can be done to encourage Muslims into higher education and address the barriers to accessing higher education.

The number of British Muslim Higher Education students has increased, but only in the 'non-elite' universities. Russell Group universities could do much more to encourage British Muslims to access them. University institutions could work with Muslim institutions to provide workshops, taster days, competitions and tours, and use recently graduated alumni to give talks for Muslim students intending to pursue Higher Education, in order to provide as much information and support as possible. **The next government should reflect on the significance of religion in applying equality legislation, not just ethnicity, to help students access wider education and opportunities.**

Once at university, data suggests that fewer British Muslim men, than women, are gaining accreditation, and more British Muslims overall are failing to graduate when compared to students of other faiths.<sup>55</sup> **The next government must work with universities to understand why this might be the case and develop policies to tackle the attainment gap.** Universities should also

work more collaboratively with the National Union of Students (NUS) to provide BAME officers within all student unions, as well as Muslim chaplain positions for Muslim students facing difficulties.

Student unions should develop, or lobby for the development and promotion of more inclusive activities for students. This could focus on sport, including women-only sporting opportunities and events not dominated by alcohol.

The experience of Muslim students on campus must be reviewed by universities and student unions, particularly with regards to Islamophobia. The NUS has found that more than half of Muslim students have been subject to harassment or abuse online, a third have been victims of crime or abuse at their further education college or university, and 79% of those who have suffered abuse felt they had been targeted because of being Muslim.<sup>56</sup> More needs to be done to ensure Muslim students are safe and feel respected on university campuses. Efforts must be made to remove the threat and fear of Islamophobia to ensure a positive university experience for Muslim students and to encourage more Muslims to attend university.

Equality levels could be better observed, and universities held more accountable for inequalities if sufficient data was available.

**To improve transparency and address a lack of diversity at universities among teaching staff, students and student unions, the next government should ensure all universities publish their data pertaining to religion of staff, students and student unions.**

## **Recommendations**

- Support for the continued teaching of Religious Education as a priority subject, continue to consult religious organisations when shaping the syllabus for the National Curriculum.
- Ensure schools engage constructively with concerned parents in the process of policy-making in areas such as Relationship and Sex Education, respecting the religious backgrounds of all pupils.
- Continue support for faith school provision and a fair and transparent process for considering faith school applications.
- Develop a more informed approach to school inspections with Ofsted that does not conflate religious conservatism with extremism.
- Provide training on governance to encourage parents from under-represented backgrounds to participate in school governance.
- Apply equality legislation for religion, not just ethnicity, to help students access education and opportunities.
- Conduct research with universities to understand the cause of the attainment gap for Muslims and develop policies to tackle this.
- Ensure all universities publish their data pertaining to religion of staff, students and student unions to address a lack of diversity.
- Emphasise the importance of lifelong learning in order to tackle poor skills levels, enhance integration and improve employability.
- Encourage cooperation between further Education colleges and local communities to identify local demand and offer suitable academic and vocational courses which are free at the point of use.







# Health and Social Care

**British Muslims share with many others the commitment to the core values of our National Health Service – availability of good healthcare based on clinical need, not the ability of the individual to pay, and preventative, ‘person-centred’ care that reflects the needs of the individual.**

In England, approximately 10% of NHS doctors, excluding GPs, are Muslim. In addition, approximately 3% of staff in NHS England’s Trust and in Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) are also Muslim.<sup>57</sup> As these figures exclude GPs and NHS staff in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, where there are a significant number of BAME and overseas clinical staff, it is likely that this under-represents the true extent of the contribution of Muslims to the NHS.

Islamic tradition fosters strong family and altruistic values, which is cultivated in Muslim communities. Muslim institutions and communities can act as a strong vehicle for change, offering ample opportunities to provide education, help vulnerable people, encourage socio-economic empowerment and provide companionship to address loneliness.

Healthcare is a key issue for Muslim communities, with the two most important concerns being ‘access to healthcare and availability of services’ and ‘cuts to the NHS and privatisation’ as shown in the Muslim Council of Britain’s survey of its affiliates. The sustained

cuts to public services and underfunding of NHS trusts nationally since 2010 remain problematic amongst the general population too.<sup>58</sup>

## Health Inequalities

The Muslim population today is younger than the overall population, but by 2036 it is estimated that 10% of the Muslim population will be aged 65 and above.<sup>59</sup> While younger Muslims have a similar self-declared health profile to the population as a whole, older Muslims, particularly women aged 65 and above, self-declared bad or very bad health (38% for these Muslim women, compared to 16% for all women in England).<sup>60</sup> Those at the helm of health policy-making need to take up the challenge of ensuring equity for all sections of society, including the Muslim population.

Health practices seem to be failing some Muslim communities as demonstrated by poor health outcomes and the particularly low Muslim participation in key national screening programmes, such as the NHS bowel cancer-screening programme.<sup>61</sup>



With research showing faith-based programmes, mainly focused on primary prevention and general health maintenance, having a significant impact on improving health outcomes,<sup>62</sup> **engagement with faith and cultural communities is key in order to facilitate the lifestyle changes that are necessary to improve public health. Policy must meet the needs of all sections of society by working alongside communities to design and implement initiatives which deliver tangible improvements.**

Determinants of ill health such as low income, poor housing and homelessness, disconnected communities, stigma and discrimination need to be addressed through a more holistic approach. Research has shown that a significant cause of under-diagnosis and under-treatment of conditions in BAME communities is down to a lack of awareness and understanding of the issues. However, there is a distinct lack of data for faith communities specifically. Whilst the vast majority of Muslims are from BAME backgrounds, **healthcare services must begin recording faith, as well as ethnicity, of patients to give a better understanding of background and allow for a more tailored approach to healthcare. In addition, providing cross-cultural communication training to medical staff in areas with large Muslim representation and increasing available funding for health link workers would provide stronger outreach in all communities.**

Muslim women have been found to receive poor and inappropriate maternity care, which puts them and their babies at risk. Muslim women tend to encounter a range of issues, including stereotyping and inaccurate cultural assumptions held by some practitioners.<sup>63</sup> **The next government should ensure services do more to support Muslim women through this significant life event.**

Ensuring an appreciation of the diversity in beliefs and practices amongst Muslims, through access to the necessary education and training to prevent assumptions and stereotyping will vastly improve the experiences of Muslims and other minorities. **The next government should improve diversity, equality and unconscious bias training such that these can offer specific guidance on minority faith and ethnic communities.** This could help equip staff with the necessary awareness and skills to address challenges.

## Patient Public Involvement

Communities most vulnerable to health inequalities are the least likely to participate in patient public processes. If this is not addressed appropriately these communities (including refugee and asylum groups) will face a further widening in inequalities.

**Community associations should play a greater role in educating the community with co-produced health interventions. In particular, faith lay representation will benefit in the co-production of services which cater**

**for the spiritual needs of communities already.** In these areas, a shift of resources to local communities (who are upskilled and enabled to help themselves) would have a transformative effect on healthcare design and delivery and boost health outcomes. These types of co-produced early intervention and prevention initiatives will likely also have the added value of reducing demand on acute services, leading directly to substantial cost savings.

## Mental Health

Approximately 1 in 4 people in the UK will experience mental health problems in their lifetime,<sup>64</sup> and faith communities are no exception. Muslims have been found to be under-referred for mental health treatment, and the outcomes for those who do get referred are not as good as the general population.<sup>65</sup>

The rate of suicides in Britain has risen sharply to its highest level since 2002, with men accounting for 75% of all suicides in 2018.<sup>66</sup> Suicide is a huge problem for all communities, but more research and evidence is needed into the most vulnerable sections of society to inform a community-based suicide prevention strategy. **Suicide rates should be broken down in much more detail, including ethnicity and faith, to allow for specific approaches to prevent suicide in different pockets of society.**

**The next government must commit appropriate resources to mental health to improve access to services, while**

**carrying out significant outreach work to stimulate open and honest conversations, and raise awareness about what help is available and how to access it.** The NHS has a statutory duty to provide culturally appropriate care for its patients, which should include therapy which considers faith. **Further work should be undertaken into how to tailor mental health services to be culturally and religiously sensitive.**

## Adult Social Care

The MCB's report, *Elderly and End of Life Care for Muslims in the UK*, found an increasing older-age population across Britain is leading to the rising need for social care services, with evidence showing demand is not being met in a timely way. In particular, elderly Muslims may not ask for services due to perceptions of being a burden, lack of awareness of due rights, and a lack of information available.

There are a number of ways in which local authorities should respond to faith needs of elderly Muslims – for example, the availability of halal meals in care homes with Muslim residents upon request; taking a carer's gender into account in the allocation of domiciliary care; provision of transport to attend Friday prayers. **The next government should encourage collaboration between mosques and voluntary associations within Muslim civil society with health authorities and specialist agencies to ensure faith needs of elderly Muslims are met.**

## End of Life Care

Managing palliative and end of life care is always difficult, but evidence suggests that the current model of end of life care does not meet the health needs of Muslim communities. Such evidence includes reports that point to an unmet need amongst Muslims of end of life care. This is reflected in poor uptake of advanced care planning and hospice services, including community-based services and on-site care.<sup>67</sup>

Within Muslim communities, imams and mosque leadership must raise with their congregations issues of death and dying, which can increase awareness of palliative and end of life care services, and help counter the stigma in access of services. **The next government must also work with faith organisations to strengthen community-based chaplaincy services to allow for Muslim patients and families to better access palliative and end of life care through trusted people and trusted spaces.**

**The next government must ensure palliative and end of life care service providers better understand how faith and cultural preferences of individuals and their families can be recognised and supported.**

## Death Certification and Coroner Services

Islamic practices for burial are in line with burial conventions of other faiths, such as in the Jewish tradition. Muslims strive to bury the dead as soon as possible after death.

There is a strong call from religious communities for invasive autopsies to never be routine or automatic. **Non-invasive autopsies (CT and MRI scanning) should be the first option and made readily available free of charge.** Areas with high Muslim and Jewish populations should have good 'out of hours' cover from all the necessary professionals at the time of death to help expedite the necessary processes. Funding and adequate resources should be provided to ensure that this service is available at all times.

There is consensus that there is a shortage of burial space, with this being more acute in London and Birmingham. **This issue should be taken up by the next government with solutions found, including revisiting the existing legislation on re-usage of graves and working with local authorities to ensure practical solutions are put in place to allow for the re-usage of graves, as is done in certain local authorities.**

## Recommendations

- Design policy to meet the needs of all sections of society and coordinate delivery alongside communities for the most impact.
- Collect data specifically on faith to allow for more granular analysis of impact and a better tailored approach to policymaking.
- Train medical staff on cross-cultural communication in areas with large Muslim representation and increase funding for health link workers to provide stronger outreach in all communities.
- Review why Muslim women receive poor and inappropriate maternity care and take steps to ensure services do more to support Muslim women through pregnancy.
- Adapt diversity and equality and unconscious bias training to offer specific guidance on minority faith and ethnic communities to equip healthcare staff with the necessary awareness and skills.
- Improve access to mental health services, particularly for Muslims who are under-referred, and undertake significant outreach work to raise awareness of services available in Muslim communities.
- Record suicide rates in more granular detail, including ethnicity and faith, to enable specific prevention approaches.
- Enable further collaboration between mosques and voluntary associations within Muslim civil society with health authorities and specialist agencies to meet the faith needs of elderly Muslims.
- Strengthen community-based chaplaincy services and improve palliative and end of life care services to better recognise faith and cultural preferences of individuals and their families.
- Offer non-invasive autopsy free of charge to all and provide funding to implement a reform of the coroner programme to facilitate this.





# Criminal Justice

**Justice is a core value within Islam. Respect for the law, supporting safe and secure communities, and being a good citizen are all aspects to be promoted.**

These are common practical concerns that are shared by many in society, yet the commonality of interests and shared values too often fails to come to the fore, and community relations are impacted as a result. Greater dialogue is needed between Muslim communities, police and security services, fostering mutual respect and trust. Dialogue needs to be respectful, patient and open, and involve all sections of the community, especially the young.

## Policing

The rate at which incidences of hate crime and Islamophobia are rising around the UK is alarming, with Home Office statistics showing that more than half of all religiously motivated attacks in 2017 – 18 were directed at Muslims.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, some communities that are affected are less likely to report attacks to the police due to a lack of trust or belief in the system; therefore, the full scale of offending is unknown. There is

a sentiment that cases where Muslims are the suspects are investigated and prosecuted robustly, however, when there are hate crimes directed towards Muslims there is insufficient evidence.

Knife crime in England and Wales has increased by 80% since March 2014.<sup>69</sup> It has become particularly prevalent in many urban areas, affecting many Muslim and BAME communities with 61% of Muslims polled by the MCB identifying this as the most important issue pertaining to security. **The next government should prioritise increasing community policing and developing joint initiatives between police, youth organisations, faith and cultural communities and schools to tackle the root causes of knife crime.** Local police forces should be encouraged to work with mosques and places of worship to install knife amnesty bins, as many places of worship have already done.

More responsive and sensitive policing is required to restore confidence, and **there needs to be a greater focus on recruitment of officers from minority backgrounds to reflect the diversity of the communities they work with.** While the introduction of more community-based policing is needed, significant efforts are required to re-build trust that has been lost during the implementation of the Prevent strategy.

Cuts in policing budgets have also affected the opportunity for community organisations to build links and relationships with the police as their numbers have been drastically reduced. Police

forces in England and Wales lost 15% of their officers between 2010 and 2018.<sup>70</sup>

**The commitment of recent governments to recruit more police officers is welcome and the next government should ensure police forces have sufficient resources to restore community links.**

## Counter-Terrorism

The overall principle that the ‘first duty of government is the safety and security of its citizens’ is important. When it comes to tackling the challenge of terrorism, British Muslims have consistently condemned terrorism in the strongest possible terms.

Nevertheless, that effort is being undermined in relation to counter-terrorism, particularly the Prevent strategy of the Counter-Terrorism policy. The United Nations Special Rapporteur stated that “Prevent is having the opposite of its intended effect: by dividing, stigmatising and alienating segments of the population.”<sup>71</sup>

Taken together with increasingly illiberal counter-terrorism powers, the detrimental effects of the Prevent strategy must be recognised in its continuing alienation of British Muslim communities. With the fastest-growing terror threat in the UK now coming from far-right extremism, the focus of the Prevent strategy on Muslim communities is unreasonable.

Recent suggestions for the Government to close Shari'ah courts exacerbate the problem.<sup>72</sup> For many, they are seen as measures designed to appeal more to the prejudices some people have against Muslims, not tackle the scourge of terrorism itself.

The Prevent strategy has resulted in resources being spent on phony ideological battles and training public servants on how to report the ill-defined non-violent extremism, whilst funding is cut from our police forces. **A fresh approach following a comprehensive, in-depth, independent review of all counter-terrorism related legislation is therefore required** that does not rely on Prevent and its flawed underlying premise of a conveyor belt from 'non-violent extremism' to violent extremism.

**The review into the Prevent strategy, which was announced by the previous government, is welcome, but the issues with this review raised by MCB and other civil society organisations must be addressed.** In particular, the appointment of the reviewer must be properly scrutinised and concerns about independence and credibility, as raised by the MCB and civil liberties organisations should be accounted for. The terms of reference for the review should be revisited to ensure the review includes a comprehensive evaluation of the past implementation of the Prevent strategy, which has proven to be deeply problematic and controversial.

In order to develop a more effective policy in combatting terrorism, which continues to blight our society, it is key to engage, consult and build trust with communities as partners. In addition, **the next government should develop an evidence-based strategy to look into the causes of radicalisation.** Part of this will be to consider proactively creating spaces to allow ideas to be discussed in public, particularly by young people rather than have them driven underground where radicalisation is more likely.

Local Scrutiny Involvement Panels, which are already established by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), are designed to scrutinise the CPS on certain cases, looking at the approach taken, the evidence collected, conviction rates and the treatment of victims. **The next government should consider the benefits of establishing Local Scrutiny Involvement Panels to review counterterrorism cases.** This would allow greater transparency into the workings of the police and the CPS which community organisations can then analyse.

## Muslims in Prison

The number of Muslims in prison has more than doubled over the past 16 years, with 16% of the prison population identifying as Muslim, compared to 5% of the general population.<sup>73</sup> **The next government must ensure prisons are equipped to support Muslims with their religious and cultural needs. Information, guidance and training**

**should be given to prison staff to enhance their understanding of the needs of Muslims.**

Problems faced by Muslim women, both while in prison and upon release, are particularly acute. There are 226 Muslim women in UK prisons, accounting for 6% of the female prison population.<sup>74</sup> These are worrying statistics that require the attention of Muslim civil society and cooperation with specialist agencies. In prisons with a sizeable population of Muslim women, **the recruitment of Muslim women as prison officers who are aware of community issues will enable prisons to have in-house resources on particular sensitive issues.**

**For Muslim women in particular, the next government should develop a community-owned preventative programme of action led by community organisations, and work to raise awareness of the factors that impact on Muslim women's paths into and out of criminality.**

The Lammy Review conducted in 2017 concluded that the criminal justice system in England and Wales has deep-rooted issues with bias and discrimination in its treatment of people from ethnic minority backgrounds. The review into deaths and serious incidents in police custody, carried out by Dame Elish Angiolini in 2015, also found that a disproportionate number of people who have died following the use of force were from BAME communities.

The next government, as a matter of urgency, should implement the recommendations of the Lammy and Angiolini reviews, including recording and publishing data on ethnicity and faith for better scrutiny of the approach taken by the criminal justice system.

Rehabilitation should adopt a holistic approach, not simply a transactional relationship between the person on probation and their probation officer. The re-integration of ex-offenders in society is not only the responsibility of government, but of the community too. Islamic and cultural institutions in communities should look to establish working relationships with statutory agencies to help support people upon release from prison to successfully reintegrate into society.

**The next government should look into the merits of broadening its approach to probation to use the facilities and support networks faith and cultural communities provide.**



## Legal Aid

The cuts to legal aid have disproportionately impacted upon Muslim communities. This damages the rule of law, where the equality of access to justice is fundamental. The recent increase of court fees has compounded the difficulties faced by those with low income, making the right to justice inaccessible.

Changes to the legal aid system which ensures universal access to justice – particularly where liberty is at stake – should be implemented. A clear strategy to improve BAME, and in particular Muslim, presence in the administration of justice is needed to bring it on par with Muslims as a proportion of the wider population.

**The next government should carry out an impact assessment of legal aid cuts on Muslim communities.**

### Recommendations

- Prioritise increasing community policing and developing joint initiatives between police, youth organisations, schools, faith and cultural communities to tackle the root causes of knife crime.
- Work with mosques and places of worship to install knife amnesty bins at faith institutions.
- Increase recruitment of officers from minority backgrounds to reflect the diversity of the communities they work with.
- Recruit more police officers to ensure police forces have sufficient resources to restore community links.
- Take a fresh approach to countering extremism following a comprehensive, in-depth, independent review of all counter-terrorism related legislation.
- Address the concerns raised by the MCB and wider civil society about the review into the Prevent strategy.
- Develop an evidence-based strategy to look into the causes of radicalisation.

- Consider the benefits of establishing Local Scrutiny Involvement Panels to review counterterrorism cases.
- Recruit Muslim women as police officers who are aware of community issues in prisons with a sizeable population of Muslim women.
- Develop a community-owned preventative programme of action led by community organisations, and work to raise awareness of the factors that impact on Muslim women's paths into and out of criminality.
- Implement the recommendations of the Lammy and Angiolini reviews, including recording and publishing data on ethnicity and faith for better scrutiny of the approach of the criminal justice system.
- Explore the merits of broadening the approach to probation to use the facilities and support networks faith and cultural communities provide.
- Undertake an impact assessment of cuts to legal aid on Muslim communities and commit to ensuring access to justice for all.
- Improve BAME, and particularly Muslim, presence in the administration of justice to bring it on par with Muslims as a proportion of the wider population.

EVERYONE IS

# WELCOME





# Immigration and Refugees

The Muslim population in Britain is ethnically very diverse, with 53% of Muslims having been born outside of the UK. Recent wars and humanitarian crises, particularly in the Middle East and Africa, have resulted in an increase in the number of people across the world seeking safety, security and refuge in stable countries.

Immigration is important not just to the diversity of communities, but to ensure Britain has the labour force it needs, including doctors, agricultural workers, scientists, entrepreneurs and many others.

Immigration and the impact of immigration on local areas are likely to concern many Muslims, just as they concern other parts of British society. For example, some Muslims voted to leave the European Union in 2016 citing feelings of unfairness between freedom of movement for European citizens and a much harsher system for those from the Commonwealth.

The current immigration rules for those outside of the European Union involve high sponsorship costs, both for employment visas and family visas. With many Muslims in low socio-economic groups, meeting the annual income threshold of at least £18,600 to sponsor a spousal visa is not feasible. For general work visas, which see many Muslims come to the UK from South Asia to work in the hospitality industry, the salary threshold is £35,000, which is much higher than any low-skilled worker earns. **The next government must review the impact**

**the high threshold for visa sponsorship has on different faith, ethnic and socio-economic groups.** If the immigration system is overhauled in the event of leaving the European Union, a fairer system which does not disproportionately discriminate against those from low socio-economic backgrounds, or those from non-Western countries, would be welcome.

## A Sanctuary for those Seeking Refuge

The conflicts, humanitarian disasters, unfolding across the world, particularly in the Middle East and Africa, have led to a significant increase the number of people seeking refuge in safe and stable countries. Many Muslim communities believe it is morally imperative to uphold the proud British and Muslim tradition of helping those seeking refuge from war, persecution and degradation. With 72% of respondents to the Muslim Council of Britain's survey feeling the UK Government should accept more refugees, **the next government should ensure it continues to uphold our moral and international obligations by taking our fair share of refugees.**



Many refugees risk their lives to flee their homes and come to Europe. An endless number of horrific cases of lives lost making this difficult journey have been widely documented. **The next government should offer safe and legal routes to the UK for refugees to avoid the need for making journeys that could cost them their lives.**

A reform of family reunion rules to make it easier for refugees to join relatives living in the UK would be welcome. In addition, **the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme should be expanded to offer sanctuary to more of those in need. The next government should re-open the Dubs scheme for unaccompanied child refugees, ensuring Britain meets its responsibilities by taking in 3,000 unaccompanied refugee children.**

Refugees are often resettled in a country where the society, language and culture are completely different and new to them and providing for their effective reception and integration is beneficial for both the settled refugee and the host country. Muslim communities in the UK often share a common faith, culture and language with many refugees, and can act as a bridge in welcoming and helping them with integrating into their new society. The MCB has partnered with Mercy Mission UK, a charity supporting vulnerable people, to encourage more mosques and British Muslim communities to support vulnerable refugee families via the Community Sponsorship scheme. **The next government should encourage**

**Community Sponsorship programmes and provide additional support to communities taking part in this initiative.**

## **English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)**

Many refugees and immigrants, especially those from the first generation of migrants, may not have the English language skills to enable them to participate fully in British society. Instead of stigmatising these people, **the next government should provide additional funding for English as an additional language classes to help migrants and residents improve their language skills.** A central English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) online service could speed up the access to resources and enable more successful engagement with education for those who need it.

## Recommendations

- Recognise the importance of immigration, particularly for the economy, but understand the impact high levels of immigration have on communities across the UK.
- Review the impact the high threshold for visa sponsorship has on different faith, ethnic and socio-economic groups.
- Uphold our commitment to resettle refugees from countries affected by war and conflict, providing a safe haven in the UK.
- Offer safe and legal routes to the UK for refugees, to avoid dangerous and often life-threatening journeys.
- Expand the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and re-open the Dubs scheme for unaccompanied child refugees, ensuring Britain meets its responsibilities by taking in 3,000 unaccompanied refugee children.
- Encourage Community Sponsorship programmes and provide more support for refugees resettling in the UK, including working with faith and community groups to tackle issues faced by refugees.
- Fund English language tuition for migrants and residents to improve their language skills to tackle socio-economic barriers to integration.



# International Affairs

British Muslim communities are a microcosm of the world, and hold deep rooted connections with people, cultures and languages from across the globe. Britain's national interest should be aligned with upholding international law, justice and humanity.

British Muslims can be seen as a bridge to Muslim states across the globe, as can other cultural and religious communities in Britain. **The next government should seek to engage UK-based representative institutions in an attempt to understand diverse and well-informed diaspora opinions.** This will help to facilitate the formation of better policies.

## British Values for British Foreign Policies

British foreign policy should be based on the principles of justice, humanity and the upholding of international law. With the recent rise in conflicts across the world, it is arguably more important than ever to ensure Britain's approach to international affairs embodies these principles.

Over recent years, British arms have been identified as having been used in conflict zones, potentially intensifying humanitarian crises. **The next government's arms export policy should be explicit: British arms should not be promoted for sale where they may be used to commit human rights abuses or war crimes.**

There have been numerous instances of countries committing horrific human rights abuses against their citizens in recent years. This has been most acute among Muslim communities, like the genocide of the Rohingya in Myanmar, the concentration camps set up to hold over 1 million Uighurs in Xinjiang and the illegal shut down faced by communities in Indian-occupied Kashmir. The MCB found in its surveying of a cross-section of its affiliate base and wider British Muslims that an overwhelming majority (89%) of respondents felt addressing human rights abuses abroad should be the government's priority. **The next government must stand up against such human rights abuses, push for UN resolutions condemning these atrocities, and use its diplomatic power to discourage governments from taking such actions against their citizens.**

In particular, the fundamental freedoms and human rights of the Palestinian people must be respected. The tensions between Israel and Palestine are ongoing, with the further annexation of Palestinian territories. The historic vote in the House of Commons in 2014 to recognise Palestine as a state was



a momentous step to support its self-determination, but unfortunately, no further action has been taken. **The next government should formalise the binding recognition of Palestine as an independent state.**

The withdrawal of the United States from the Iran Nuclear Deal by President Donald Trump has demonstrated an attitude of contempt for international treaties. This is an increasingly dangerous trend, and **the next government must ensure it rejects this behaviour in the strongest terms and continues its participation in international treaties, particularly those of such significance.**

## International Aid

With British Muslims donating more to charity than any other faith group in the UK,<sup>75</sup> the commitment by the government to spend 0.7% of Gross Domestic Product on international development is welcome. **Aid should be directed to overcome poverty and promote self-sufficiency.** It is imperative that this aid spending is not used as a bargaining tool with developing countries to secure trade deals or for reasons other than to help those most in need.

## Creating a Sustainable Future

Whilst Muslim communities have been taking small steps to tackle climate change, the recent global drive towards sustainability must be harnessed to plan for the huge leaps that need to be made by all.

Climate change is not an issue confined to one country, and not something that can be solved by individual governments. Every community is responsible for caring for the environment. Not only should governments be working together globally to align efforts to create a sustainable future, but governments should also be pushing for more green policies and encouraging their own communities to consider climate change.

In Britain, many mosques and Islamic centres have launched campaigns to encourage environmentalism – from caring for and cleaning up local environments, to introducing green initiatives like the use of reusable crockery.<sup>76</sup>

**The next government must empower individuals, communities and businesses, and work with other countries to change culture, to be more conscious of the impact of actions on the planet and to foster an understanding of what everyone can do to combat the impact of climate change.**

## Recommendations

- Engage UK-based representative institutions to understand diverse and well-informed diaspora opinions to facilitate the formation of policies.
- British arms exports should not be promoted for sale where they may be used to commit human rights abuses or war crimes.
- Stand up against human rights abuses, as seen against the Rohingya in Myanmar, the Uighurs in Xinjiang and communities in Kashmir. Push for UN resolutions condemning these atrocities and use diplomatic power to discourage governments from taking such actions against their citizens.
- Formalise the binding recognition of Palestine as an independent state.
- Continue participation in the Iran Nuclear Deal and reject the behaviour of President Trump towards this international treaty.
- Ensure foreign aid is directed to alleviate poverty and promote self-sufficiency, not used to secure trade deals or for reasons other than to help those most in need.
- Empower individuals, communities and businesses to understand the impact of actions on the environment and take steps to combat climate change.

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