**Combatting Islamophobia in the European Union**

**ENAR plans 2017 for implementation by person of reference**

**Updated June 2016**

***What is the problem and what is the impact of the problem?***

Islamophobia is a pressing issue across Europe that continues to affect the lives of many ethnic and religious minorities in various ways due to racial and religious discrimination and there continues to be a lack of an effective political response to it. The particularity and seriousness of Islamophobia also lies in the fact that it is structural, meaning that it comes from institutions and public services and that it proliferates there in the absence of measures to curb the phenomenon. Structural discrimination can range among others from disadvantages in particular in the access to education, employment, housing, goods and services as well as in how they are treated by the police and criminal justice system. Islamophobia itself is a form of hate crime that is not officially recognized in most European countries andconvictions of increasing islamophobic acts remain weak and not dissuasive contributing to a climate of tension and division in European societies and generating a sense of impunity that reinforces and promotes violence and islamophobic acting out.

In general, it is difficult to statistically prove the extent to which Muslim people are exposed to Islamophobia since there is only little and uneven data relating to Islamophobia is being conducted in Europe. Additionally, there is an under-reporting regarding islamophobic discrimination as only a fraction of the victims of Islamophobia are taking steps to report the act and stand up for their rights. In Belgium for example, less than 2 out of 10 victims of discriminations seek to take steps against the perpetrator or a discriminative situation. One of the reasons is that 3 out of 10 victims believe that the justice system will not protect them and 8 out 10 people are not aware of any organization that can provide assistance or advice to victims of discrimination.[[1]](#footnote-1) A European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights’ [survey](http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2010/eu-midis-data-focus-report-2-muslims) indicates that on average 1 in 3 Muslim respondents stated that they had experienced discrimination in the past 12 months. Those Muslim respondents who had been discriminated against stated that they had experienced, on average, 8 incidents of discrimination over a 12-month period. The survey further reveals that migrant groups from countries with predominantly Muslim populations living in 15 EU countries experienced high levels of discrimination[[2]](#footnote-2).

Muslim women are especially disadvantaged as a result of experiences with multiple forms of discrimination. Muslim women and girls: they experience double discrimination on the basis of both their visible religion and their gender. A Muslim woman with a migrant background who wears a headscarf is described in the German Shadow Report as a woman embodying three major obstacles, inhibiting labour market access.

Moreover, existing stereotypes reinforce negative images of Muslims as a threat to society. Muslim men are perceived as ‘backwards’ and Muslim women wearing headscarves are considered ‚oppressed’. „However, to impose a general prohibition on religious and cultural symbols and dress purporting to address discrimination within a community is itself discriminatory, and compounds and reinforces the idea that discrimination can be legitimate. Moreover, such a prohibition negates the right to freedom of expression of those women who choose to wear religious and cultural symbols and dress. In addition any such general prohibition risks being counter-productive, as it may result in women being more confined to their homes and unable to exercise their rights including the rights to work and to education. As these restrictions often have a disproportionate effect on women and girls, they are also indirectly discriminatory on the ground of gender.“ [[3]](#footnote-3)

Islamophobia is first expressed through hate speech or discourse stigmatizing Muslims that encourage discrimination and violence in the field. The normalization of islamophobic discourse has led to a normalization of anti-Muslim acts in the field, particularly in institutions. Indeed, CCIF figures show that a large majority of the acts of discrimination occur in institutions at the hand of government officials. The CCIF (Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie en France / Collective Against Islamophobia in France)[[4]](#footnote-4) noted a clear correlation between hostile speech or hate speech against Muslims voices by the French intelligentsia and disseminated by the media, and the transition from word to deed in the field. This observation is shared by all the organizations fighting against Islamophobia and is all the more alarming given that it denotes a normalization of Islamophobic rhetoric. In 2010, it was estimated that more than 44 Million Muslims live in Europe, excluding Turkey.[[5]](#footnote-5) Muslim communities are very diverse and vary according to ethnic and national origins, their social class and migration histories but face similar and related forms of discrimination in European societies. Islamophobia is promoted by both extremist political parties as well as mainstream parties to gain votes and popularity. In July 2012 the Council of Europe’s Human Rights Commissioner reported that some political parties in some countries continue to use an anti-Muslim rhetoric for electoral purposes[[6]](#footnote-6). Parties promoting anti-Islam discourse gain momentum to be represented at national parliaments such as in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland. These parties thrive on public sentiments of anxiety which they fuel and instrumentalise by promoting ideologies of ethnic nationalism, notions of a “clash of civilizations” and the alleged danger of the “Islamization” of Europe. They aim at halting immigration, establishing mandatory integration criteria for migrants and reducing the influence and visibility of Islam:

* In **Italy**, Mr. Mario Borghezio, of the Lega Nord Party and an MEP, recently proposed taxing Muslims who have too many children in order to slow down ‘the great Islamic advance in Europe’.
* In **Finland**, members of the True Finns Party, including a Member of European Parliament, have been fined by the court for expressing anti-Muslim views on blogs.

Acts of violence committed "in the name of Islam" by individuals or groups of individuals are used to systematically justify a structural Islamophobia predating such events. Measures to combat terrorism often raise human rights issues regarding the frequent focus of any counterterrorist powers on Muslims and migrant communities. Legislation (regardless of which political party has the majority in the assembly voting bills into law) tends to introduce emergency laws that restrict the freedoms of Muslim citizens, on the basis of safety or the principle of „neutrality.“

***What is ENAR aiming to achieve in response to the problem? What is the change we want to see? Outcomes (1. Change in law, policy and standards 2. Change in practices and accountability 3. Change in mobilisation  all of which to impact change in people’s lives)***

1. Recognition of islamophobia as a specific form of racism
2. National strategies, in consultation with the civil society and relevant communities, to tackle islamophobia
3. Collection of data on hate crime, disaggregated by motivation
4. Inclusive network of feminist organisations in order to include Muslim Women with their particular experience of discrimination and oppression as well as their political agenda.
5. Security and counter terrorism policies Human right compliant and don’t have a disproportionate impact on Muslims.

***Why ENAR?***

***What are the main barriers from achieving the desired outcomes?***

1. Lack of recognition of islamophobia as a specific form of racism by national relevant bodies
2. Normalisation of islamophobia in the political game and discourses by representatives for electoral purposes
3. Counter terrorism policies and their impacts on minorities and Muslim communities
4. Legislation on neutrality progressively being extended from public to private sector

***What are the change hypothesis/assumptions?***

1. Coalition with feminist organisation to build a common agenda

Discriminations against Muslim women as too often been disregarded by mainstream feminist organisations. Excluded, sometime violently from feminists movement therefore, there has been a development of minorities-led women’s rights organisations but they are still not mainstreamed and recognised by others actors.

1. Disseminate and mainstreaming the notion of intersectionality and fight against multiple discriminations (gender, ethnicity and religion)
2. Encourage and disseminate collection of data on experience of discrimination
3. Engage in a counter narrative on counter terrorism narrative (inefficient and counterproductive as it validates extremist assumptions of a clash of civilisation and the impossible common narrative).

***How will we respond to achieve the desired outcomes? Activities. Actions***

1. Resolution on the role of the EC coordinators on Islamophobia and antisemitism to provide them with a road map and clear mission in order to better design advocacy work.
2. Resolution on a working definition of islamophobia to work toward a recognition of the phenomena. This working definition could be advocate together with a resolution on a working definition of anti-Semitism to foster its adoption.
3. Follow up on the work for a procedure to sanction MEP inciting hatred
4. Anti-racism week at the EP: one day dedicated to a form of racism, including islamophobia thus, this could be an opportunity for a hearing, together with partners.
5. Engaging more with the FEMM committee of the EP and the Gender Unit of the EC, as islamophobia has a disproportionate impact on Muslim women. A hearing should be organized to present the findings of Forgotten Women project in the FEMM committee.
6. Follow up activities and dissemination of the Forgotten Women project. A legal workshop should be organised to highlight the gender approach of case laws. A impact assessment of a negative decision from the ECJ on the Muslim women needs to be provided.
7. Debunking myths publication
8. Following up the advocacy work with the informal coalition: meeting with MEPs to discuss set up priorities (recognition of islamophobia and the need for national strategies, work with the FEMM committee, employment and counter terrorism directives).
9. Counter-terrorism directive: impact assessment of counter terrorism policies in Europe on minorities.
10. Proposal for an updated Audiovisual Media Services Directive: provide amendments on the hate speech and freedom of expression (<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/proposal-updated-audiovisual-media-services-directive>)
11. Disseminate and follow up FRA survey and the results on the anti-Muslim hatred
1. FRA MIDI report [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. FRA EU MIDIS 2009 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. report Amnesty [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie en France, Rapport annuel 2013. http://www.islamophobie.net/rapport-annuel [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Report Amnesty International [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. ENAR Shadow report [↑](#footnote-ref-6)