



National Association of Muslim Police  
"Muslims making a Difference to Policing"

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MUSLIM POLICE

# **An Overview of Key Islamophobia Research**

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## National Association of Muslim Police "Muslims making a Difference to Policing"

### **About the National Association of Muslim Police**

The primary role of the National Association of Muslim Police (NAMP) is to support Muslim colleagues, both Officers and Staff.

NAMP is an umbrella organisation for 11 local Associations of Muslim Police across England and Wales.

The NAMP has grown beyond expectation from our initial launch in 2007 when there were just three affiliated Associations.

### **NAMP'S key objectives are:**

- Support Network
- Increase Trust /Confidence and improve Community Cohesion
- Recruitment/Retention and Progression
- Raising Islamic Awareness and dealing with Equality issues such as Islamophobia.

NAMP is a Muslim organisation that welcomes the diversity of Islam and does not concentrate on any specific strands or sects of Islam.

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### **About the Author**

Dr Chris Allen is currently a Research Fellow in the Institute of Applied Social Studies, School of Social Policy at the University of Birmingham.

Since completing his Arts & Humanities Research Council funded doctoral studies that explored the discourse and theory of Islamophobia, Chris has been researching the topic for more than a decade. With a monograph entitled 'Islamophobia' (Ashgate) due in 2010, he has since published widely in such places as Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland as well as the UK. He has also presented his findings at conferences in Austria, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Norway and in November 2009 was invited to the European Parliament to debate the issue of Islamic and European identities. At the European level, he was co-author of the highly influential EUMC's report into Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001.

As well as his academic work, Chris has worked closely with a range of different organisations and institutions on policy issues including the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism & Xenophobia, the House of Lords Select Committee on Religious Offences, the Centre for European Policy Studies, the British Council, the European Commission on Security Issues in Europe, and the Greater London Authority amongst others. Most recently he submitted evidence in support of the establishment of an All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia in the House of Commons.



## Introduction

The 1997 publication of the Commission on British Muslims & Islamophobia's (CBMI) report, *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all* was a watershed moment. With it came the formal recognition of Islamophobia in the public and political spaces.

Defining Islamophobia as "a useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims" (p.1), the report set out a range of policy and practical recommendations to counter an Islamophobia that was purported to be a "part of the fabric of everyday life in modern Britain" (p.11).

A decade and a half since the publication of the CBMI report, Islamophobia has not gone away. As a recent report by the European Muslim Research Centre at the University of Exeter put it:

"the rise of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime is morally abhorrent and needs to be countered. Muslim communities in the UK and Europe have important contributions to make to the local communities and broader societies in which they live. Yet to date, these communities, and Islam more broadly, are often the subject of misunderstanding and vilification. Whereas Islamic legal and political traditions have, at key points, inspired and informed Western political and intellectual traditions, and Muslims in Europe have historically made, and especially today continue to make, important contributions at every level of British and European society, portrayals of their religion and identity still often seem to focus on terrorism, intolerance, and issues such as the veil. While such portrayals are unjust and empirically untrue, they still appear to academically, politically and popularly inform perceptions of Islam in Britain and Europe. This insidious phenomenon runs the very real risk of driving deep divisions through European societies, and of alienating friends, neighbours and political partners." (p.7)

Indeed, the situation might have worsened since the publication of the 1997 CBMI report.

Despite this, some remain dismissive of the idea, notion and reality of Islamophobia. Some justify Islamophobia as being the fault of Muslims due to the fact that a handful of individuals seek to commit atrocities in the name of their religion. Sadly, for those who put forward this argument, they attribute all Muslims without differentiation and so overlook the diversity that is present within Muslim communities both here in the UK and elsewhere in the world. For others, Islamophobia is little more than a shield behind which Muslims deflect or shy away from legitimate and valid criticism. For them, Islamophobia is far from being something that we should be readily considering let alone seeking to address.



This report therefore seeks to offer an overview of the evidence put forward for the existence of Islamophobia as a means of improving understanding and increasing awareness of the issues. Drawing upon the findings from a number of key pieces of research that have been published since the CBMI report almost a decade and a half ago, this report will consider: the evidence for Islamophobia; what has been noted and understood about the phenomenon; and what recommendations have put forward to address the issue. The key pieces of research that this report draws upon include:

**European Monitoring Centre for Racism & Xenophobia**

Summary report on Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001  
(published 2002)

**Commission on British Muslims & Islamophobia**

Islamophobia: issues, challenges & action (published 2004)

**Open Society Institute**

Muslims in the UK: policies for engaged citizens (published 2005)

**European Monitoring Centre for Racism & Xenophobia:**

Muslims in the European Union - Discrimination and Islamophobia  
(published 2007)

**European Monitoring Centre for Racism & Xenophobia**

Perceptions of discrimination and Islamophobia: Voices from members of  
Muslim communities in the European Union (published 2007)

**European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights:**

Data in Focus Report: Muslims (published 2009)

**European Muslim Research Centre:**

Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime: a London Case Study (published 2010)

It is worth stressing that each report is both long and detailed and so for the purposes of this particular report, the overviews provided are indicative rather than conclusive.



## What is Islamophobia?

Attempts to define Islamophobia have not been entirely successful and no single definition is used and accepted. This is not surprising given that, as Marcel Maussen puts it:

"Islamophobia groups together all kinds of different forms of discourse, speech and acts, by suggesting that they all emanate from an identical ideological core, which is an 'irrational fear' (a phobia) of Islam" (Cesari 2006, p.6)

When setting out definitions of Islamophobia, most sources refer to the CBMI report, where Islamophobia is the "dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims" (p.1). Being quite simplistic, the report went on to add that Islamophobia was manifested through a series of 'closed views'. These closed views saw Islam and Muslims as being: monolithic and static; 'other' and separate from the West; inferior; enemy; manipulative; discriminated against; and having its criticisms of the West rejected. It added that through these closed views, Islamophobia was becoming increasingly natural and 'normal'.

Whilst the closed views are helpful in identifying different forms and manifestations of Islamophobia in different situations and settings, they are also quite clumsy and sometimes difficult to understand. A more succinct definition is put forward by the Forum against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR). Building upon the original CBMI definition, FAIR states that Islamophobia is the fear, hatred or hostility directed towards Islam and Muslims. It goes on, adding that Islamophobia affects all aspects of Muslim life and can be expressed in several ways including: attacks, abuse and violence against Muslims; attacks on mosques, Islamic centres and Muslim cemeteries; discrimination in education, employment, housing, and delivery of goods and services; and the lack of provisions and respect for Muslims in public institutions. Whilst recognising the limitations of the definitions of Islamophobia available, and the multitude of different expressions and manifestations possible, it is the FAIR definition that is used throughout this report to inform understanding and analysis.

## The evidence for Islamophobia

### **European Monitoring Centre for Racism & Xenophobia: Summary report on Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001 (published 2002)**

In the report published by the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) in 2002, research undertaken across the breadth of the European Union (EU) showed that following the events of 11 September 2001 (9/11), Muslim and other vulnerable communities became targets of increased hostility.



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Recognising greater levels of fear among the general populations of the different EU member states, the report stated that the attacks exacerbated pre-existing prejudices and fuelled acts of aggression and harassment. Some of this was manifested in terms of low levels of physical violence with verbal abuse, harassment and aggression being far more widespread. Muslim women and those who had a much more 'visual' aspect to their religion were the most likely victims. At the same time, mosques and Islamic cultural centres were also widely targeted as were Islamic schools and Muslim-owned businesses. More worryingly, across the EU an increase in activity by far-right and neo-Nazi groups was also noted (pp.6-7).

Within the British context, the report drew upon the findings of monitoring undertaken by the Commission for Racial Equality, one of three national equalities-focused watchdogs at the time. The report began by noting the, "...significant rise in attacks on Muslims [that] was reported across a range of media in the immediate aftermath of September 11" (p.29). Incidents of violent assault, verbal abuse and attacks on property were noted although the report added that Muslim women, especially those wearing the hijab, were the most likely targets for such things as "verbal abuse, being spat upon, having their hijab torn from them and being physically assaulted" (p.29). Mosques were attacked, ranging from minor vandalism to arson and firebombs.

The monitoring by the CRE also noted how many of these incidents were reported in the press as being a "backlash against British Muslims" (p.29). Although as now, the report noted the disproportionate amount of coverage offered to more extremist Muslim groups and individuals. As the report put it, this meant that "...less sensationalist Muslim voices were mainly overlooked" (p.29).

One final observation of note was how in Britain:

"The far-right British National Party launched a highly explicit Islamophobic campaign. Drawing heavily on issues of the inability to co-exist with Islam, it reasserted Christianity as being under threat from Muslims in the UK. The BNP included isolated Sikh and Hindu voices in their campaign, despite these being denied by the wider respective communities" (p.29)

Unlike now, the BNP did not have any seats on local councils, the Greater London Assembly or in the European Parliament as indeed they do now. This alone is a timely reminder of how far the BNP and its message has come in less than a decade.



As the report concluded, what the findings from this research highlighted was "the deep-seated nature of Islamophobia and xenophobia" (p.54) adding that "anti-Muslim sentiment has emanated from a vast array of sources and taken on a range of manifestations building upon premises that were already pre-existent to the events of September 11 and may even have been strengthened by them" (p. 54). As was evident from the CBMI report, Islamophobia was not a distinctly post-9/11 phenomenon.

In terms of recommendations, the report drew upon instances of 'good practice' from across the EU. These included:

- Initiatives to develop the interest generated in the grass-roots in Islamic culture with an 'information offensive' based upon cultural, academic and educational initiatives
- Media-based initiatives that begin to deconstruct inaccuracies and stereotypes
- Muslim organisations developing dialogues with media groups and institutions that monitor and challenge unfair negativity
- Improving policies towards asylum seekers as indeed those that seek to address racism, Islamophobia and issues of social marginalisation (pp.9-10)

One final recommendation was to undertake a further research report one year on from 9/11. Sadly, this was not completed although the EUMC have since commissioned other research into Islamophobia and Muslim communities in Europe (*see below*).

### **Commission on British Muslims & Islamophobia: Islamophobia: issues, challenges & action (published 2004)**

The report, Islamophobia: issues, challenges and action was a follow up report to the CBMI's 1997 report published by the Runnymede Trust. Published by the Uniting Britain Trust, the report took the opportunity to 'take stock' and consider the 'progress, unfinished business and new challenges' that had subsequently emerged. It described the following as "notable developments" (p.1):

- changes in employment law, so that Muslims are protected from direct and indirect discrimination in recruitment and workplace practices;
- changes in the criminal justice system, so that crimes against Muslims attract higher sentences if they are aggravated by anti-Muslim hostility;
- the appointment of Muslims to chaplaincy roles in hospitals and prisons;
- the creation of Muslim schools within the state education system; encouragement of inter-faith activity and cooperation, and the involvement of faith communities in neighbourhood renewal;
- the potential of the community cohesion agenda to promote equality and dialogue in local settings;
- and greater sensitivity to the concerns and needs of Muslims throughout public services.



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It also recognised changes in the financial services industry to include a range of ‘halal’ products and a greater recognition of the dangers of Islamophobia in the media.

Recognising “disappointment and concern” (p.3), the report noted how some change had been rather more cosmetic than real and how the negative impact from 9/11 was showing the potential to severely curtail the civil liberties of Muslims in Britain. As the former solicitor, now Member of Parliament Sadiq Khan was quoted as saying, “Criminal laws such as the Terrorism Act 2000 and the Anti-Terrorism Crime Security Act 2001 have helped to create a climate of fear” (p.4). As with the EUMC report, the growing fear apparent in within society was acknowledged as a key factor. Other similarities are also apparent. The report notes how Islamophobia is exacerbated by the fact that a high proportion of refugees and people seeking asylum are Muslims (p.8).

Unlike the EUMC report, the follow-up CBMI report goes into much more detail about the situation and context for Islamophobia in Britain. Across a range of chapters, the report considers the media, community cohesion, education, employment and quite unlike the EUMC report, the issue of criminal justice. Noting that since the publication of the first report in 1997, the concept of religious aggravation had been applied across all categories of crime (p.31) yet was still able to record incidents of abuse, discrimination, harassment and violence being widespread. Providing examples of how Muslim women had their scarves forcibly pulled from their heads or had alcohol thrown at them, the report quoted sources from the Islamic Human Rights Commission as having evidence of clubbing incidents with bats, an attack on a Muslim child with pepper spray and another Muslim who was deliberately run over by a car (p.31). Sadly, the report noted how the victims were unlikely to report such incidents due to the fact that many had little confidence in the police.

Drawing upon research undertaken for the European Commission in 2003, the report noted how a high proportion of British Muslims perceived the police to be racist (p.32). In justifying this, examples of the disproportionate use of stop and search powers, discrimination in responding to calls, harassment of Muslims, ‘macho, nationalistic and colonial’ attitudes, and the failure of the service to recruit and retain Muslims were cited. Considering the issues more widely, the report suggested that the criticisms and concerns from within Muslim communities were very similar to those that were highlighted by the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report. Going further, the report added that the recommendations that came out of the Inquiry were as relevant for combating Islamophobia as indeed they were racism.

Providing an update to the sixty recommendations made in the original report, a series of priorities for 2004-2010 were identified. These priorities were necessary, the report argued, to highlight the many-pronged approach that was required to combat Islamophobia. Many of these priorities have since been acted upon and incorporated in various pieces of legislation – not least the Equality Act 2006 – and its recognition of the religion or belief strand of equalities. However as it went on, to truly combat Islamophobia, “legislation and regulation have important parts to play, but so also do ethical and professional codes of practice, the campaigning and lobbying efforts in the voluntary and community sector, and good will amongst individuals” (p.80). In other words, Islamophobia remains an issue for all in society.



**Open Society Institute: Muslims in the UK: policies for engaged citizens (published 2005)**

In its report, Muslims in the UK: policies for engaged citizens, the Open Society Institute (OSI) built upon the findings from its previous report, Monitoring Minority Protection in the EU: the Situation of Muslims in the UK. In doing so, the OSI identified severe levels of disadvantage and discrimination being experienced by British Muslims including a significant number of barriers to full participation and integration. The report focused on four specific areas:

- equality and discrimination
- education
- employment
- criminal justice

In the first part of the report, the socio-economic context for Muslims in Britain was set out, highlighting how British Muslims (pp.11-12):

- were disproportionately represented in the most deprived urban communities and experience poor housing conditions
- fell below the national average at GCSE level
- experienced high levels of the risk factors associated with child poverty
- of working age had no qualifications, a figure that was higher than all other faith groups
- were the most disadvantaged faith group in the British labour market suffering from disproportionate levels of unemployment and inactivity
- report higher rates of illness than all other faith groups and fare poorly on certain health indicators

In the second part, the report considered the levels of discrimination experienced by Muslims. Showing how research conducted prior to 9/11 already showed that Muslims were the most likely to report very serious problems or experiences in relation to seven out of nine indicators of unfair treatment (p.17), it added that things had become far worse since 9/11. Religion rather than 'race' or ethnicity was recognised as being a more important marker upon which discrimination was based, echoing the EUMC report's acknowledgement that individuals were being increasingly targeted on the visible markers of what it was perceived to be Muslim (p.18).



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Quoting a variety of different polls and surveys, the report noted how since 9/11: 80% of Muslim respondents reported being subjected to Islamophobia; 68% feeling they had been perceived and treated differently; and 32% being subjected to discrimination at UK airports (p.19).

The report went on to suggest that general attitudes and treatment based on stereotypes and prejudice were one of the most prominent ways in which Muslims encounter discrimination noting how young Muslim men had "...emerged as the new 'folk devils' of popular and media imagination, being represented as the embodiment of fundamentalism...dangerous individuals with a capacity for violence and/ or terrorism" (p.19). It went on to add that Muslims were increasingly being seen to be 'culturally dangerous' and threatening of the British 'way of life'.

In response to the "deprivation, disadvantage and discrimination that many [British Muslims] experience in their daily lives" (p.23) there was a tendency for many Muslims to prioritise their religious identity over their ethnic equivalent and to develop a distinct discourse about what it means to be an active and engaged British citizen.

Comprising more than 340 pages, the report set out a wide range of recommendations across a broad range of different policy perspectives. Some indicative recommendations included:

- a broader definition of violence to also include less severe incidents of harassment and intimidation, including hatred expressed in speech ('hate speech') although not with the intention of restricting freedom of speech (p.33)
- a greater commitment to inclusive education that included both a willingness to listen to the ways that minority communities like Muslims define their own needs as well as a determination to respond to those needs (p.34)
- a firm policy drive towards better integrating Muslims into the mainstream labour market through developing more inclusive and integrated strategies for labour market entry and progression (p.35)
- the need to increase confidence in the criminal justice system through addressing the needs of Muslims in all aspects, whether as victims of crime, witnesses, offenders, employees or volunteers (p.35)

More broadly, policy areas for additional input were identified (p.36):

- policy aimed at tackling the socio-economic disadvantage experienced by Muslim communities should be better targeted to meet the specific needs of Muslims as a group to ensure that it reaches individuals from Muslim communities.
- policy aimed at addressing the discrimination encountered by Muslims, as a result of the prejudice and stereotypes that others have about them. In particular, anti-racism and diversity training should also cover anti-Muslim racism; and ethnic monitoring should, where possible, also include monitoring of religious affiliation, in order to identify ways in which policies can, unintentionally, operate to disadvantage Muslims.
- policy that views faith identities as a positive resource, which should be respected and acknowledged.

**European Monitoring Centre for Racism & Xenophobia: Muslims in the European Union - *Discrimination and Islamophobia* (published 2007)**

**European Monitoring Centre for Racism & Xenophobia:  
*Perceptions of discrimination and Islamophobia: Voices from members of Muslim communities in the European Union* (published 2007)**

Following on from earlier reports, the EUMC published two reports simultaneously in 1997. One considered the evidence gathered by its 25 National Focal Points of its Racism and Xenophobia European Information Network (RAXEN) which showed that since 9/11, European Muslims had become seriously affected by an increasingly hostile social climate. The other reported the findings from 58 in-depth interviews with members of Muslim communities in 10 EU countries with significant Muslim populations. Both were designed to be read in conjunction with each other.

In the first, **Muslims in the European Union - Discrimination and Islamophobia**, the EUMC highlighted how “Muslims are often victims of negative stereotyping, at times reinforced through negative or selective reporting in the media” adding that Muslims “...are vulnerable to manifestations of prejudice and hatred in the form of anything from verbal threats through to physical attacks on people and property” (p.8). Reinforcing the evidence put forward in a variety of other reports and resources, the report went on to add that increased prejudice and discrimination impacted in such ways that “Many Muslims, particularly young people, face limited opportunities for social advancement, social exclusion and discrimination which could give rise to hopelessness and alienation” (p.8). At the European level, these trends prompted the Council of Europe’s European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) to publish two relevant General Policy Recommendations: General Policy Recommendation No. 5 combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims (CRI (2000) 21) and General Policy Recommendation No. 7 on national legislation to combat racism and racial discrimination (CRI (2003) 8) (pp.12-3).

Drawing together a comprehensive body of evidence, the report considered:

- official criminal justice data including police reports, prosecution reports and case files
- non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) reports and data
- research reports
- victim surveys
- and the media (p.15)

Quoting various statistics from the Crown Prosecution Service's (CPS) racist incident monitoring reports, the report noted how in the aftermath of 7/7, "there was an upsurge in 'faith hate' incidents recorded by the London Metropolitan Police Service" (p.17). Whilst these appeared to return to normal levels within a few weeks, the report noted how FAIR recorded in the period 2004-2005 more than 50 cases of violence against Muslim property - including places of worship - and over 100 cases of verbal threats and abusive behaviour.

In conclusion, the report added that much of the discrimination experienced by Muslims can be attributed to Islamophobic attitudes where racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia are increasingly becoming mutually reinforcing phenomena. As a word of warning, the report added that the true extent and nature of Islamophobia across the breadth of the EU remains severely underreported and under-documented. It went on, "as a reflection of this, policy makers are not well informed at both national and EU level about the specific situation of Muslims in the areas of employment, education and housing, as well as about the extent and nature of discrimination, incidents and threats targeted at Muslims" (p.19).

In the second report, *Perceptions of discrimination and Islamophobia: Voices from members of Muslim communities in the European Union*, the impact of 9/11 was again significant. Many Muslims felt that they had been placed under "intense scrutiny" and that there had been an "increase in open incidents of everyday hostility" (p.7). Most agreed that the situation had deteriorated over the last five years. Many felt that Islamophobia, discrimination, and socio-economic marginalisation were significant factors in generating disaffection and alienation. Most felt that the situation was made worse by the overwhelmingly negative representation of Muslims and Islam in the media. Key to this was the way that the media represented Islam as "monolithic, authoritarian and oppressive towards women" (p.8).

Recalling earlier reports, Islamophobia was once again shown to manifest itself in everyday situations where Muslims were recognisably visible. Despite the fact that the majority of attacks were verbal rather than physical or violent, the report noted how Muslims were easily 'wore down' by such daily experiences (p.9). The everyday nature of Islamophobia was highlighted by the perception that it was becoming increasingly expressed in the small details of every day encounters: "in passing comments, in jokes, in the way Muslims are observed and looked at by others" (p.9). Victims rarely felt confident enough to be able to challenge most instances of discrimination or Islamophobia. As a result, not only does Islamophobia remain under-reported but so too does it remain unchallenged.

From both of the EUMC’s reports, a lack of concrete recommendations emerged. Whilst the latter report attempted to capture ‘perceptions’ as a means of understanding, the more quantitative approach of the first report provided a foundation upon which to establish some suggested areas for development. Primarily, this focused on the issue of promoting integration as a means to reducing both Islamophobia and alienation. Drawing upon the principle of integration as “a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all” the report proposed developing constructive intercultural dialogue, as well as promoting inter- and intra-faith dialogue platforms between religious communities and/ or between communities and policy-making authorities at the national levels (p.18). It went on to add that there was a real need to develop, reinforce and evaluate policies aimed at delivering equality across a range of different sectors including employment, education and access to goods and services. The report concluded that monitoring and data collection was indispensable to not only addressing Islamophobia but so too informing effective policy development. Consequently, improving monitoring and data collection were something that needed to be swiftly addressed.

**European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights: *Data in Focus Report: Muslims* (published 2009)**

Published in 2009, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights’ (FRA) Data in focus: Muslims report provided some interesting observations. Whilst not including evidence from the UK, it continued to reiterate many of the findings from other reports about the levels and likelihood of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim discrimination. It did challenge some also.

With regard to experiencing discrimination, the report noted how approximately 34% of Muslim men and 26% of Muslim women in Europe had experienced anti-Muslim discrimination in the past year. Whilst going against research that suggested that it was Muslim women who were more likely to experience discrimination, the FRA report added that quite irrespective of gender, those who had experienced discrimination had done so an average of 8 times over the past twelve months (p.3). Once more challenging previous research, the report added that being ‘visible’ (e.g. Muslim clothing etc) did not make someone more likely to become a victim. Further exploring the type of person likely to become a victim of Islamophobia, the report suggested that someone between the ages of 16 and 24 were most likely to become a victim, with that likelihood seeming to reduce with age.

Of those who did become a victim, 79% were unlikely to report their experience of discrimination. The main reason given for not reporting discrimination was because the victims felt “nothing would happen or change” if they did (59%). For others, 38% did not see the point of reporting discrimination as it was just “part of their normal everyday existence” (p.3). Around 80% of victims could not name either an organisation or institution – official or otherwise – where they might be offered support or advice.



And finally, in terms of contact between Muslims and the police and other law enforcement agencies, the report stated that about 20% of Muslims had been stopped by the police in the previous 12 months, 40% of whom believed this was specifically because of their Muslim-ness. Of those who were stopped, they experienced on average 3 stops per year (p.3).

**European Muslim Research Centre: *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime: a London Case Study* (published 2010)**

The most recent report to consider Islamophobia is the European Muslim Research Centre's (EMRC), *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime: a London Case Study*. In the report's Preface, it notes how "the perils of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime threaten to undermine basic human rights, fundamental aspects of citizenship and co-existing partnerships for Muslims and non-Muslims alike" (p.7). The report sets out empirical evidence that "provides prima facie and empirical evidence to demonstrate that assailants of Muslims are invariably motivated by a negative view of Muslims they have acquired from either mainstream or extremist nationalist reports or commentaries in the media" (p.11). Going on, the report adds that "the evidence is clear that the major motivating factor for violence against Muslims is a negative and false belief that Muslims pose a security or terrorist threat" (p.11). The findings are based upon interviews with the victims, perpetrators and witnesses of Islamophobic and anti-Muslim hate crimes in London.

The report suggests that the perpetrators of Islamophobic and anti-Muslim hate crimes can be categorised under three groupings. First, from a relatively small number of violent extremist nationalists who hold political ideologies similar to those such as the BNP and English Defence League (EDL) but whose ideologies are also shaped by those from within the mainstream of politics also. Second, from London gangs who function and are quite distinct from nationalist gangs. And finally, from what the report describe as "ordinary Londoners and visitors to London who have become convinced and angry by negative portrayals of Muslims as terrorists and security threats" (p.11).

A very brief summary of the report's findings show that in the last year, Muslim Londoners have suffered serious attacks which include murder, serious assaults and arson as well as numerous other less serious assaults, abuse and intimidation, the overwhelming majority of which consist of spitting and threatening or abusive words and behaviour. As has been noted in previous reports, the EMRC's report highlights how the majority of Islamophobic hate crimes are not reported to the police either because of a lack of confidence or because victims are unaware of a police interest. Because of this, evidencing the true extent of Islamophobic hate crimes remains difficult to assess or quantify. Despite this, the report notes that since the events of 9/11, anti-Muslim hate crimes appear to have become more prevalent than racist hate crimes where black and Asian Londoners are the victims. Yet at the same time, they have not been afforded the same priority attention government and police have invested in racist hate crimes (p.11).



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In terms of motivation, the EMRC report suggests that “Islamophobic, negative and unwarranted portrayals of Muslim London as Londonistan and Muslim Londoners as terrorists, terrorist sympathisers and subversives in sections of the media” (p.12) are the main culprits. Whilst some attacks appear to have been, somewhat bizarrely, motivated by the association of Muslims with Barack Obama, the report also recognised the role of the political ideologies of those from within the “violent extremist nationalist milieu” (p.12) linking in both the BNP and EDL. Unsurprisingly, Muslims are less likely to become victims of Islamophobia in areas that have a high percentage Muslim population or when near to their homes. As with many criminal activities, many assailants are either drunk or have been drinking and are most likely to attack their victims late in the evening. Perpetrated by both individuals and gangs, the report notes how assailants invariably indicate their sentiments and motivation through an “explanatory insult linking the victim to terrorism” (p.12).

As with numerous reports beforehand, recommendations were focused on three broad areas: police, politicians and the media. Recognising the outstanding conduct of the vast majority of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), the report acknowledged the damage inflicted by the poor behaviour of a small handful of officers. Suggesting leadership akin to that following the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, the report identified the need to build confidence within Muslim communities (p.13). It also recommended an anti-Muslim hate strategy being developed in conjunction with the Muslim Safety Forum.

For politicians, the report highlighted the legacy of the Bush/ Blair ‘with us or against us’ mentality and how current counter-terrorism strategies have wrongly conflated any threat from al-Qaeda with other Islamic groups and organisations, both of which unwittingly licence anti-Muslim attitudes and crimes. The report also suggested that a minority of mainstream politicians display Islamophobic attitudes and sentiments (p.13).

And finally, as regards the media, the EMRC reiterated its view that some sections of the media provide Islamophobic motivation for anti-Muslim hate crimes (p.13). Quite simply, the report suggests that the media should do more to promote victims of anti-Muslim hate crimes in the same way they do victims of other hate crimes.



## Recurring Themes

Throughout the research that has been undertaken over the past decade and a half, a number of recurrent themes have become apparent. Of these, this report intends to consider those that relate to: communities, criminal justice and media.

## Communities

The recent British Social Attitudes Survey suggests that 52% of respondents believe that Britain is deeply divided along religious lines. In many ways, this is somewhat unsurprising because as the various pieces of research set out here show, the legacy of the 'either with us or against us' mentality looms large as does the view that Muslims are 'the Other'. In the light of recent terrorist atrocities – including the stereotypes and assumptions drawn from this – and the burgeoning counter-terrorism agenda that many equate with Muslims and Muslims alone, the impact and potential to further divide communities along lines of religion and religious identity cannot be overlooked.

Unlike other forms of discriminatory behaviour – based on race, ethnicity, gender, disability etc – protecting against discrimination on the basis of religion in particular Islam and Muslim-ness has not been afforded the same historical importance. The recent extending of the equalities framework to include 'religion or belief' through the Equality Act 2006 as well as the establishment of the EHRC whose remit includes monitoring religious discrimination are therefore welcome developments. But with the extending of protection for Muslims, Muslim communities have at the same time been the central focus of the development and implementation of other legislation and policies: those that have sought to curtail and control radicalism, proscribe 'extremist groups', and introduce new offences that include 'acts preparatory to terrorism', 'encouragement to terrorism' and the 'dissemination of terrorist publications'. Not only has this isolated and alienated Muslim communities but so too has it both raised and reinforced fears and anxieties in wider society about Muslim cultures and traditions as the 2002 EUMC report highlighted.

As a response, that same report suggested the need for an 'information offensive' to be generated. Whilst it is questionable the extent to which 'Islam awareness' and other similar initiatives are able to counter Islamophobia, there would appear to be a need for – as one of the EUMC's reports from 2007 put it - 'a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all'. Drawing upon such notions as community cohesion, practical proposals are required that help to improve relations and promote greater integration and cohesion at the local level. Building upon the findings of the Commission on Integration & Cohesion's 'Our Shared Future' report from 2007, four key principles might be useful in taking this agenda forward. First, there has to be an emphasis on 'shared futures', one that emphasises that which binds communities over and above that which differences divides them. Second, new thinking about our collective rights and responsibilities that as the report puts it, makes clear both a sense of citizenship and the obligations that go along with membership of a community, both for individuals or groups. Third, an emphasis on respect and civility that recognises the need to strengthen social bonds not least to address the view that Britain is seriously divided along religious lines. And finally, a greater and more wholesale commitment to equality for all irrespective of difference.



**RECOMMENDATION:**

**Muslims and their organisations must be actively engaged in equalities if the outlawing of discrimination is to be achieved. They need to seek dialogue with others from across the different equality strands at the same time as begin open and honest debates about the inequalities and discrimination that exist within their own communities.**

Key to this is the need for a holistic approach to be undertaken: one that tackles exclusion, isolation and inequalities. Central to this will be the building and maintaining of sustainable communities that are cohesive, integrated and – in considering the negative connotations associated with extremism and terrorism and the backlashes that duly ensue – more resilient. Recognising the potential of the community cohesion agenda to promote equality and dialogue in local settings will support this as indeed will the development and implementation of policies that, as the OSI report recommended, are aimed at tackling the socio-economic disadvantage experienced by Muslim communities. Likewise, policies that seek to address the discrimination encountered by Muslims.

Things have begun to change as regards this issue, not least with the introduction of the ‘religion or belief’ strand of equalities as part of the Equality Act 2006, but as a recent report that evaluated the implementation of religion or belief legislation on behalf of the EHRC noted, more still needed to be done (Woodhead, 2010). And tackling discrimination is just one part of the conundrum.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**The EHRC and others need to undertake further research into Islamophobia and other forms of religious discrimination to better evidence and understand the scale and breadth of the phenomenon.**



## Criminal Justice

In terms of criminal justice, the recurring issue appears to be twofold: first, the likelihood of victims of Islamophobic crimes being unlikely to report them to the police; and second – and possibly derivative of the first - a lack of confidence in the police.

Individuals and communities can become victims of Islamophobia from, as the 2002 EUMC report noted, incidents of being spat upon, having hijabs torn from heads, of verbal or physical abuse, and from attacks on property that range from minor vandalism to arson and firebombs. Irrespective of the type of incident, all are without any doubt whatsoever unacceptable in today's society. Yet as the 2004 CBMI follow-up report stated, whilst the number of incidents appears to be continuing to rise – particularly sharply after trigger events – the vast majority of incidents go unreported. Reiterated in the 2004 OSI report, both EUMC reports from 2007, the FRA 2009 report and most recently, the 2010 EMRC report, the issue of reporting incidents is a critical one.

Albeit focusing on Europe rather than in the UK, the FRA 2009 report stated that 79% of victims of Islamophobic incidents were unlikely to report their experience. As it went on, the main reasons given for not reporting discrimination was the perception that nothing would happen or change whilst in other reports, the view was confidence in the police or even that the police were racist. Acknowledging the recognition made in the EMRC report, the damage inflicted by the poor behaviour of a small handful of officers cannot therefore be underestimated. Taking forward the EMRC's recommendations as a means of addressing this issue, another way of encouraging victims to report Islamophobic incidents might come in the form of better leadership. Taking the model of leadership that emerged out of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, activities that build confidence within Muslim communities is one way forward. Unlike the aftermath of the Lawrence inquiry however, the relationship between police and Muslims communities as well as the perceptions of each other are and indeed continue to be overshadowed by agendas that focus upon counter-terrorism and security. Because of this, efforts to build confidence may be more difficult not least because of the suspicions that exist. Nonetheless, it is an area where further work is required.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

**The police and other strategic partners to develop an initiative to raise awareness within Muslim communities of the need to report all incidents of Islamophobia and other religiously based hate crimes.**

As well as recognising the need to raise awareness of the need to report all Islamophobic incidents to the police, those from within Muslim organisations must begin to work more closely with the police and other relevant bodies to ensure that monitoring and evaluation of all relevant data and statistics clearly identify and duly evidence the scale of the problem. As part of this, and as recommended by the EMRC report, an anti-Muslim hate strategy could be developed by the various police forces in conjunction with such organisations as the Muslim Safety Forum and indeed others. Another useful strategy might be for one or more Muslim organisations to produce something akin to the annual reports published by the Community Security Trust (CST).



The CST is the only organisation in the country dedicated to collecting, analysing, responding to and publishing statistics relating to antisemitic figures. Every year it publishes its Antisemitic Incidents Report which not only details the number and type of incidents but so too allows for trends to be identified also. Given that its findings are relied upon by both the Government and police, in its 2009 report published earlier this year the CST were able to evidence the fact that the number of anti-Semitic incidents recorded in 2009 were the highest on record.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**Muslim organisations to work together to collect, analyse, respond to and publish statistics relating to Islamophobic incidents**

**The Media**

Each of the reports in some way called into question the role and influence of the media. From the earliest recognition of the media in the 2002 EUMC report through to the EMRC's acknowledgement of the ongoing 'drip-feed' of Islamophobic, negative and unwarranted portrayals of Islam and Muslims as terrorists, terrorist sympathisers and subversives, the media would appear to be playing a significant role in the shaping and determining of Islamophobic and anti-Muslim attitudes and ideas. However, the role of the media is one that is difficult to categorise. As the 2002 EUMC report put it:

"To try and explain the media's role therefore remains difficult. None of the reports suggested that the media directly caused or, indeed, were responsible for any reported or identified act of aggression or significant change in attitude. However, this is not to dismiss their impact in any way, and despite there being no direct evidence to suggest otherwise, the media continue to play a major role in the formulation and establishment of popular perceptions in the public sphere. So when certain media were identified as representing Muslims both negatively and stereotypically - sometimes as an almost necessary part of the reporting process - in a situation that was volatile, a greater willingness to be responsible and accountable would have been welcomed. However, some media sectors were responsible and accountable, while others sought to remain balanced and objective, and for this those sources should be congratulated. So whilst no evidence exists to suggest that medias are influentially causal, they also cannot be completely dismissed either" (pp.52-3)

So whilst the media cannot be blamed for Islamophobia – in particular the translation of attitudes and ideas into incidents and actions – the media's role cannot be entirely dismissed either.

With this in mind, it is worth drawing upon the findings of another report commissioned by the Mayor of London on behalf of the Greater London Authority in 2006. Entitled, *The search for common ground: Muslims, non-Muslims and the UK media (2007)*, the report concluded that the media typically presented Muslims and Islam:

- as having no common ground with 'the West', where conflict is inevitable
- as a threat to traditional British customs, values and ways of life.
- where alternative views, understandings and opinions are not mentioned or are not given a fair hearing.
- where facts are frequently distorted, exaggerated or oversimplified.
- where the tone of language is frequently emotive, immoderate, alarmist or abusive.

**The consequences of this were set out as being:**

- likely to provoke and increase feelings of insecurity, suspicion and anxiety amongst non-Muslims.
- likely to provoke feelings of insecurity, vulnerability and alienation amongst Muslims, and in this way to weaken the Government's measures to reduce and prevent extremism.
- unlikely to help diminish levels of hate crime and acts of unlawful discrimination by non-Muslims against Muslims.
- likely to be a major barrier preventing the success of the Government's community cohesion policies and programmes.
- unlikely to contribute to informed discussion and debate amongst Muslims and non-Muslims about ways of working together to maintain and develop Britain as a multicultural, multifaith democracy.

It concluded that the media reinforce the notion that "Islam is profoundly different from, and a serious threat to the West; and that, within Britain, Muslims are different from – and a threat to – 'us'" (p.xvii).

In response, it would be good to see news and other media organisations drawing up or including in their codes of conduct and style guides recommended standards about Muslims and Islam and all associated terminology to might help reduce the recurrence of misrepresentations and stereotypes. Such codes and guides however should not be imposed from the outside but based upon existing best practice within media circles that are equitable with other religious and minority groups and communities. News and other media organisations should also consider how Muslim staff are utilised so as not – as identified in the GLA's 2007 report – to be pigeon-holed for 'Muslim issues' only.



**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Media codes of conduct and style guides to include clear guidelines about Muslims and Islam to help reduce misrepresentations and stereotypes.**

As well as news and other media organisations, institutions such as the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) and the Office of Communications (OFCOM) also have a key role to play. Not only must the news and other media organisations take seriously any complaints they receive in relation to distorted, inaccurate and inflammatory representations of Islam and Muslims but so too could the PCC for instance consider amending its terms of reference. At present, complaints are only considered if they concern individuals although with some slight amendment, it should also be possible for the PCC to consider complaints about the representation of groups and communities as well. And finally, those such as the EHRC could help to monitor levels and expressions of Islamophobia in the media if indeed they saw this as part of their broad remit.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**Developing an initiative that monitors and responds to levels and expressions of Islamophobia in the media and to publish its findings accordingly.**



## Conclusion

As noted previously, the recent British Social Attitudes Survey suggested that 52% of respondents believe that Britain is deeply divided along religious lines. In addition, it also noted how 45% of people believe that religious diversity is having a negative impact on society, and that more than half would oppose the building of a large mosque at the end of their road as opposed to 15% who would object if it was a church. It is worth stressing that in stating these findings, none of these attitudes are overtly Islamophobic or indeed anti-religious. However they do suggest a hardening of perceptions and attitudes towards Muslims and Islam that could be easily exacerbated by certain agitators to fuel Islamophobia and so become the catalyst for even greater hatred and violence.

If Islamophobia and all its potential impacts, consequences and ramifications are not afforded the necessary and rightful importance now, then it is possible that this will bring about deeper divisions, less cohesion, greater tensions and social unrest across British society. The need to act now with speed, clarity, commitment and impartiality is long overdue.

Having provided an overview of the key pieces of research to have been undertaken over the past 15 or so years, this report set out with the intention of highlighting the evidence put forward for the existence of Islamophobia as a means of improving understanding and promoting a better engagement with the issue. The motivation for this was because – as was stated at the outset - a decade and a half on from the publication of the original CBMI report, Islamophobia has still not gone away.

Having opened with a significant quotation from the recent EMRC report, it is worth ending with one also. In seeking to address Islamophobia, the report noted:

“...the method to counter Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime is clear: education. By creating an unimpeachable body of academic work, and by creating mechanisms to empower Muslim communities to put forward their positions – now and in the future, we hope to help dispel the ignorance that has thus far fuelled the populist appeal of Islamophobia and the hate crimes it spawns, and challenge those individuals and organisations that seek to pursue agendas that demonise and alienate European Muslims” (p.8)

This report clearly endorses and duly supports this approach because as the 1997 CBMI report recognised, Islamophobia is – and indeed remains - a challenge for us all.

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