

Equinet workshop summary

Equality bodies tackling discrimination and intolerance against Muslims

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Background Information

Equinet, the European Network of Equality Bodies, brings together 47 organizations from across Europe, which are empowered to counteract discrimination as National Equality Bodies across a range of grounds including age, disability, gender, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, and sexual orientation.

Equinet published a report in early 2018 on '[Faith in Equality: Religion and Belief in Europe](#)', bringing powerful evidence of the particularly grave discrimination experienced by Muslims in Europe. We have established regular engagement with the European Commission's Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred and relevant civil society partners to identify effective remedies to this discrimination, taking an intersectional approach to allow addressing, for instance, the particular experiences of Muslim women.

In 2020 this included a high-level conference co-organised with the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU and the Commission's Coordinator, while in [January 2021](#), we co-organised [a workshop](#) with the Commission's Coordinator and civil society partners to enhance cooperation between Equality Bodies and NGOs.

The need for a follow-up to this workshop was agreed with partners, with the workshop summary also identifying a list of actions for improved cooperation. Furthermore, the [EU's Anti-Racism Action Plan](#) adopted in 2020 and [the Council conclusions on combating racism and antisemitism](#) adopted in 2022 provide an important backdrop to this work.

To serve this purpose, the in-person workshop 'Equality Bodies tackling discrimination and intolerance against Muslims' provided the opportunity to discuss the most effective and useful ways for Equality Bodies to tackle discrimination against Muslims. This in-person workshop served as a unique opportunity to bring together Equality Body staff and European institutions, and civil society organisations to encourage dialogue and the development of common actions. Co-organised with the German Federal Anti-discrimination Agency, it took place in Berlin on 15-16 September 2022 under the Chatham house rule, including plenary sessions, small group discussions, as well as a study visit to the offices of the Berlin-based CLAIM Alliance Against Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate.

With over 25 participants from countries across Europe, representing Equality Bodies, civil society organisations and European institutions, discussions were very fruitful. The presentations and conversations held during the workshop contributed to rich outcomes which are summarized in this document.

Workshop resources

- [Event webpage](#)
- Find out more about [Equinet and Equality Bodies](#)

Session I: Reviewing the political-legal landscape

During this session, panellists reflected on their work experience and shared an overview of the existing political-legal landscape including:

1. [Key discrimination, inequality and intolerance challenges](#)
2. [Recent developments addressing discrimination against Muslim people at the European level – ECRI’s revised General Policy Recommendation No. 5](#)
3. [Countering forms of intolerant and hateful speech through cooperation at the national level](#)

1. Key discrimination, inequality and intolerance challenges

Panellists representing the [European Commission against Racism and Intolerance](#) and the [European Network Against Racism](#) shared several issues and challenges addressing discrimination against Muslim people that need to be tackled, including:

- **Ultra-nationalistic populist discourses against minorities** and specifically Muslim people.
- **A lack of strong commitment** at the European and national level to combat anti-Muslim hatred.
- **Negative stereotypes and criminalisation** of Muslims. Muslim people are labelled as a suspect community, wrongfully presuming that they are involved in crime simply because they are Muslims. Additionally, Muslims are often depicted as a threat to, rather than a part of society.
- Certain **intersecting characteristics exacerbate inequalities and discrimination against Muslim people**. For instance, Muslim women are more exposed to discrimination and exclusion.
- **Muslim women wearing religious symbols have been facing serious challenges in both the private and the public sector** across Europe. The impact of their choice in education and employment is strong as well as their exclusion and isolation.
- Increase of **online islamophobia** across Europe.
- **Racialisation** of Muslim people and its systematic negative impact across all areas of life.
- **Over-representation of Muslim people in low-income neighbourhoods**. For instance, in Denmark, the government publishes a list of ‘ghettos’ where more than 50% of residents are immigrants or descendants of non-western people. This stigmatizes certain communities without addressing the problem.
- **Counter-terrorism measures** have expanded criminalisation in different areas leading to many abuses to the rights of Muslim people.

2. Recent developments addressing discrimination against Muslim people at the European level

[ECRI’s revised General Policy Recommendation No. 5](#)

In order to identify some of the recent developments and instruments addressing discrimination against Muslim people, participants benefitted from a presentation from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, focusing particularly on their recently adopted revised General Policy

Recommendation No. 5 on preventing and combating anti-Muslim racism and discrimination ('revised GPR').

The revised GPR 5 takes into account the trends observed over the last two decades including hate speech and hate crime, and particularly some of the challenges mentioned above. The aim of ECRI's revised GPR is to provide comprehensive guidance to governments on addressing anti-Muslim racism and discrimination in four specific areas: policies and institutional coordination, prevention, protection and prosecution/law enforcement. Under such areas, ECRI recommends that the governments of Member States:

- Give **high priority to the fight against anti-Muslim racism** through relevant Action Plans, appointing national level coordinators and setting up independent monitoring bodies.
- Regularly **assess the impact, including from a fundamental rights and gender perspective, of laws and policies against terrorism and extremism on Muslim communities** and to ensure that groups particularly affected by the implementation of such laws and policies are thoroughly consulted and involved in debates concerning their implementation.
- Ensure **the inclusion of the principle of intersectionality in all equality policies** dealing with racism and discrimination against Muslims.
- **Collect and publish comprehensive gender disaggregated equality data** to help identify any systemic issues and priority areas for policy responses to anti-Muslim racism and discrimination.
- Fully **involve the National Equality Bodies** in the process of countering, monitoring, data collection, hearing and considering complaints and petitions on anti-Muslim acts, as well advising the legislative authorities on the adoption of relevant legislation, along the lines set out in ECRI's revised General Policy Recommendation No. 2 on Equality Bodies to combat racism and intolerance at national level.
- Encourage political actors, opinion leaders and other public personalities to **take a firm public stand against anti-Muslim racism**, speaking out against its various manifestations.
- Regulate internet companies, including social media networks, telecom operators and internet service providers in order to **establish effective systems to monitor and stop anti-Muslim hate speech online**. These should be in line with international human rights standards and engage with social media networks to work together on initiatives, in particular in the field of education, that could help **propagate balanced narratives about Muslims and Islam on social media platforms**.
- **Support the activities of non-governmental organisations** that play an important role in preventing and combating anti-Muslim discrimination and secure an open and democratic space for these organisations to discuss about anti-Muslim discrimination together with state bodies, regional/local administrations and other relevant actors from the private sector.
- **Ensure that anti-Muslim crimes committed online are punished** just as crimes offline and are adequately addressed by means of effective prosecution and other measures. Illegal anti-Muslim hate speech must be removed promptly and consistently by internet service providers, in accordance with the relevant legal and policy framework.

3. Countering forms of intolerant and hateful speech through cooperation at the national level

Panellists from [OBERAXE](#) and the [Spanish National Office Against Hate Crime \(ONDOD\)](#) shared key features and lessons learned through their cooperative work addressing hate speech and hate crime against Muslim people.

They underlined that **knowledge of the evolution of racism**, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance, is **key to the articulation of active policies** and the development of effective prevention and protection measures. Good practices by OBERAXE in this regard include the publication of a [study](#) on Islamophobia in 2020, and the co-creation of the [Observatory of Islamophobia in the Spanish Media](#) which analyses articles in the Spanish media.

OBERAXE also plays an important role in [combating online hate speech](#). This is illustrated by their daily **monitoring of hate speech on social media** including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Tik Tok. The collected data is shared through the Social Media Hate Speech Monitoring Bulletin. Some interesting trends are observed in these bulletins. For instance, a recent bulletin showed that among the five top reasons for discriminatory acts are: islamophobia, anti-immigration sentiment, as well as xenophobia against Sub-Saharan Africans and toward people from the Maghreb region. However, this work would be difficult without the **harmonization of the categorization of Islamophobia**.

Equally important is a **cooperation between different stakeholders** to effectively tackle hate speech in practice. Besides a national [interinstitutional agreement on preventing and combating racism and other forms of intolerance](#), initiatives to engage with CSOs at the local level were also mentioned. These initiatives aimed to **expand local action meta-communities** to facilitate harmonious coexistence solutions, especially for the specific area they are addressing. Victims' social organizations, law enforcement authorities, social affairs and other relevant stakeholders should all participate. A concrete example of such an initiative is [Proyecto CLARA](#), which contributed to **improving the capacities of local authorities, in particular local police, to prevent, identify, mediate and combat racist and xenophobic incidents** and in particular hate speech and hate crimes that threaten peaceful coexistence in cities. Several actors were involved including OBERAXE, several local police stations and universities. The project included activities such as a training plan on hate incidents and hate crimes for local police staff, the creation of Police units specialised in tackling hate crime and promoting diversity, and collaboration agreements for community development.

Fostering training and raising awareness among members of law enforcement bodies in combating hate crimes is also one of the actions included in the [Action Plan to combat Hate Crimes](#) which ONDOD contributes to. In this regard, ONDOD has the important task of providing adequate police assistance and protection to victims or witnesses of hate crimes based on racist, anti-Semitic or other ideological grounds, religion or belief, sexual orientation, illness or disability and other discriminatory acts.

The important role of ONDOD in **improving the coordination mechanisms of law enforcement bodies and other public and private institutions** was discussed. A good example is a [Protocol for action by law enforcement agencies for hate crimes and conduct in breach of the legal provisions on discrimination](#). The protocol aims to establish unified and consistent rules or guidelines for police forces for the identification, correct collection and codification of racist or xenophobic incidents or discriminatory

conduct, and a determination of the specific elements to be taken into account in the police procedures to be followed.

Apart from national initiatives, OBERAXE and ONDOD also underlined **opportunities to coordinate and participate in European projects that include actions against Islamophobia**. This is the case of [Real UP](#), a collaborative project funded through the EC's Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV). The main aim of the project is to improve the capacities of state authorities to **identify, analyse, monitor and evaluate online hate speech, so as to develop and strengthen counter-narrative (upstander) strategies against hate speech** motivated by racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and anti-Gypsyism. This is done by discussing and generating a map of good practices and effective didactic tools for counter-narrative hate speech online. The project also includes descriptions of profiles for perpetrators and victims, through which the intensity, severity, distribution and potential impact of hate speech can be assessed, in order to establish recommendations for action related to upstander discourse.

Session II: Cooperating for equality

This session aimed to **reflect on and discuss the importance of cooperation** in combating discrimination and intolerance against Muslims. For this purpose, we built upon the main points on cooperation identified at [Equinet's Workshop](#) tackling discrimination and intolerance against Muslims organised on 25-26 January 2021.

For **concrete ways and examples** to enhance the cooperation between relevant stakeholders, we had a presentation by the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism (ECCAR).

ECCAR's [Working Group on anti-Muslim Racism](#) aims to **create a meaningful impact on the ground** by taking preventive actions, as well as monitoring and mediating. After identifying anti-Muslim racism as a major challenge in building more equal and inclusive cities in Europe, ECCAR highlighted the **need for knowledge exchange** between local governments, researchers and NGOs in order to design adequate policies. ECCAR has worked on different tools to fulfil this need including the organisation of webinars, development of good practice guidance, surveys and policy recommendations.

For instance, an **online survey** targeting city administrations across Europe on their work against anti-Muslim racism provided some relevant insights. For example, 97,5% responded to not having a department/contact person that/who solely focuses on work against anti-Muslim racism. However, 60% responded to having experience with measures tackling anti-Muslim racism. Among the main challenges when it comes to the design and implementation of measures and initiatives to tackle anti-Muslim racism, most responders identified the **lack of staff**. This only confirms further the importance of cooperation, particularly with representatives of the Muslim community.

Disseminating good practices from different actors and cooperative endeavours is also key to exchanging knowledge among relevant stakeholders. This is the aim of ECCAR's Guidebook of good practices, written in collaboration with researchers, CSOs including FEMYSO or ENAR, and 17 ECCAR cities. The Guidebook includes good practices in cities addressing intersectionality, [promoting civic participation of local Muslims](#) and tackling hate crimes and discrimination against Muslims.

Finally, another interesting piece of work highlighted by ECCAR is a working definition of Anti-Muslim racism and policy recommendations to local authorities regarding Ramadan greetings.

Small group discussions

The groups reflected and discussed questions about cooperation and reported back the following takeaways:

Factors that enable successful cooperation between CSOs and Equality Bodies

- Increasing awareness-raising in education including addressing hate speech, stereotypes and prejudice among children.
- Specific funding and action plans to tackle Islamophobia & anti-Muslim racism.
- Increasing visibility of Equality Bodies and other stakeholders tackling discrimination against Muslims.
- The importance of seeing benefits/results from cooperation initiatives to encourage and strengthen engagement between different partners.
- Sustainable, long-term commitment including a strategic framework to guide the work and clarify the goals.

Successful cooperation examples

- In the United Kingdom, a collaboration was set up between police, NGOs, equality agencies, citizens' advice bureaus and libraries to inform and support people experiencing hate speech.
- In Spain, as part of the Erasmus+ programme, the Equality Body supports debates in universities, together with students and teachers.
- In Portugal, the Equality Body is missing a mandate on religion and belief, so to tackle cases on this ground, they often opt for a nationality-based case.

Session III: Communication

This session identified the particular challenges and opportunities that Equality Bodies and CSOs face to effectively communicate about the rights of Muslims. Challenges identified by participants in advance of the meeting included:

- Anti-Muslim racism is not perceived as a problem in the country. As it is not formally acknowledged, there is no basis to begin any discussions or work on solutions.
- Limited funds and resources
- Shrinking civic space, including censorship and attacks on associations, as well as defamation
- Online hate
- Islamophobic narratives in politics
- Media portrayals of Muslims are often simplistic, and inaccurate. This fuels stereotypes and irrational fears, which leads to Islamophobia and even bullying.

- Prejudice against Muslims
- Under-reporting

In order to tackle some of these challenges, we had a presentation by Fundación Al Fanar, focusing particularly on their work around tackling Islamophobia in the media. The [Observatory of Islamophobia in the Spanish Media](#) has been analysing articles in the Spanish media since 2017, and has noted a welcome decline over the years. That is in part thanks to their work connecting Muslim sources and journalists, such as the new app ‘[Muslim Diversity Agenda](#)’. Through the [MAGIC project](#), they have also been working on tackling gendered Islamophobia in the media¹, where they created an [Advisory Council of Muslim Women](#), and developed the [first training for Muslim activists on how to deal with the media](#).

With the campaign #Velosinetiquetas (veil without labels), they tried to create positive narratives for women who wear the veil on social media. There was quite some engagement on the campaign, but about 70% of the engagement was rather negative than positive. Finally, the project ‘COCO: Against Everyday Hatred’ aims to tackle hate speech, including gendered Islamophobia. They did this through [comics](#) and an [escape room](#), and most recently, have prepared a [guide with eight proposals](#) that should contribute to the work of institutions and political representatives, based on the experiences and priorities of those who live daily hatred and fight to combat it.



The guide suggests them to:

1. Collect data for reality-based public policies
2. Promote legislation against everyday hatred
3. Simplify administrative formalities and procedures
4. Combat hate in the media & social networks
5. Foster diversity in political participation
6. Train professionals from various areas
7. Educate through diversity, free from everyday hatred
8. Create a free-phone number to tackle everyday hatred

Discussions following this presentation highlighted:

- The importance of enforcing positive content creation against hate (multilingual)!
- How useful it is to know about EU prevention strategies/projects and make them accessible to the public with guidelines for implementation
- Technology can be useful to tackle everyday hatred. For example, the [ALRECO project](#) run by Oberaxe uses algorithms to identify hate speech, and the mobile app Alertcops Spain allows citizens to send alerts to law enforcement when in risk situations.

In the small group discussions following this session, we looked at a number of different areas, and brainstormed around each.

Risks & how to mitigate them

- In an Equality Body, it is important to do legal and communication work in parallel. This allows you to be ready for the next news cycle with legal texts and communication for media ready at the same time. Good internal communication between both teams is very important!
- Crisis = learning opportunity
Eg. Croatia warns against discrimination with legal text explaining the law and media info based on pizzeria case on social media
 - Inform on discrimination to people identified as perpetrators, so they understand what they need to do better next time
 - Inform media to teach the public
- In an Equality Body, build cooperation with NGOs to support on issues eg. Burkini
- We could consider somehow building on the positive reaction that people have to tackling climate change (ecological positivity), and use a global approach, that encompasses a broader range of issues such as this, to also tackle anti-Muslim discrimination.
- Where you can, always combat fake news
- Defamation meant we couldn't focus on our work: Do not plan all your communication, so that you have place to react to problems. Prepare your crisis communication in advance!
- Freedom of speech dogma: To get over this as an automatic reply to your work on this issue, think communication through so you preempt this. Eg. This is not a freedom of speech issue, rather it is...
- Do not respond to provocation (institutionally)

Opportunities

- Organise activities in public spaces
- Apply for funding in partnership – EBs/CSOs
- Bring together priests, rabbis and imams
- Use role-models
- Social media – influencers
- Organise interdisciplinary events including media reps
- Think out of the box eg. Humour, context
- Education: support programmes, collaboration with the Equality Bodies, media literacy
- Produce counter-content
- European Day against Islamophobia – 21 September, [FEMYSO event in EP](#)

Key Messages

- Representation matters
- Solidarity
- Take a universal approach to respect people
- Climate justice = social justice