



BRITISH MUSLIMS STRIVING FOR FAIRNESS

2021 Census findings with a focus on social mobility

The MCB was an active member of the interfaith alliance that lobbied successfully for the religion question in the Census, first appearing in 2001.

THE 2021 CENSUS FINDINGS: BRITISH MUSLIMS IN NUMBERS

Striving For Fairness

Key points

This briefing from the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) is the second in a series of reports on the demographic and socioeconomic profile of Muslims in England and Wales, drawing on Census data from 2021, 2011 and 2001. It is a continuing story of life in deprived neighbourhoods with opportunities limited to lower-tier albeit essential jobs. Given the strides made by the community in higher education and the commitment to a British identity, the need of the hour is a fair deal to overcome entrenched inequalities.

- **The proportion of Muslims in England and Wales aged under 16 is almost double that of the overall population. The majority of Muslims in England and Wales (51%) are British born, most identify as British (75%) and for over 90% of Muslims, English is their main language or spoken fluently.**
- **The Muslims population is ethnically diverse, whilst the largest numbers draw from South Asian and African ethnicities, it is spread across all ethnic groups including the Roma and Traveller communities.**
- **Educational attainment is rising, with 32.3% of Muslims having a degree level qualification in 2021, up from 24.0% in 2011. This increase is driven largely by greater numbers of Muslim women participating in higher education.**
- **A Muslim newborn baby has almost three times the chance to be born into the most deprived (10%) local authorities in England and less than a quarter of the chance to live in the most affluent (10%) local authorities in England as compared to other newborns.**
- **On measures of social mobility such as occupational classification, Muslims have not progressed at the same rate as the general population over the past decade. This is noticeable in the 'higher echelon' jobs.**
- **The Muslim population is largely concentrated in deprived parts of urban centres. The MCB hopes that these areas can feature more prominently in future versions of the Government's levelling up strategy.**

INTRODUCTION

The MCB's census briefing, 'First Look', published in November 2022 highlighted two key facts: that the Muslim population in England and Wales on Census Day 2021 was 3.87 million, or 6.5% of the total, and the disproportionate impact of deprivation.¹ This prompted media coverage, such as the Guardian's headline of 30 November 2022, 'Census says 39% of Muslims live in most deprived areas of England and Wales'.

This briefing draws on Census data releases from the ONS in 2023, for a more detailed profile of the Muslim population's characteristics and circumstances faced. The briefing comprises three sections: the Muslim community's potential for achievement; the constraints that make this journey difficult; ways forward, at general and specific levels.

Given the recently published report from the Social Mobility Commission [SMC], 'State of the Nation 2023'², it is opportune to place the MCB's concerns on the table. The SMC report offers an optimistic note in stating "Overall we find substantial upward occupational mobility" – where this refers to the link between parents' occupational class and that of their children. This is welcome, but the report also goes on to say that the highest rates of downward mobility are found among the Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups and suggests: "possible explanations might relate to a lack of fluency in the English language, foreign qualifications that are not easily transferable, or discrimination." This is at the heart of the sort of issues that concern the MCB. Taking this specific

example, the British Bangladeshi population is mainly Muslim, the majority is British born and as far as the 2021 Census is concerned, English language fluency is prevalent. So why the downward mobility? Are British Muslims poised for prosperity or poverty?

This briefing does not make the case for special favours, but it does advocate for equal opportunities to progress for the minority ethnic populations, helping us achieve a fairer society for all. The analysis highlights trends, because in many areas there is now twenty years of data from the 2001, 2011 and 2021 Census.

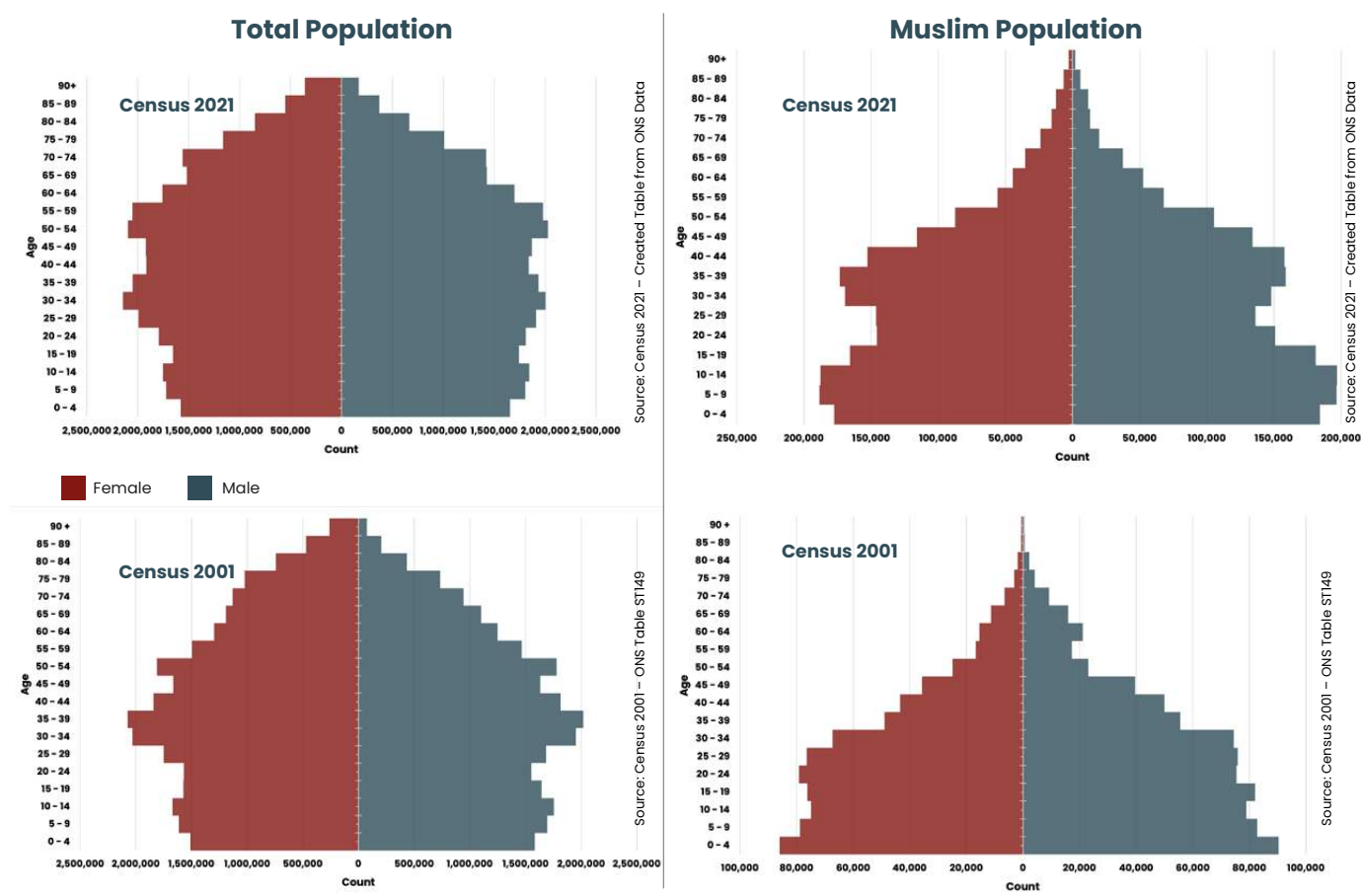
Introducing this Briefing, MCB Secretary General Zara Mohammed observed, "The cost-of-living crisis, food poverty, rising energy bills, paying this month's rent – mosques and community centres are rising to the challenge in supporting their neighbourhoods. In addition to this immediate service, we need longer-term thinking to move people out of deprivation and supporting today's youth in achieving their potential. The British Muslim population is much younger on average than the rest, educated and now, for a majority, this is the land of their birth. The MCB seeks a conversation with social policy decision makers and the experts in the field on the pathways for upward social mobility for those living in deprived neighbourhoods. As thoughts turn to a general election sometime in 2024, this briefing has a message: it can now no longer be 'business as usual'."



1. POISED FOR SUCCESS: YOUNG, STRONGLY BRITISH, PROFICIENT IN ENGLISH, EDUCATED AND DIVERSE

A young population

The age profile of the Muslim population is skewed towards the younger age groups. The proportion of Muslims aged 15 years or under is almost double that of the overall population. The median age of Muslims is 27 years, compared to 40 for the overall population. Comparing the age-sex pyramids for 2001 and 2021, Britain will continue to benefit from this demographic dividend in terms of contributions to society and economy from a working age population for several decades to come. This is significant as society as a whole is entering the older age bands in greater numbers and proportions.



Majority now UK born and Identifying as British

Just over half (51%) of the Muslim population is UK-born. In some local authority districts (LADs, equivalent to borough councils), the proportion is higher. For example in Bradford, 65% of its 166,846 Muslim population is UK-born. This marks a turning point, with the majority of Muslims now British-born, and increasingly so as second-generation and beyond make up the population.

Table 1: UK born Muslim population

Local Authority District	2021 Muslim Total Number	2021 Muslim UK Born		2011 Muslim Total Number	2011 Muslim UK Born		2001 Muslim Total Number	2001 Muslim UK Born	
		Number	%		Number	%		Number	%
Bradford	166,846	108,334	65	129,041	77,589	60	75,192	42,994	57
Birmingham	341,813	196,485	57	234,411	129,962	55	140,033	76,225	54
Slough	46,661	24,252	52	32,655	15,704	48	15,899	7,874	50
Barking and Dagenham	53,389	27,131	51	25,520	11,400	45	7,144	2,836	40

Source: Census 2021 – Created Table from ONS Data; Census 2011 – ONS Table DC2207EW; Census 2001 – ONS Table ST150

For 74.9% of the Muslim population in England and Wales, their sole identity is UK-only.

Table 2: National Identity – faith group responses, 2021

Faith Group	Total	UK identity only		UK identity and non-UK identity		Non-UK identity only	
	Number	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Christian	27,522,673	24,210,527	88.0	465,876	1.7	2,846,270	10.3
Muslim	3,868,133	2,897,026	74.9	145,922	3.8	825,185	21.3
Hindu	1,032,775	661,757	64.1	72,748	7.0	298,270	28.9
Sikh	524,140	407,993	77.8	15,412	2.9	100,735	19.2
Jewish	271,327	239,350	88.2	8,519	3.1	23,458	8.6
Buddhist	272,508	167,097	61.3	15,955	5.9	89,456	32.8
Other religion	348,336	279,501	80.2	17,164	4.9	51,671	14.8
No religion	22,162,062	20,654,716	93.2	367,457	1.7	1,139,889	5.1
Not answered	3,595,591	3,125,429	86.9	83,532	2.3	386,630	10.8
All	59,597,545	52,643,396	88.3	1,192,585	2.0	5,761,564	9.7

Source: Census 2021 – ONS Table RM088

A much greater proportion of Muslims born in the UK indicate a 'UK only identity' (89.4%) compared to those not born in the UK (61.5%). The proportion of Muslims born in the UK who indicate a non-UK identity only is low (3.4%), compared to those born outside of the UK (28.9%).

Proficient in English and Educated

- For 90.8% of the overall population, the main language is English; it is 67.5% for the Muslim population. However, if the categories of 'main language is English' and 'English is spoken very well or well' are combined, this will apply to 98.1% of the overall population, and 90.6% of the Muslim population.
- Educational attainment is rising, with 32.3% of Muslims in the age groups 16 and over having a Level 4 qualification (includes degree, postgraduate degree, NVQ Level 4-5) in 2021, up from 24.0% in 2011, and 20.6% in 2001.

Table 3: Attainment of Level 4 and above qualification

Census Year	All				Muslims			
	All Age 16 and over		Age 16 to 24		All Age 16 and over		Age 16 to 24	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2021	16,413,220	33.8	1,228,165	19.4	861,930	32.3	119,150	20.8
2011	12,383,477	27.2	906,364	13.6	434,742	24.0	62,987	15.2
2001	7,432,962	19.8	651,534	11.5	208,241	20.6	31,916	11.3

Source: Census 2021 – Created Table from ONS Data, Census 2011 – ONS Table DC5204EW, Census 2001 – ONS Table ST158

- Focussing on one London borough with a high British Bangladeshi population (Redbridge, where Bangladeshi heritage population is 10.3% of its population), there is a similar trend in the 16–24 year age group: the proportion reaching Level 4 or higher (includes degree, postgraduate degree, NVQ Level 4–5) exceeds the White British ethnic category.

Table 4: Redbridge: Highest Level of Qualification – Bangladesh and White British ethnic categories

Census Ethnic Group	Census 2021 – Age 16 to 24			Census 2001 – Age 16 to 24		
	All categories: Highest level of qualification	Level 4 and above qualifications		All categories: Highest level of qualification	Level 4 and above qualifications	
	Number	Number	%	Number	Number	%
White: British	5,467	1,235	22.6	13,106	1,853	14.1
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	4,682	1,127	24.1	776	137	17.7

Source: Census 2001 – ONS Table ST117; Census 2021 – Created Table from ONS data

- The proportion of Muslim women in higher education is on the rise – the 2021 Census indicates a Muslim full-time student population of 429,322 – 215,049 (50.1%) females and 214,273 (49.9%) males.

Table 5: Muslims in higher education in some select Local Authorities

Local Authority District	2001					2021				
	Male		Female		Total	Male		Female		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Birmingham	7,328	57.0	5,525	43.0	12,853	19,438	47.9	21,111	52.1	40,549
Bradford	3,770	53.6	3,261	46.4	7,031	8,627	48.8	9,050	51.2	17,677
Manchester	2,954	57.0	2,230	43.0	5,184	8,033	50.3	7,939	49.7	15,972
Tower Hamlets	3,866	53.2	3,396	46.8	7,262	7,173	49.5	7,310	50.5	14,483
Newham	4,059	58.1	2,926	41.9	6,985	7,116	50.7	6,929	49.3	14,045
Redbridge	1,763	54.5	1,469	45.5	3,232	4,937	48.8	5,188	51.2	10,125
Leicester	1,563	53.7	1,347	46.3	2,910	4,844	49.2	5,006	50.8	9,850
Brent	2,157	54.5	1,801	45.5	3,958	4,445	50.2	4,405	49.8	8,850
Kirklees	2,244	58.4	1,600	41.6	3,844	3,896	48.6	4,126	51.4	8,022
Ealing	1,973	54.2	1,664	45.8	3,637	3,732	47.2	4,173	52.8	7,905
All LADs in England and Wales	93,509	55.7	74,254	44.3	167,763	214,273	49.9	215,049	50.1	429,322

Source: Census 2001 – ONS Table ST157; Census 2021 – Created Table from ONS Data



Picture:
Young Muslim woman
graduates from university.

Bridge-builders

- Muslims are a 'kaleidoscope of communities' with representation in all ethnic group, including the Gypsy or Irish Traveller and Roma.

Table 6: Ethnic representation of Muslims

Ethnic Group	2021				2011			
	All	Muslim	Muslim as % of All Population	Muslims as % of Overall Muslim Population	All	Muslim	Muslim as % of All Population	Muslims as % of Overall Muslim Population
White: Total	48,699,247	226,233	0.5	5.8	48,209,395	210,620	0.4	7.8
English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British	44,355,038	90,939	0.2	2.4	45,134,686	77,272	0.2	2.9
Irish	507,465	1,386	0.3	0	531,087	1,914	0.4	0.1
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	67,767	455	0.7	0	57,680	378	0.7	0
Roma	100,980	2,028	2	0.1	-	-	-	-
Other White	3,667,997	131,425	3.6	3.4	2,485,942	131,056	5.3	4.8
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: Total	1,717,975	142,045	8.3	3.7	1,224,400	102,582	8.4	3.8
White and Asian	488,225	56,265	11.5	1.5	341,727	49,689	14.5	1.8
White and Black African	249,596	23,078	9.2	0.6	165,974	15,681	9.4	0.6
White and Black Caribbean	513,042	5,527	1.1	0.1	426,715	5,384	1.3	0.2
Other Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	467,112	57,175	12.2	1.5	289,984	31,828	11.0	1.2
Asian/Asian British: Total	5,515,426	2,550,022	46.2	65.9	4,213,531	1,830,560	43.4	67.6
Indian	1,864,318	246,968	13.2	6.4	1,412,958	197,161	14.0	7.3
Pakistani	1,587,822	1,470,775	92.6	38.0	1,124,511	1,028,459	91.5	38.0
Bangladeshi	644,882	593,136	92.0	15.3	447,201	402,428	90.0	14.9
Chinese	445,619	1,890	0.4	0.0	393,141	8,027	2.0	0.3
Other Asian	972,785	237,253	24.4	6.1	835,720	194,485	23.3	7.2
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: Total	2,409,280	416,327	17.3	10.8	1,864,890	272,015	14.6	10.1
African	1,488,381	378,219	25.4	9.8	989,628	207,201	20.9	7.7
Caribbean	623,119	7,167	1.2	0.2	594,825	7,345	1.2	0.3
Other Black	297,780	30,941	10.4	0.8	280,437	57,469	20.5	2.1
Other ethnic group: Total	1,255,619	533,505	42.5	13.8	563,696	290,289	51.5	10.7
Arab	331,843	277,737	83.7	7.2	230,600	178,195	77.3	6.6
Any other ethnic group	923,776	255,768	27.7	6.6	333,096	112,094	33.7	4.1
	59,597,547	3,868,132	6.5	100	56,075,912	2,706,066	4.8	100.0

Source: Census 2011 – ONS Table DC2201EW; Census 2021 – Created Table from ONS Data

- There are 142,045 Muslims in the mixed/multiple ethnicity category in 2021. This is 3.7% of the overall Muslim population. This proportion is higher than other faiths, with the exception of the Buddhists.

Table 7: Mixed/multiple ethnic group population by Religion

Mixed/ multiple ethnic group	2021		2011		2001	
	Population		Population		Population	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Muslim	142,045	3.7	102,582	3.8	64,262	4.2
Hindu	10,995	1.1	9,761	1.2	5,725	1.0
Sikh	7,024	1.3	5,122	1.2	2,762	0.8
Jewish	6,084	2.2	4,249	1.6	3,105	1.2
Buddhist	11,003	4.0	9,855	4.0	4,647	3.2
Christian	627,412	2.3	566,363	1.7	346,763	0.9

Source: Census 2001 – ONS Table ST104; Census 2011 – ONS Table DC2201EW; Census 2021 – Created Table from ONS Data

- Muslim individuals can draw on their own experience of ‘mixedness’ to be bridge-builders and foster good relations within wider society. A poignant example was the way in which local communities, with the nearby Al-Manar Centre leading by example, stepped in to support survivors of Grenfell Tower fire of June 2017, irrespective of faith or skin colour. As a community which has a stake in multiculturalism, Muslims are well aligned with those who have a nobler ambition for modern Britain.

“Islamic sources acknowledge race and ethnicity as natural phenomena that should be positively appreciated and accommodated, and not negatively exploited to discriminate against or despise any human being anywhere.”

Professor Mashood A. Baderin, in *Race, Faith & Community in Contemporary Britain* (MCB, 2022).

“A characteristic of British culture, despite its self-image of insularity, is the readiness to borrow and mix ideas and influences, as supremely exemplified in the English language. The British, especially the English, may be less open than other Europeans to their European neighbours, but they are also less hostile to multiculturalism and to inter-continental exchange. Hence today London is not simply an English or a British or even a European city, but a world city.”

Professor Tariq Modood, A defence of multiculturalism, http://www.tariqmodood.com/uploads/1/2/3/9/12392325/a_defence_of_multiculturalism.pdf

“It is the duty to protect the diversity of our country, including by protecting the space for Faith itself and its practise through the religions, cultures, traditions and beliefs to which our hearts and minds direct us as individuals. This diversity is not just enshrined in the laws of our country, it is enjoined by my own faith. As a member of the Church of England, my Christian beliefs have love at their very heart. By my most profound convictions, therefore – as well as by my position as Sovereign – I hold myself bound to respect those who follow other spiritual paths, as well as those who seek to live their lives in accordance with secular ideals.”

King Charles III, The King’s remarks to Faith Leaders, September 2022. <https://www.royal.uk/kings-remarks-faith-leaders>



2. THE CONSTRAINTS – DEPRIVED NEIGHBOURHOODS AND SOME CONSEQUENCES

From the data, the prospects for Muslims are promising: a young population entering the labour market, with trends indicating an increase in levels of education and English language proficiency, stake holders in a forward-looking UK plc and the embodiment of diversity with all its creative potential. However, there are various obstacles that stand in the way of this promise being realised.

Deprived neighbourhoods in England

The majority of the Muslim population is urban, inner city based – 61% (2,349,134) reside in 10 cities or towns: London, Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester, Leicester, Luton, Leeds, Oldham, Bolton, Sheffield.

In the post-World War II period, Britain's need for labour in the manufacturing centres and the ports was met through immigration. By the 1980s, as Britain's economy became more high-tech and service-oriented, the demand for skills changed, and working-class neighbourhoods became rundown and neglected. However, these were the neighbourhoods where Muslims had settled and built community networks.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is a tool used by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government to assess the level of

deprivation in different areas. It is based on factors like income support, job seekers, health issues, and housing conditions to determine an area's level of deprivation. The higher the IMD value, the more deprived a neighbourhood. The information is available at various levels of geography, including local authority districts (or borough councils), their administrative wards and sub-ward level.

Based on the 2019 IMD, the 309 local authority districts (LADs) in England in 2022 can be ranked in order, from those with the highest IMD, to the lowest. For example, Blackpool, the most deprived LAD, has an IMD of 45.0, while at the other extreme, for affluent Wokingham, it is 5.8. In London, Hackney has an IMD of 32.5, making it a more deprived borough than say Brent, which has an IMD of 25.6 (but still far removed from Wokingham).

Muslim population in deprived neighbourhoods

- In 2021, 20% of the population of England (11.42 million) resided in 46 of England's most deprived local authority districts ranked in order of their IMD, from most deprived to least deprived. If the distribution was equal, then the expectation would be for a Muslim population in these LADs to be 774,000 (20% of 3.87 million). It is in fact 1,529,442 – 40%. So the proportion of Muslims in these deprived LADs is twice that of the population as a whole.
- There have not been shifts of any significance in the preceding 20 years: in 2021, 40% of the Muslim population resided in these 46 LADs; the proportion in the same 46 LADs was 39% in both 2011 and 2001.
- The discrepancy is more marked if the pool of deprived LADs is narrowed: 10% of the population of England (5.71

million) resided in 20 of England's 309 local authority districts in 2021. If the distribution was equal, then the expectation would be for a Muslim population in these LADs to be 387,000 (10% of 3.87 million). However, the Census indicates this to be 991,175 – or 26.1% of the Muslim population. So almost three times as many Muslims live in these deprived neighbourhoods than would be expected.

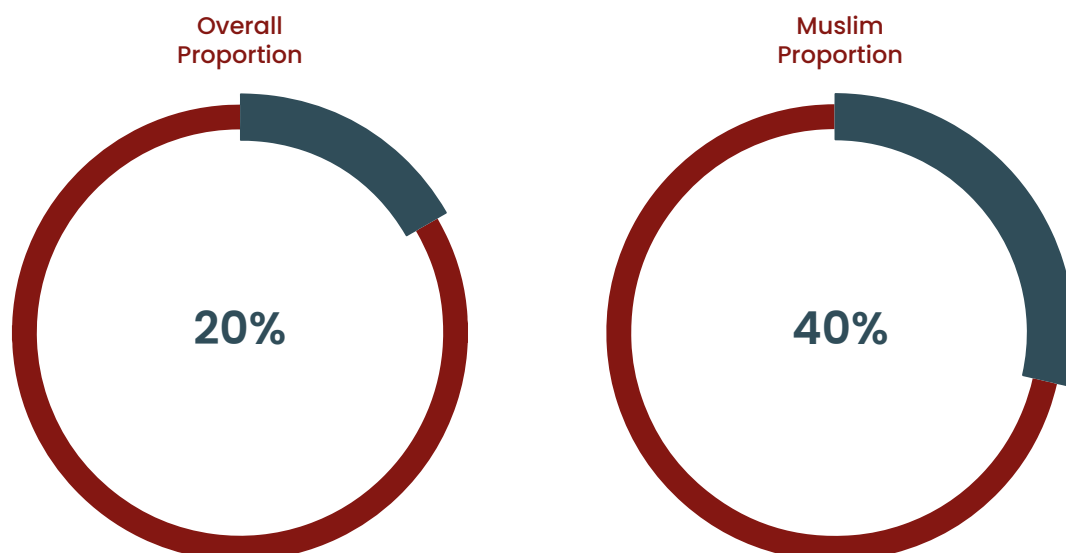
[In] 10.5% of the total number of LSOAs [ONS census term for a low level of geography, ~ 2,000 residents] [...] the Pakistani group has higher levels of deprivation than any other ethnic group [...]

Before this research, we knew that deprivation was highly uneven across England and Wales and across districts. Our findings show that deprivation can also be uneven within small geographic areas such as LSOAs. Moreover, we illustrate a further layering of unevenness such that within a single LSOA one ethnic group might be experiencing the most extreme deprivation, while another ethnic group lives with some of the lowest levels of deprivation.

Christopher D. Lloyd, Gemma Catney, Richard Wright, Mark Ellis, Nissa Finney, Stephen Jivraj, David Manley, Sarah Wood.

'An ethnic group specific deprivation index for measuring neighbourhood inequalities in England and Wales'. *The Geographical Journal*, November 2023.

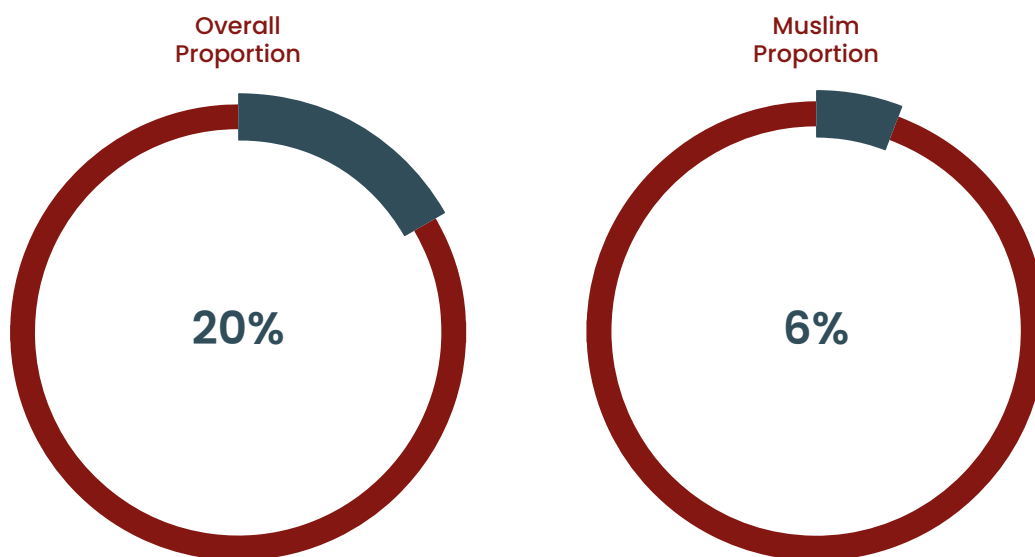
Distribution of Population in Most Deprived LADs



Muslim population distribution in the affluent neighbourhoods

- In 2021, 20% of the population of England (11.42 million) resided in 83 of England's most affluent local authority districts (i.e. least deprived when ranked in order of their IMD). If the distribution was equal, then the expectation would be for a Muslim population in these LADs to be 774,000 (20% of 3.87 million). It is in fact 218,783 – 6%. So the proportion of Muslims in these affluent LADs is less by a factor of a third compared to the population as a whole.
- There have not been shifts of any great significance in the preceding 20 years: in 2021, 6% of the Muslim population resided in these 83 LADs; in 2011 and 2001 it was 5%.
- A Muslim newborn baby has almost three times the chance to be born into the most deprived (10%) local authorities in England and less than a quarter of the chance to live in the most affluent (10%) local authorities as compared to other newborns.

Distribution of Population
in Most Affluent LADs



Many lower-income households have been pushed to the brink of deep poverty for some time, as they were disproportionately affected by the ongoing economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Children living in larger families, from Black and ethnic minority groups and from lone-parent families are more vulnerable to child poverty [. . .]

State of Child Poverty 2023,
<https://buttleuk.org/news/news-list/state-of-child-poverty-2023/>



Four consequences of life in a deprived neighbourhood

Poor Housing

The proportion of Muslim residents in households experiencing deprivation in the housing dimension (accommodation is either overcrowded, in a shared dwelling, or has no central heating) exceeds other faith groups.

Table 8: All usual residents in household deprived in the housing dimension by Religion

Religion	2021	
	Household Deprivation	
	Number	%
Christian	776,149	6.1
Muslim	281,451	26.9
Hindu	40,645	11.8
Sikh	16,706	10.3
Buddhist	13,654	11.4
Jewish	6,723	6.0
Other religion	17,491	10.5
No religion	625,387	7.1
Not answered	115,839	8.5
Total	1,894,045	7.6

Source: Census 2021 – Created Table from ONS Data



Picture:
Ocean Estate, Tower Hamlets, London.

“Households where all members identified as “Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African” had the highest level of overcrowding (16.1% in England, 11.9% in Wales) compared with all households (4.4% in England and 2.2% in Wales) [...] Households where all members identified as “Muslim” were more than five times more likely to be in overcrowded accommodation in comparison to all households in England and six times more likely in Wales.”

Source: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/articles/overcrowdingandunderoccupancybyhouseholdcharacteristicsenglandandwales/census2021>

Childhood poverty

The MCB has analysed the child population in local authorities that have a high Muslim population (20% or more) and are also among the most deprived, to assess the number of children being raised in poor neighbourhoods. There are about 400,000 children in these 14 local authority districts.

Table 9: Muslim children's population in select Local Authority Districts

Local Authority District	Age 0-4			Ages 5-15		
	All	Muslims	Muslims	All	Muslims	Muslims
	Number	Number	%	Number	Number	%
Barking and Dagenham	17,249	6,088	35.3	39,873	12,397	31.1
Birmingham	75,022	32,683	43.6	180,273	79,061	43.9
Blackburn with Darwen	10,059	4,671	46.4	25,172	11,890	47.2
Bolton	18,457	6,237	33.8	45,218	13,672	30.2
Bradford	36,095	15,670	43.4	88,741	38,037	42.9
Hackney	16,137	2,526	15.7	33,541	6,790	20.2
Hyndburn	4,926	1,181	24.0	11,676	2,876	24.6
Leicester	22,302	7,500	33.6	55,252	18,774	34.0
Manchester	34,378	12,373	36.0	79,603	28,470	35.8
Newham	23,854	10,941	45.9	51,007	25,840	50.7
Oldham	16,005	5,849	36.5	39,048	14,174	36.3
Pendle	5,952	2,334	39.2	14,583	5,846	40.1
Preston	8,922	2,058	23.1	20,247	4,961	24.5
Rochdale	14,637	3,915	26.7	34,187	9,324	27.3
Total	303,995	114,026	37.5	718,421	272,112	37.9

Source: Census 2021 – Created Table from ONS Data

No period of your life is as important as your first four years: it's when the basic structure of your brain is formed, shaping your capacities for language, reasoning and for interacting with others and with your environment. Your early years set the course for the rest of your life, a course which is extremely hard to correct later on [...] the effect of deprivation on children is so severe that the NHS classes 'growing up in poverty' as a form of 'childhood adversity' [...]. Of course, not all children who grow up in poverty are irredeemably traumatised by it, and doomed to failure and mental illness as adults. But it is extremely hard to escape unscathed [...]. By the age of 5 – the point at which children start school in the UK – children born into poverty are already a year behind the expected level of development [...].

Hashi Mohamad, *People Like Us*, Profile Books, 2020.

There is good evidence that socio-economic disparities in children's skills emerge early on, well before they start school. They then tend to increase in the school journey, and have major effects on their careers.

Social Mobility Commission, *State of the Nation 2022: A fresh approach to social mobility*, June 2022

Underachievement at school

- Poor neighbourhoods and poor schools are interconnected. Though educational attainment is rising with Muslims having a Level 4 qualification (degree level), the proportion of Muslims in the 16–24 age band without qualifications has not changed significantly in the last 10 years: it was 11.7% in 2021 and 11.0% in 2011. This can be seen as an indication of underachievement during schooling years.
- In the same age band, the proportion for whom Level 1 (includes 1–4 O levels/ CSE/GCSE any grades, NVQ Level 1) is the highest qualification obtained was 8.4% in 2021 compared to 20.2% in 2011. This is a move in a positive direction because it means a greater proportion are proceeding to Level 2 compared to 10 years previously. However given the number of 277,182 Muslims not proceeding to higher levels of education, there is no room for complacency.

Table 10: Young Muslims' educational underachievement

Census Year	Educational attainment	All				Muslims			
		All Age 16 and over		Age 16 to 24		All Age 16 and over		Age 16 to 24	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2021	No qualifications	8,827,460	18.2	699,350	11.1	674,930	25.3	66,915	11.7
	Level 1 qualification	4,679,223	9.6	572,825	9.1	277,182	10.4	48,119	8.4
2011	No qualifications	10,307,327	22.7	700,869	10.5	464,434	25.6	45,764	11.0
	Level 1 qualification	6,047,384	13.3	1,162,232	17.5	245,043	13.5	83,743	20.2
2001	No qualifications	10,937,042	29.1	901,267	15.9	390,164	38.6	61,373	21.8
	Level 1 qualification	6,230,033	16.6	885,125	15.6	122,509	12.1	47,916	17.0

Source: Census 2021 – Created Table from ONS Data, Census 2011 – ONS Table DC5204EW, Census 2001 – ONS Table ST158

It has been known, since at least the early 1990s, that Pakistani children, especially boys, were underachieving. The question arises whether enough has been done to address the problem [...] there have been times when Birmingham schools did not act to address underachievement of their Pakistani pupils when they could have done so [...]

Karamat Iqbal, British Pakistani Boys, Education and the Role of Religion in the land of the Trojan Horse, Routledge, 2020

For example, to the best of our knowledge, there is no UK-wide and regularly-updated database showing how young people's educational achievements are related to their social backgrounds. The closest we can get is a half-measure in England, free school meals (FSM), which captures approximately the poorest 15% of students [...] This is a serious limitation, although one which efforts are currently being made to remedy, by developing improved measures.

Social Mobility Commission, State of the Nation 2022: A fresh approach to social mobility, June 2022

Ill-health

Over a 20-year period, the proportion of Muslims aged 65 years and over with self-declared ill-health, particularly for women, has remained twice as higher than the rest of the population.

Table 11: Ill Health in the Over 65 population by Gender Census 2021

Sex	All			Muslims		
	All categories: General health	Bad or very bad health		All categories: General health	Bad or very bad health	
	No	No	%	No	No	%
Males	5,066,636	626,889	12.4	90,109	17,453	19.4
Females	5,996,711	784,073	13.1	96,395	28,824	29.9
All persons	11,063,347	1,410,962	12.8	186,504	46,277	24.8

Source: Census 2021 – Created Table from ONS Data

Table 12: Ill Health in the Over 65 population by Gender Census 2011

Sex	All			Muslims		
	All categories: General health	Bad or very bad health		All categories: General health	Bad or very bad health	
	No	No	%	No	No	%
Males	4,096,161	608,188	14.8	54,396	14,514	26.7
Females	5,126,912	825,476	16.1	52,430	20,033	38.2
All persons	9,223,073	1,433,664	15.5	106,826	34,547	32.3

Source: Census 2011 – ONS Table DC3203EW

Table 13: Ill Health in the Over 65 population by Gender Census 2001

Sex	All			Muslims		
	All categories: General health	Bad or very bad health		All categories: General health	Bad or very bad health	
	No	No	%	No	No	%
Males	3,494,203	776,793	22.2	32,384	11,077	34.2
Females	4,818,571	1,195,806	24.8	24,118	10,315	42.8
All persons	8,312,774	1,972,599	23.7	56,502	21,392	37.9

Source: Census 2001 – ONS Table ST15

“To reduce health inequalities requires action to reduce socioeconomic and other inequalities. There are other factors that influence health, but these are outweighed by the overwhelming impact of social and economic factors—the material, social, political, and cultural conditions that shape our lives and our behaviours.”

Michael Marmot PhD & Jessica J Allen PhD, In: Social Determinants of Health Equity, American J Public Health (2014), 104 (Suppl 4) S517 – S519



Picture:
Muslim women visiting the Royal
London Hospital, East London.

3. WAYS FORWARD

Given the statistics on deprivation and inequalities, there is no room for complacency, more so at a time of rising costs, growing queues at food banks and rapidly increasing rates of homelessness.

Effective policies are needed at the general and specific levels: to lift those living in deprived neighbourhoods out of poverty; and to give positive encouragement to young people to raise their sights and be ambitious. Of course, there are individual Muslims at the top of their career ladders, just as there are some Muslims living in affluent neighbourhoods. However, these success stories are few and far between with little evidence of upward social mobility for Muslims in the last twenty years.

At the general level, the MCB is raising an alert with the Government's 'Levelling Up' programme. At the specific level, Census data has highlighted an occupational social mobility malaise.

The General: Levelling Up

In our 'First Look' briefing, reference was made to the Government's 'Levelling Up the United Kingdom' programme, driven by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities'. The programme has declared its intention to focus on rural and coastal areas. The MCB does not covet this spend, but if this policy is to deliver a truly equitable allocation of resources, then the needs of deprivation in our urban centres also need to be addressed. The majority of the Muslim population is urban, inner city based. According to the 2011 Census, only 1.4% of the Muslim population lived in rural areas.

- **Institute of Fiscal Studies**

The Government's Levelling Up plans for England are being hampered by

a funding system that is "not fit for purpose" and deprives the poorest areas of the financial support to match their needs. The Institute for Fiscal Studies said that the method for allocating money to pay for public services is out of date, based on inadequate data and skewed in favour of the better-off south-east [...] The IFS said the most deprived 20% of areas were getting a smaller share of local government and police funding than they were estimated to need, while the least deprived 20% were receiving a bigger portion than their needs required.³

- **University of West London**

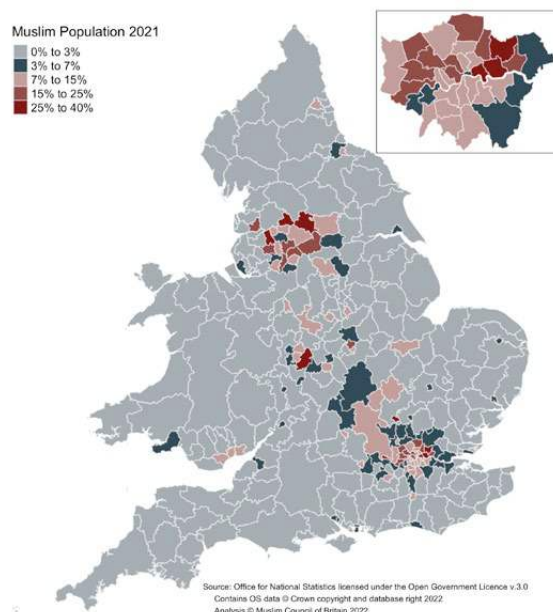
Researchers at the Centre for Inequality and Levelling Up, based at the University of West London, found that 61% of the most deprived areas in England have not been allocated

any funding from the £4.8bn Levelling Up Fund (LUF) [. . .] The researchers measured deprivation using the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), a widely used official measure of local areas' economic and social well-being. The government's allocation of LUF funding, however, uses a bespoke formula based on factors such as local productivity, unemployment, skills, transport connectivity and housing vacancy rates.⁴

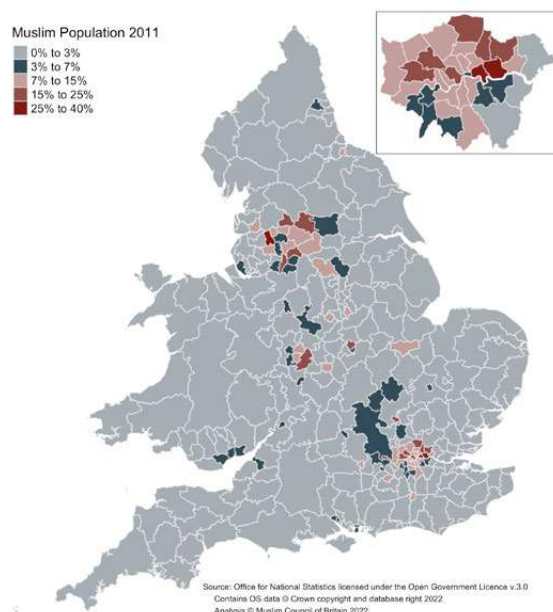
- **Dr. Faiza Shaheen, London School of Economics** [. . . a 2020 White Paper . . .] provided more details, opening up applications for a £4.8bn 'levelling-up fund' which promised to invest in infrastructure such as town centres and local transport, as well as freeports – special areas within the UK's borders where different economic regulations apply, including lower taxes – to supposedly help deprived communities [. . .] from a policy standpoint the agenda is flawed in design.⁵

MCB's concern is that the popular catchphrase 'a rising tide lifts all boats' – to denote how economic development can benefit everyone – will leave the poor sections of society marooned unless there is more consultation with communities.

Muslim Population 2021



Muslim Population 2011



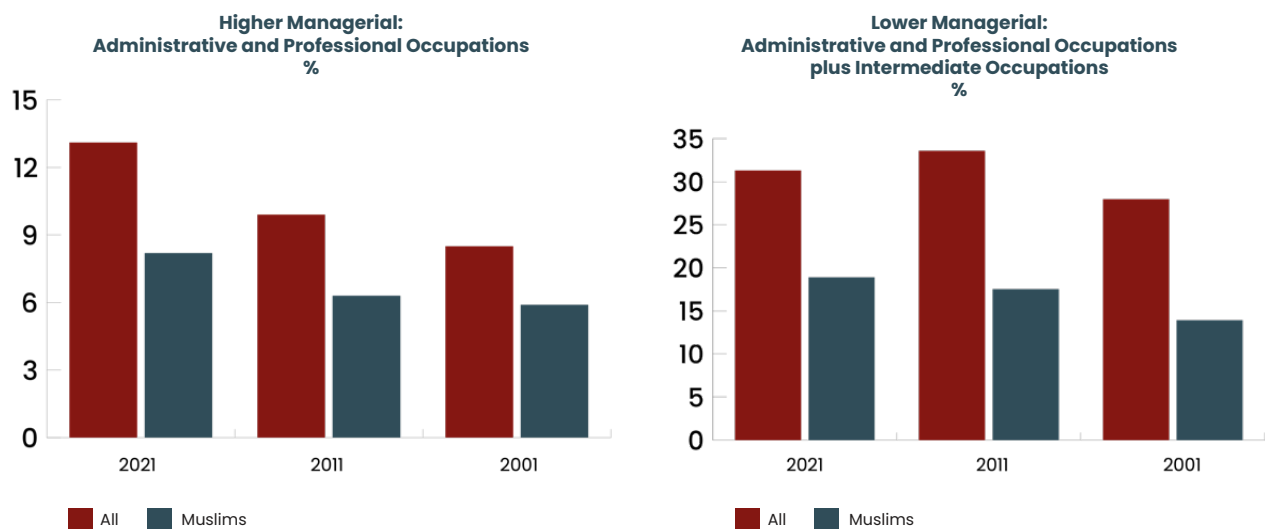
The Specific: Penalties in the labour market and the need to rethink 'social mobility'

The SMC report 'State of the Nation 2023' provides an easy-to-grasp definition of occupational mobility: "If you have a professional occupation and your parents had a working-class occupation, you have experienced upward occupational mobility." Drawing on the Labour Force Survey, it reports that there are significantly higher chances for this upward mobility for those from Chinese and Indian ethnic backgrounds. There is, however, a downward mobility trend – a shift from professional to working-class occupations – for those of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black African backgrounds.

The Muslim population in these three

groups account for 63% of the Muslim population of England and Wales. The proportion of Muslims in 'upper echelon' jobs has increased less than it has for the general population, whilst the number of Muslims in "lower echelon" jobs has not decreased as it has in the general population.⁶ The Social Mobility Commission reports that "there has been no decline in the rates of absolute or relative occupational mobility for decades" in the general population. It also indicates that this is sadly not true for Muslims (Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black African populations) who have experienced downward occupational mobility.²

Occupational classification – Census 2001, 2011 and 2021



Source: Census 2021 – ONS Table RM092; Census 2011 – ONS Table DC6207EW; Census 2001 – ONS Table ST157

There is a 'glass ceiling' at the higher echelons, sometimes described as the labour market penalty experienced by the Minority Ethnic population.

- **The King's Fund, 2020**

"Ethnic minority staff are over-represented in the NHS Agenda for Change pay band 5 (including, but not limited to, nursing and administrative roles, as well as some clinical roles) and significantly under-represented above band 8a, which includes very senior managers (that is, chief executives, executive directors and other senior managers with board-level responsibility who report directly to the chief executive). In other words, as the pay bands increase, the proportion of ethnic minority staff within those bands decreases, from 24.5 per cent at band 5 to 6.5 per cent at very senior manager level."⁷

- **EVENS Findings**

"Experiences of discrimination
– Employment: Pakistani, 28.6%; Bangladeshi, 41.88%; Arab, 21.09% [...] We find clear evidence that racism and racial discrimination are prevalent in the UK [...]"⁸

- **Professors Tariq Modood and Nabil Khattab**

"If you are a Muslim in the United Kingdom, you are likely to face a penalty regardless of your colour or geography. If you are a Christian in the United Kingdom, you are not likely to face any penalties unless you are black. If you are white you will also be protected unless you are a Muslim or to a lesser extent atheist (have no religion). The penalty will peak if you are a Muslim and black."⁹

- **Ethnicity Pay Gap, ONS Findings**

Over a 10-year period (2012–2022), analysis of pay indicates a persistent trend of UK-born White employees earning more on average than most ethnic minority employees

after adjusting for occupation, qualifications, geography, age and sex. Moreover, for British-born Bangladeshis in particular, this adjusted pay gap has been increasing – from almost comparable to the UK-born White population in 2016 to almost 20% worse off in 2021 [10% in 2022].¹⁰

- **Hashi Mohamed**

"[...] Today, Britain is in the grip of a social mobility crisis. So much of your future success, or not, is pre-determined by your social status, the parents to whom you're born and the schools you attend. Children from high income backgrounds who show signs of low academic ability by the age of 5 are 35% more likely to be high earners as adults than children from poorer families who show early signs of high ability.

Young people especially, have to believe that they have a future and stake in a society which is beneficial to them and those around them. If a young person does not feel that the society in which they're growing up has a place for them, they're unlikely to want to invest in it, they are less likely to be properly integrated and they're less likely to grow up to be productive and giving members of society."¹¹

- **Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2023**

Outcomes for Muslims in Britain have improved in higher education attainment, employment, reduced economic inactivity and median hourly income. However, these are still poorer outcomes than for most other religious groups. Adult and child poverty and severe material deprivation remains high among Muslims.¹²

- **Dr Faiza Shaheen**

“ [...] the story of social mobility is built on implicit hierarchy that devalues work like care and retail, while elevating jobs that pay well but often deliver little tangible benefits to society.”⁵



Picture:
Uber drivers strike at a demonstration
in front of Uber's headquarters,
London.

The intention of the Social Mobility Commission (SMC) “to undertake research to get a better understanding of what real people actually think about social mobility, so we can ensure the work of the Commission is aligned to their needs and wants and other bodies with expertise in the field” is to be commended.²

Community bodies like the MCB may lack the analytical capacity of the SMC, but do possess the lived experience of the consequences of social (im)mobility. For example, the statistics point to lack of diversity at the board-level. Perhaps if there had been greater diversity in NHS trusts’ boards, the issue of ill health among the Muslim elderly would have been addressed rather than left to persist? Perhaps if there had been greater ethnic diversity in schools’

senior leadership, the problems of educational underachievement would not have been so longstanding? Given the misgivings with the values implicit in the NS-SEC, the MCB also welcomes the SMC’s statement, “We believe cognitive ability is over-emphasised (for example, getting smart kids into top universities and jobs). As a Commission, we believe that other talents and other jobs should be valued too.” The ‘other jobs’ applies to the role of so many Ethnic Minority ‘intermediate-level’ workers that served as a backbone in the care and transport sectors during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The MCB is committed to working with civil society partners and the authorities in addressing Britain’s ‘social mobility crisis’. The choice is between one of poverty or prosperity.

End Notes

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4. Ben van der Merwe, *Investment Monitor*, 18 Jan 2022.
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7. Shilpa Ross et al, *Workforce race inequalities and inclusion in NHS providers*, 2020.
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*Any errors in this briefing remain solely the
MCB project team's responsibility.*

For data sources and related research:

Office for National Statistics <http://www.ons.gov.uk>

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local
Government

For English indices of deprivation 2019 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>



Picture: Advice to young Muslims on offer at Khizra Mosque, Manchester.

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Mebhoob Asaria, Dr Miqdad Asaria, Dr Shuja Shafi,
Dr Jamil Sherif, Fatema Sunderji, Zainab Uddin.

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admin@mcb.org.uk.

Art Director: Salman Farsi

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-  **0845 262 6786**
-  **admin@mcb.org.uk**
-  **www.mcb.org.uk**
-  **PO Box 57330, London,
E1 2WJ, UK**

