SPEAK UP FOR DIVERSITY!

Toolkit on how to stand against gender Islamophobia

Rizwana Hamid (ed.)
Andrea Olea, Lucila Rodriguez-Alarcón

m magic

MAGIC Consortium members

CONTENTS

Introduction

Nowadays, Islamophobia is unfortunately one fact among many that underlines a rise in intolerance in Europe. According to a new report on islamophobia in Europe[1], the pandemic has accelerated anti-Muslim hate crimes. On the other hand, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) reports have shown that anti-Muslim racism may also materialise in widespread discrimination in various areas of life and in the relations with the authorities. In an EU survey, about four in ten Muslims (39%) reported experiences of discrimination, while one in five indicated that religion was the primary motivation. Negative sentiments about Muslims can also be explained by the political context in the Middle East, which has led to migration to Europe, or by the existence and media coverage of violent acts committed by individuals/groups claiming to be representative of Muslims and Islam when, in fact, they are not.

In Europe, Islamophobia debates are echoed abundantly in the public and political spheres. The phenomenon of Islamophobia is expressed through different realities: ideological constructs, political contexts or demographics that vary from country to country. In other words, Islamophobia is strongly context-specific and varies according to time and space. Yet, across the European continent, one constant remains: Muslims are subject to the same stigmatisation and are portrayed as the imagined "other", leading to the emergence of populism, racism and nationalism that transcend traditional political divisions.

Intersectional discrimination, hostility, and violence towards Muslim individuals and communities (real or perceived) undermine their dignity and violate their freedom of religion or belief and a host of other human rights. Despite their pervasiveness, Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred remain poorly understood, and discussions on how to tackle their effects are often tense. Many reports have warned that the main victims of Islamophobia are Muslim women. This is because women wear visible religious symbols. The ECRI has observed that women wearing visible religious symbols, such as the headscarf, are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and harassment due to both gender and religion. Indeed, Muslim women wearing visible religious symbols have been the focus of intense controversy in European societies.

So what is gendered Islamophobia? Who are its main perpetrators and its main targets? What are its impacts and, above all, how can we effectively combat this growing phenomenon in Europe?

This toolkit is aimed at Muslim communities and civil society actors who are struggling for a more diverse, just and inclusive society. It aims to enhance their capacity to identify Islamophobia, including gendered Islamophobia, learn new communication tools, and develop strategies to combat its manifestations in the media, in private and public spaces, and in physical and virtual spaces.

---

[1] F. Hafez and E. Bayrakli, "European Islamophobia Report", *Leopold Weiss Institute,* 2020.

Background

What is "Islamophobia"?

The term "Islamophobia" started to be used extensively in the Anglo-Saxon world after the publication of the Runnymede Trust's 1997 report, Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All. However, although 15 March has been designated by the United Nations as the International Day against Islamophobia and the term is widely used in academic literature by practitioners, institutions and in public policy in many European countries, there is still no agreed definition of the term.

On 19 December 2019, a workshop entitled "Towards an Operational Definition of Islamophobia" was held in Brussels. The workshop brought together a wide range of actors to work on a common definition of the term Islamophobia, including academics, local, national, and European NGOs, the European Commission, and international organisations.

Although this definitional work is not yet complete, this group began by defining Islamophobia as **"a form of racism that targets real or perceived Muslim individuals, communities, persons, sites or property through structural, institutional, and interpersonal means."** In addition to this definition, the *Collectif pour l'Inclusion et contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique* (CIIB) points out that Islamophobia consists of five types of violence[2] that act individually, but also structurally and systemically. This violence can be:

1. Verbal
2. Psychological
3. Physical
4. Institutional
5. Economic

Furthermore, like the ECRI in its General Policy Recommendation No. 53 on preventing and combating racism and discrimination against Muslims, the aforementioned working group strongly emphasizes that a full understanding of Islamophobia as a specific form of racism can only be achieved through the prism of racialisation. In other words, historical and contemporary forms of Islamophobia racialise Muslims and, in so doing, essentialise them and portray them as a homogeneous and monolithic group with particular characteristics and tendencies that are considered innate. Thus, in Europe, the Muslim is often portrayed as the archetype of otherness and a threat from within, refusing any form of modernity and incompatible with European values such as respect for democracy or human rights.

As for Muslim women, when they are not perceived as submissive, oppressed, under-educated, and lacking in initiative, etc., they are seen as strongly committed to violent radicalisation. Nevertheless, there are religious and/or cultural reading in the history of Muslim communities that aim to promote women's education and engagement, the recognition of their equal dignity with men, and their right to self-determination. These Muslim women have contributed to the heritage of Islam as scholars, jurists, rulers, benefactors, warriors, businesswomen, legal experts, and others. To name a few examples:

- **Khadīja b. Khuwaylid:** an important figure in the time of the Prophet of Islam. She was a prosperous merchant and one of the elites of Mecca. She was the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad.

- **Ashifa bint Abdullah:** the first Muslim woman to be appointed inspector and

---

[2] Collectif pour l'Inclusion et contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique, "Rapport chiffres 2020", 2021.

manager of the market by Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab.

- **Amra bint Abdurrehaman:** one of the great scholars of the eighth century, she was a jurist, mufti, and specialist in ahadith.
- **Fatima al-Fihriyya:** the founder of the oldest university in the world that remains active: al-Qarawwiyyin in Fez, Morocco.
- **Lubna of Cordoba:** one of the most important figures in the Umayyad Palace of Islamic Spain, as she was employed as the private secretary of the Caliph Al Hakam the Second and presided over the royal library, which contained more than 500,000 books. She was also well-versed in the exact sciences of mathematics, as she could solve the most complex geometric and algebraic problems known at the time.
- **Rābi'a al-'Adawīyya:** considered one of the founders of the Sufi school of "divine love", which emphasises loving God for His own sake, rather than for fear of punishment or desire for a reward.

Even today there are countless numbers of Muslim women engaged in academia, medicine, education, politics, and other spheres of work.

Unfortunately, these facts are often unknown or ignored even though they easily deconstruct prejudices and stereotypes about Muslim women. Therefore, to learn more about the most common myths about Muslim women in Europe and how to debunk them, we invite you to read "Debunking Myths on women's rights, Muslim women, Feminism and Islamophobia in Europe", a handbook that was created for this purpose by the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) in the framework of the "Forgotten Women"[3] project.

Who are the victims of Islamophobia?

As can be seen from the illustration below, the victims of Islamophobia include both Muslims and people who are perceived to be Muslim because of their origin, dress or other factors. This is, for example, the case of non-Muslims from Arab-Muslim cultures or women who wear a headscarf because of a certain illness or fashion style, etc. Thus, not all targets of Islamophobia are Muslims, but can also be Muslim owned property, such as shops supplying halal products, or institutions, such as the many mosques that have been the target of terrorist attacks in France, Britain, New Zealand, etc.
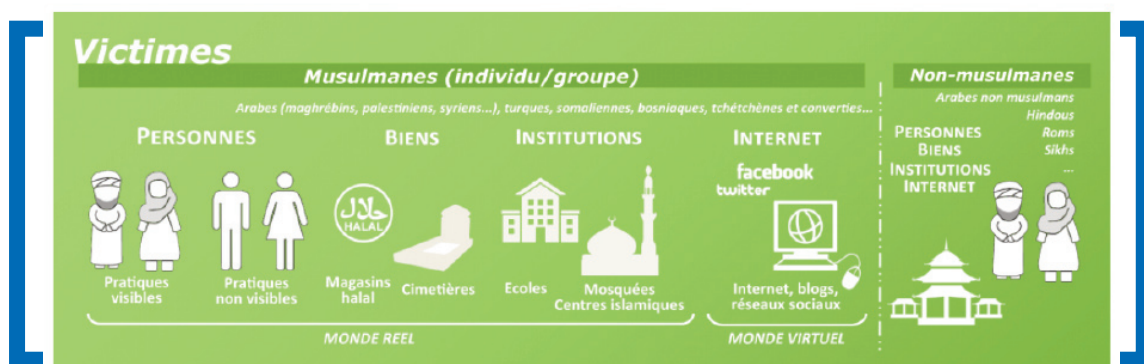
Source: Collectif pour l'Inclusion et contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique (CIIB)

[3] European Network Against Racism, "Debunking myths on women's rights, Muslim women, Feminism and Islamophobia in Europe", 2016.

In addition to being targets in real life, Muslims are also subject to stigmatisation, denigration, and hateful speech on social networks, blogs, websites, etc. in the virtual world. On the negative side, hate speech is not only made by isolated individuals but is also promulgated by public figures and policy-makers. These statements are replayed by the press and very often instrumentalised by ultranationalist populist movements for political purposes, which greatly undermines social cohesion. Moreover, during the pandemic period, when social interactions were severely limited during lockdown, hate speech against Muslims was reported to be on the rise by various organisations working in this field[4].

Gender Islamophobia

One of the specificities of Islamophobia is that it targets women in particular. Indeed, according to the monitoring of Islamophobic acts in different European countries, women, and more particularly those wearing a visible sign that they belong to Islam, represent between 60% and 90% of victims. Racism and discrimination against Muslim women often intersect multiple grounds such as religious belief, gender, and ethnic, national and/or social origin. These different grounds of exclusion often overlap and interact to create cumulative disadvantages and underpin the specific Islamophobia faced by Muslim women in the media, political discourse, and popular culture. There are many organisations that have carried out detailed studies about gender Islamophobia and intersectionality[5].

This is particularly the case according to ECRI 6: "Wearing religious dress is a major difficulty for Muslim women, as this choice often places undue restrictions on them in many areas, such as access to education, employment, and goods and services. These barriers affect their lives profoundly and prevent them from reaching their full potential, which is a great loss not only for each individual woman but also for society as a whole."

The impacts of Islamophobia

In addition to having a psychosocial impact on the victims, Islamophobia also has an impact on Muslim communities, as well as on society as a whole, as it causes division and social exclusion and promotes a hierarchy between communities within European society. Indeed, repeated confrontation with discrimination has deleterious effects on the psychological well-being of victims[6] but also on members of discriminated groups. These effects can range from fear, anxiety, vulnerability and guilt to low self-esteem that can lead to depression.

The internalisation of the stigma or the fear of being confronted with Islamophobia[7] can also

---

[4] As mentioned in the "European Islamophobia Report 2020" and in the following article: O. Tugrul Cam, "COVID-19 pandemic deepens online Islamophobia in Europe", *AA*, 2021.

[5] For more information, check: API-GBV, "What is gendered Islamophobia?", 2021. Available at: https://www.api-gbv.org/resources/what-is-gendered-islamophobia/
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, "What is gendered Islamophobia?", 2021. Available at: https://vawnet.org/material/what-gendered-islamophobia
N. Soubani, "Hijab, Gendered Islamophobia, and the Lived Experiences of Muslim Women", *Yaqeen Institute,* 2021. Available at: https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/hijab-gendered-islamophobia-and-the-lived-experiences-of-muslim-women
B. Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: hate crime against Muslim women", *Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture,* 2013. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13504630.2013.864467
E. Ghosh, "Gendered Islamophobia: A question of dehumanisation of Muslim Women", *Feminism in India,* 2021. Available at: https://feminisminindia.com/2021/07/16/gendered-islamophobia-sulli-deals-muslim-women/

[6] L. Azzouzi, "How Muslims perceive discriminations and how it is impacting their well-being, identity processes and intergroup relations", 2015. Available at: https://dial.uclouvain.be/memoire/ucl/

[7] C. Martelet and N. Pignède, "I love France, but I left: The Muslims who decide to emigrate", Middle East Eye, 2022. Available at: https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/france-muslims-decide-emigrate-love

lead to avoidance strategies such as limiting the visibility of religious practice or not pursuing higher education or job search for fear of being discriminated against because of a visible practice such as wearing a headscarf or beard. Changing the route or mode of transport to a particular location following an Islamophobic attack in neighbourhood X or Y may also be a form of avoidance strategy put in place to prevent being attacked.

Finally, institutional/structural discrimination can also create a sense of non-membership in the majority society, which often translates into reduced socio-political and civic participation, not to mention the infringement of Muslim rights in our democratic societies. This is what Mr. Ahmed Shaheed, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, emphasised in his report of 2 March 2021: "Institutional suspicion of Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim has escalated to epidemic proportions. Numerous States – along with regional and international bodies – have responded to security threats by adopting measures that disproportionately target Muslims and define Muslims as both high-risk and at risk of radicalisation. Drawing upon long-entrenched imperialist essentialisations of Muslims as cultural 'others',[8] laws, policies and practices have also perpetuated harmful stereotypes and tropes that depict Muslims and their beliefs and culture as a threat. The consequences for human rights, in particular the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief, have been stark." **(For additional resources see Appendix 1)**

[8] E.Said, *Orientalism,* New York, Pantheon Books, 1978.

Guidelines for grassroots associations and activists

Tackling Islamophobia in the media

Islamophobia manifests itself in different sectors and institutions in society, but one of the most important areas where narratives are formed and stereotypes are perpetuated is in the media. It is important for every organisation to assess the risks when engaging with the media. All organisations should have policy papers or positions on issues around gender-based Islamophobia as well as other issues impacting Muslims. Individuals engaging with journalists should be properly trained and know how to deliver key messages as well as counter false narratives. The image of the Muslim community in the media is negative, and there are very few cases of stories in which the image is positive. When Muslim women are the objects of discussion (as opposed to the agents and producers of their own lives and narratives), they are primarily discussed through the lens of politics and with high levels of Islamophobia as has been recorded in Spain by the statistics of the Observatorio de la Islamofobia en los Medios. Their rights, their lived experience, and the inequalities they suffer are perceived as far less important than the positions of the politicians discussing them. In general, an Islamophobic tone dominates the journalistic narrative even though the majority of the informative pieces analysed are news reports and not opinion articles, where Islamophobia tends to be more evident.

Due to the current social and political climate of normalisation of hate speech, for some time Muslim communities in Europe have had the impulse to fold back upon themselves as a self-protection mechanism. As for grassroots organisations and actors working with Muslim communities, sometimes the initial instinct might be, understandably, to do the same. However, as has been seen in the Spanish media, not engaging with them does not necessarily prevent Muslim communities from being ill-treated or reported on in a biased way. The case of the Spanish politician Nora Baños is a good example. Despite having initially engaged with the media and then withdrawn, the level of attacks and misinformation about her remained.[9] The same happened to the first Muslim municipal councillor, Layla Azzouzi, in the French-speaking part of Belgium.

Unfortunately, in the present political and social context, Muslims make the news whether they and their community representatives engage with the media or not. Quite often the headlines and stories are full of myths and tropes. Therefore, it is crucial to be ready to deploy new narratives that counter those negative messages and Islamophobic discourses. Engaging with the media represents an opportunity to showcase information and stories that are important for your organisation, on your own terms. It is a chance to show and share the richness and diversity of your community, to broaden your reach, and to connect with people that are not familiar with the particulars of your culture, traditions, etc.

Even for small associations there is room to make change, if only at the most local level.[10] For those who are not used to media exposure,

---

[9] La Jungla, "Lluvia de zascas a la candidata de Podemos que dijo que el Islam es "feminista"", *El Español,* 2021. Available at: https://www.elespanol.com/social/20210121/lluvia-zascas-candidata-podemos-dijo-islam-feminista/552695779_0.html

[10] M. Carrión, "La proximidad como clave hacia una mejor práctica periodística en la cobertura de las comunidad musulmanas", *Observatorio de la Islamofobia en los Medios,* 2021. Available at : https://www.observatorioislamofobia.org/2021/02/08/la-proximidad-clave-hacia-una-mejor-practica-periodistica-la-cobertura-las-comunidad-musulmanas/

it might be difficult in the beginning, but it is important to take a stance and be in control of the narrative instead of it being told by others. Engaging regularly with the media and being able to convey your message to mass and mainstream outlets becomes a medium- and long-term strategy to reach a wider audience, fight prejudice, create a better general understanding, and ultimately improve the well-being of the community you work with.

In this document, you will find some communication tools and strategies that any organisation can use when engaging with the media to get your message across, such as press releases, interviews and some tips and techniques to make your relationship with the press efficient, fruitful and safe (both for the staff of your organisation and community members).

MAGIC Analysis: Examples from the media

Over a ten-month period, MAGIC monitored six newspapers in Belgium and Spain and analysed how Muslim women are reported on. Articles that discuss Muslim women and their roles in society fail to include these women's actual voices. They are rarely called upon for testimonies, and they are portrayed as lacking agency, reported on superficially, and mainly depicted as an unnuanced one dimensional character.

Examples from Spanish Newspapers

> # "Perded el miedo, no seáis mujeres, atacad", el marroquí detenido en España que instigaba atentados contra su país
>
> La colaboración contra el yihadismo entre ambos países ha evitado numerosas acciones criminales

In this article, the journalist misuses terminology and tries to link words such as *nasheed* (Islamic music) and *muwahidin* (a denomination within Islam) with terrorism, when in reality they have nothing to do with violence or terrorism. Jihad is translated as Holy War, even though for most Muslims it means an internal spiritual struggle for self-improvement. The writer also uses "Islamist" as a synonym of terrorist. To check the correct use of these words in Spanish, please see the glossary from the *Observatorio de la Islamofobia en los Medios*.

This article concerns Fatima Hamed, a Spanish female politician from the Assembly of Ceuta who wears a headscarf and took part in a national political meeting in Valencia in November 2021. Her participation in the event opened a discussion on media and

EL PAÍS

Opinión

EDITORIALES · TRIBUNAS · COLUMNAS · CARTAS A LA DIRECTORA · LAS FIRMAS DE EL PAÍS · DEFENSOR DEL LECTOR

COLUMNA > ①

Velos para otras vendo

¿Qué coherencia tiene incluir el símbolo del machismo, bandera del islamismo político en una plataforma que se pretende igualitaria?

Fatima Hamed Hossain interviene en el acto organizado en Valencia el pasado sábado bajo el lema "#OtrasPolíticas".
MÒNICA TORRES

ABC INTERNACIONAL

Buscar

Opinión▾ España▾ Economía▾ Internacional▾ Sociedad Deportes▾ Cultura▾ Historia Ciencia Gente Play▾   EXCLUSIVO PREMIUM   Estilo▾   Más ☰

ABC   INTERNACIONAL   Europa Hoy

FRANCISCO DE ANDRÉS

El Consejo de Europa se 'burla' de centenares de millones de musulmanas con su campaña en defensa del velo

247   Francisco de Andrés

FIRMAS RELACIONADAS

Álvaro Delgado Gal

social media about women with headscarves in politics.

The article talks about a campaign launched by the Council of Europe, *Beauty is in Diversity as Freedom is in Hijab*, which became controversial and was finally cancelled due to pressure from the French authorities.

Examples from Belgian Newspapers

The subtle sexist ways of referring to Muslim women were a pronounced issue between October 2021 and February 2022.

This article is about an aspiring journalist's struggle to find acceptance in journalistic circles due to her visibility as a Muslim. Though the article is relatively positive, it refers to her as *Kersverse echtgenote van* (the brand-new wife of…).

This article serves as an example of anti-Muslim bias and how being a woman led to an intensification of prejudice and hatred. Two Muslim women went to a swimming pool with their headscarves. A visitor to the pool was interviewed and said he was shocked. N-VA Chairman Sanne Vantomme, who is interviewed

"Je begint als vrouw met een hoofddoek sowieso onder nul": dit is Loubna Khalkhali, de kersverse echtgenote van Adil El Arbi

SHOWBIZZ Maandenlang hield hij de lippen stijf op elkaar, maar nu mag iedereen het weten. Adil El Arbi (33) heeft opnieuw liefdesgeluk gevonden. Zaterdag stapte hij in het huwelijksbootje met Loubna Khalkhali (30). Een naam die u waarschijnlijk niet kent, maar de ambitieuze, jonge vrouw maakt achter de schermen van de VRT een serieuze indruk met haar passie en inzet voor vrouwenrechten. Maak kennis met de vrouw die Rudi Vranckx (62) weet te imponeren. "Mijn vriendinnen wilden vooral trouwen en kinderen krijgen. Ik wilde reporter worden."

Bram De Brabander 19-12-21, 10:00   Laatste update: 19-12-21, 11:35

de moslima's in het zwembad Ter Leie in Wervik. De gezichten zijn onherkenbaar gemaakt © RV

Vrouwen met losse kledij en hoofddoeken in zwembad, schepencollege onderzoekt de zaak: "Dit kan helemaal niet"

in the article, said that "in case those Muslim women come back to the pool with their headscarves, the most logical thing to do would be to send them away.

"That would be a must because the regulations do not allow such a thing. This is unacceptable. Everyone is equal in front of the law. It starts with a burkini and ends with

Ihsane Haouach démissionne de son poste de commissaire à l'égalité femmes-hommes, de possibles liens avec les Frères musulmans

Belgique

Belga avec Rédaction

Publié le 09-07-21 à 19h06 - Mis à jour le 09-07-21 à 23h13

La commissaire du gouvernement auprès de l'Institut pour l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes (IEFH), Ihsane Haouach, au coeur d'une polémique pour des propos sur la séparation de l'Église et de l'État, a annoncé vendredi soir sa démission, en invoquant les "attaques personnelles incessantes" et le cyberharcèlement dont elle affirme faire l'objet. Une décision que la secrétaire d'État à l'Égalité des chances, Sarah Schlitz (Ecolo), a dit "regretter"

Port du voile: la voix des femmes, au delà des débats

Pourquoi les femmes musulmanes font-elles le choix de se couvrir ? Sont-elles contraintes à le porter, comme on entend dire ? Et les autres, celles qui ne le portent plus ou ne l'ont jamais porté, quel est leur rapport avec le voile ? Pourquoi l'avoir enlevé ?

Article réservé aux abonnés

separate swimming hours for Muslim women."

This article suggests the commissioner from the Institut pour l'égalité des femmes et des hommes (IEFH) has possible links with the Muslim Brotherhood organisation, without providing any evidence. As a result of this case, the commissioner was subject to much online criticism and abuse.

This is a positive article in the sense that the journalist is collecting testimonies from Muslim women to discuss an issue that concerns them (i.e., the wearing of the headscarf). In the MAGIC media monitoring exercise, this was a rare occurrence. One problem with this is that many Muslim women are dismayed to be offered interviews to answer and deal with these negative issues, while they are never asked to comment on or be interviewed about positive or success stories. **(To see the full report and more examples from both the Spanish and Belgian press, see Appendix 2)**

How to create an alternative narrative

Always looking for the big headlines and getting carried away by clickbait, many media outlets present cultural diversity only through a small part of the reality, that which refers to exceptionality, positive or negative, such as heroes or villains. Tired and fearful audiences are increasingly rejecting such narratives. We need new approaches to cultural diversity and societies that integrate that diversity. This means leaving behind the focus on diversity as a problem. A new, alternative narrative must be developed, but it should not be reactive or intended to contradict the existing ones.

The Rules for Creating New Messages

- The messages must be new and must not be reactive to another message that has previously been established.
- The messages must not depend on a narrative that is defined by the existence of two parts: "us" and "them".
- The messages must be based on emotions without relying solely on data as a narrative argument.

Changing the Narrative Framework

A narrative framework is a lens through which the world can be perceived and interpreted, a block of values through which thoughts and acts are filtered. Frameworks establish limits and also condition and orient perceptions. Once a narrative framework is established, people perceive reality through that framework.

Structuring a narrative in reaction to an existing framework only serves to expand the original message. For example, if you are told not to think of an elephant, you will automatically do so. The same applies in the current xenophobic discussion. If we react to existing concepts, we will only evoke them again, continue to act within the same context, and adopt the very discourse we want to combat. We would be manoeuvring on terrain where the assumptions are already established.

Telling Stories About All of Us (Instead of "Us" vs. "Them")

We simplify and reduce reality in order to understand it. What we simplify most is what we do not understand – the unknown. As a result,

the "Other" appears more homogenous than our own group, and we portray it through generalisations based on stereotypes. We presume all members of the group in question possess some of the pre-determined characteristics that come to our mind quickly. That is how this list of attributes that define a group prompts the first step towards polarisation and the perception of an "us" and a "them". Instead, stories must be built on what we have in common and then, within this broader context, differences can be introduced. We have to tell stories that make our audiences think about themselves and about longings, customs, problems and solutions that they can relate to.

How to react or report Islamophobia

If you find a news **item in the traditional media** that can be considered an Islamophobic narrative according to the indicators provided above, you can do one of the following things:

- Write an email to the media outlet that published the information. The websites of different media outlets have a contact page with a form or a general email address to write to.
- When you feel that the image accompanying an article is not appropriate, you can send an email or a letter to the editor to change it.
- Write to the journalist at their email address, which is sometimes included in the article.
- Write to the journalist on social media.
- Write to the ombudsman, although this option only exists in the case of El País in Spain: defensora@elpais.es. In Belgium, you can also ask for a mediation or lodge a complaint to the Council of Journalistic Ethics (CDJ) or to the Superior Audiovisual Council (CSA)

Social Media

Most social media networks have rules that ban hate speech. You can find them in Facebook's community standards, Twitter's rules section and Instagram's community guidelines or Abuse and Spam page.
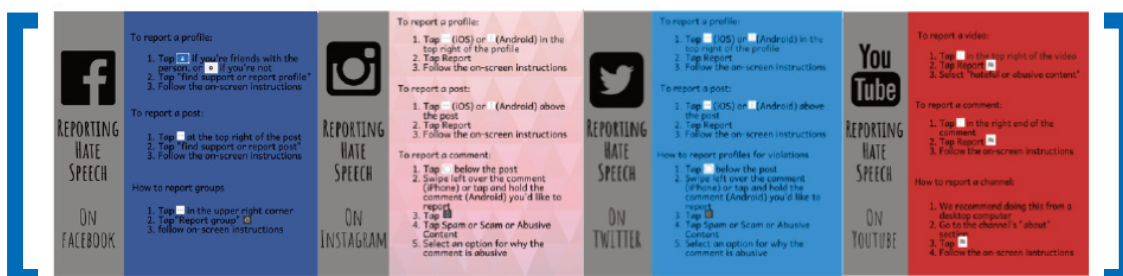
Source: Get the Trolls Out – Report Hate Speech. Available at: https://getthetrollsout.org/get-involved

- You can also ask the page administrator or moderator to remove the post. The moderator has the ability to take a post offline and can issue a warning to users or block their access to the forum.
- If you have questions **about whether you are looking at a case of hate speech,** you can get in touch with different services in Spain and Belgium. **(For a full list of organisations that deal with hate speech in Spain and Belgium, see Appendix 3)**
- To speed up the process of investigating hate speech and to facilitate the work of lawyers, remember to include:
1. A URL link to each contested article or post
2. A screenshot of the contested comment with a date and time of publication
3. Screenshots of any other racist/Islamophobic post(s)/publication(s) that create an evidence base against the author.

If you have questions about a news item and you want to find out if it is **fake news or a hoax** you can turn to fact-checking platforms, which

will help resolve your concerns. **(For a full list of fact-checking platforms in Spain and Belgium, see Appendix 4)**

To **report hate crimes** in general, or Islamophobic attacks in particular, you can contact the national, regional and local police directly. Contact the city or town council where you live and check if it has a support services for hate crime survivors. In Belgium, all the public victim support services are listed on the following website: https://www.belgium.be/fr/justice/victime/aide_aux_victimes/services_d_aide_aux_victimes. There are also other organisations you can get in touch with. **(For a full list of organisations and contact details, see Appendix 5)**

Why is it a good idea to engage with the media?

Due to the current socio-political climate in which hate speech has been normalised, Muslim communities in Europe often fold back upon themselves as a self-protection mechanism. As for grassroots organisations and actors working with Muslim communities, sometimes the initial instinct might be, understandably, to do the same. However, it has been proved that retreating will not prevent Muslim communities from being ill-treated or reported on in a biased way. Muslims make the news whether they or their community representatives engage with the media or not. Headlines and stories containing myths and tropes will appear, and therefore it is crucial to be ready to deploy new narratives to counter those negative messages and Islamophobic discourses.

Engaging with the media is an opportunity to showcase information and stories that are important for your organisation, on your own terms. It is an opportunity to show and share the richness and diversity of your community, to broaden your reach, and to connect with people who are not familiar with the particulars of your religion, culture, traditions, etc. Even for small associations there is room to make change, if only at the most local level. For those who are not used to media exposure, it might be difficult in the beginning, but it is important to take a stance and be in control of

the narrative as opposed to it *being told by* others, regardless of their good or bad intentions.

There are many benefits to engaging with the media. Below are just a few:

- **Media coverage:** you will get publicity for your activities, events, and news in your own timing.
- **Control of the message:** you will be the one telling the stories and disseminating the information that is important for your organisation.
- **Recognition of expertise:** the name of your organisation will become more recognised by the media and its audience. If you take a stance on events and issues that affect your community, it will become natural for the media to turn to you for your point of view.
- **Representative voice of the community:** your organisation will be seen as representative of your community's values and points of view.
- **Free "marketing":** by mentioning your association's name, whether in press releases or during interviews, you will get free publicity and make yourself, your organisation, and your views more widely known.

Some general recommendations on how to address the media

Whether you are engaging with the media on issues specifically relating to Muslims or Islamophobia or more general topics concerning all citizens, the rules are the same.

- **Spoon-feed journalists when trying to get coverage for an important story or information you want to relay.** Reporters rarely have enough time for in-depth research, nor are they necessarily experts on the topic they write about. Therefore, they might contribute (albeit unintentionally) to consolidating stereotypes and prejudice about minorities and discriminated communities. So the more information, sources, and resources you offer them to build their story, the easier it will be for them to produce an accurate portrait of the Muslim community and Muslim women.

- **Be available.** If no one in your organisation is free or willing to meet and/or talk with journalists looking for information, they will move on and use whatever information they have at hand, even if it is incomplete or misleading.

- **Offer help clarifying terms or providing further data/proof, etc.** Keep documents (such as glossaries that facilitate your task) or data (reports, statistics, etc.) on hand. Consider building a list of experts you can give to journalists.

- **Choose the terminology you use consciously:** I.e. "niños" (children) instead of MENA (Spanish acronym for unaccompanied minors). When using Islamic terms, explain what they mean so that journalists and audiences become familiar with them.

- **Check the background of outlets and journalists before engaging with them.** The way we deal with different media may differ depending on the f**unding sources, editorial line,** and other aspects that define the way the individual outlet tackles certain issues. You will not speak to independent and progressive media outlets in the same way that you speak to mainstream media or right wing/far right outlets. With sympathetic media outlets, you will probably have more time and space to express yourself, and you will have a more attentive professional who will do his/her best to understand and present the facts more accurately. Mainstream media generally have no time and no interest in in-depth explanations; right and far right media will probably twist your words on purpose, so be really careful before speaking to them, and consider if this will do more harm than good to your cause. You will have to decide if it is beneficial to speak to all outlets or better to be selective. Always be sure to give clear messages that the audience understands well, that are not easily manipulated.

Communication tools to engage the media

There are **several communication tools** that organisations can use to communicate with the media and "sell" their stories. The main ones are:

- **Press releases**
- **Press kits**
- **Press conferences**
- **Interviews**
- **Press launches**
- **Other events**

Here we will mainly focus on press releases and interviews.

The press release

A press release is a one- or two-page document sent by an organisation to the press, for one or more of the following purposes:

- To share a new initiative that your organisation is launching
- To inform them about an event you are organising.
- To respond or react to a topic in the news that affects you or your organisation.
- To share the results from a new research/report/study that you have published or contributed to.
- To publicise joint ventures with other organisations or a change within your own organisation, be it new leadership or new policy positions.

How to write a press release

- Make sure the headline is catchy but informative, for both the journalists receiving the press release and the audience.
- Keep the press release clear, simple and short, following the "pyramid structure", i.e., the most important information first to capture the journalist's attention and inform them immediately what the story is about.
- Make sure the first and second paragraphs address the who, what, where, why, and when of the content.
- Include a relevant quote, some additional information, and, if applicable, more quotes from other interested parties/organisations, or experts.
- Lastly, include some additional background information and context to the story.

The interview (print, radio and television)

Unlike press releases, interviews usually take place at the request of media outlets. They are an excellent tool to convey your point of view on different matters and to share stories and information that are important for your organisation. But they are also delicate and require some experience to get your message across as you intend it. That is why there are some elements to consider before agreeing to give one.

For all organisations, it is **highly recommended** to have a **Communication Protocol prepared ahead of time** with some **guidelines** defining how to act (and react) when it comes to being interviewed by media outlets/broadcasters/radio stations, etc. It should cover elements such as timing and/or time to respond, the communication channel that will be used for that purpose, the person(s) allowed to speak on behalf of your organisation, blacklisted media, considerations regarding the media editorial line, etc.

Depending on the time available to respond, there are two kinds of media requests:

A. Urgent Requests

We understand an **"urgent request"** to be when we are contacted by the media requesting a rapid reaction to a current or recent event. For example: a new law that may affect your community. Be aware that, in radio and television, production timing is very short, so journalists might request an "urgent" interview also for in-depth pieces. In all these cases, the media operate with very short notice, maybe a few hours or less. The interviews may also be live.

As a common-sense rule, if a journalist calls upon you for an "urgent" matter, it is highly advisable to do a rapid assessment.

- Is there someone available in the organisation with enough experience (spokesperson, specialist…) to speak to the media?
- If yes, give the interview. It is a good opportunity to get your message across. If not, it is better to "pass" rather than having your message easily twisted by a journalist or editor who might just use the juiciest soundbite without the full context of your interview.
- A third option, especially when it comes to reactions, is asking the journalist to wait for your press release (if you have the intention of releasing one).

For radio broadcasters, it is more and more common that they ask for voice notes. In that case, the answers can be rehearsed and revised by the team before being sent.

B. Regular Requests

We understand **"regular requests"** as those in which the media contact you, giving you enough time to prepare your responses and conduct the interview at your own pace. Ask the journalist what topics they intend to tackle. You are not asking for the questions in advance – many will refuse to provide them – but instead trying to anticipate what the journalist will need

to know, so that you can provide further information.

Consider engaging different people from your association to speak to the press so that more people gain experience and feel empowered to represent the organisation's points of view. This is particularly important if yours is a grassroots collective with barely any hierarchical structure or a scarcity of staff.

In some cases, you can try to "impose" conditions for taking part in the interview or programme. If the media accepts your conditions but then goes back on their word, make a public complaint to raise awareness about the lack of ethics employed.

What to consider when giving an interview

- What is the aim of the interview?
- Have you been called upon to comment on some news or event?
- Is it a local, national, or international issue?
- Is there a controversy you are responding to?
- Are you trying to debunk myths OR are you selling your own narrative/story?
- Is the media outlet contacting you because of something you are doing or something you have released (event, report release, joint venture, etc.), or for your expertise?

How to conduct an interview

1. Be prepared – practice, practice, practice!
2. Know what your messaging is and stick to it.
3. Stay calm – speak slowly and clearly.
4. Be in control, smile, and never lose your temper.
5. Be prepared for unexpected leading questions that have nothing to do with what you were brought on to speak about.
6. Be yourself, be enthusiastic, and be confident (remember you are the expert).

7. Give simple, short answers and stick to the point.

8. Make your story compelling and relatable.

9. Make the journalist and the audience care.

10. Humanise what you are saying by giving examples audiences can relate to.

11. Use data and evidence to back your arguments.

Campaigns
and building alliances

As we have seen throughout this document, Islamophobia is a complex phenomenon with many edges and deep roots in our societies. In order to confront it, a multidimensional approach is needed. Alliances must be made with Muslim and non-Muslim organisations that fight against this scourge. Networks must also be woven with organisations that walk similar paths and have sympathy and solidarity with this fight, such as human rights groups, anti-racist organisations, etc.

Building on this concept of networking and multiple supports, there is a myriad of actions that can be taken, individually or concertedly. In addition to the media, there are other spaces in which to act:

1. Social media. Today, hate messages spread on the internet and social media are a real threat to our coexistence beyond the world of telecommunications. We need direct actions that silence Islamophobic voices and spread the messages of Muslim role models and alternative narratives. Muslims need to create their own content that spreads messages that serve to dismantle stereotypes and create awareness campaigns, as well as preparing visual material that explains how to respond on social media, etc.

2. Associative environment. It is crucial to always be well informed and to inform those around us in order to confront hate messages. Both self-education and the organisation of courses, seminars and workshops on different topics, from the most basic ones to complex political advocacy strategies, will expand the framework of agents against Islamophobia. Actions and in-person informational meetings with political organisations and parties can be very effective with preparation and the right audience. Educating the general public to abandon their apathy towards this type of message is also important in order to keep messages that are racist against Muslim people, and particularly Muslim women, from being normalised.

Conclusion

The media has a defining role in shaping minds and narratives about reality since it can relay an accurate or distorted image of all kinds of events, individuals and societal groups. This includes minorities such as Muslim communities in Europe. Therefore, it is crucial for Muslim and grassroots organisations, but also for any actor working with such minorities, to challenge the online Islamophobia as well as that in print and broadcast media to combat anti-Muslim rhetoric, and to fight its normalisation in the media and society. This whole toolkit gives you and your organisation many avenues to pursue and how to best tackle gender-based Islamophobia.

For better or worse, the reproduction of tropes and stereotypes does not always come from bigotry and intolerance but can also be the fruit of ignorance or a lack of time. For this reason, it is worthwhile investing time in improving the knowledge about Muslim communities and Muslim women, regardless of the media's own responsibility to be informed and accurate in its work.

For that matter, there is a series of tools that you and your organisation can use in order to better communicate, defend and explain the particulars, needs and issues of the communities you work with to media actors. Some of them are, as explained, press releases, interviews and press encounters. Building a good relationship with media allies, being pedagogic when relaying your messages and being available to improve the general knowledge about your community are good tips to keep in mind.

At the same time, it is essential to be vigilant and firm in demanding accountability. As we saw, there is a number of means to fight Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia in the news, such as writing to the media outlet or the author of the piece in question, addressing a complaint to the social media platform where the message was relayed, or contacting different organisations in your country that deal specifically with Islamophobia or hate speech.

But, most importantly, it is key to work to create a counter-narrative (alternative narrative?) that breaks the monolithic image of Muslims and Muslim women and helps to debunk stereotypes and tropes. It is crucial to build a new narrative framework that highlights the rich and polyhedric reality of your community, insist on what it has in common with the rest of society, and convey messages that are not reactive to the Islamophobic rhetoric previously established.

Muslim communities in Europe have been the targets of increasing acts of hate and violence in recent years, including in the media, but they have also demonstrated agency and resilience in fighting discrimination. Grassroots organisations and activists can contribute to protecting and empowering the community by speaking up for diversity.

Further information and appendix

Appendix 1

Z. ALIYAH, "Great women in Islamic History: a forgotten legacy", Funci, 2016. Available at:
https://funci.org/great-women-in-islamic-history-a-forgotten-legacy/?lang=en

BALLANDALUS, "15 important Muslim Women in History", 2014. Available at:
https://ballandalus.wordpress.com/2014/03/08/15-important-muslim-women-in-history/

K. SHARMA, "10 inspiring Muslim Women We Should All Look Up To", Vogue Arabia, 2021.
Available at: https://en.vogue.me/culture/empowering-muslim-women/

A. RICCHUITO, "Myths About Muslim Women Debunked", Teen Vogue, 2022. Available at:
https://www.teenvogue.com/story/myths-about-muslim-women-debunked

ENAR, "Debunking Myths on women's rights, Muslim Women, Feminsim and Islamophobia in
Europe", 2016. Available at: https://www.enar-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/debunkingmyths_lr_
final.pdf

MEET, "Preventing Islamophobia against women & girls", l'Albero della Vita, 2020. Available at:
https://meet-project.alberodellavita.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/FADV_Survey-analysis-
report.pdf

Appendix 2

AL FANAR-MDIG, "National Dispatches May-Sep 2021", MAGIC, 2022. Available at:
https://magic.iemed.org/national-dispatches-may-sep-2021/

F. HANIF, "British Media's Coverage of Muslims and Islam (2018-2020), Centre for Media
Monitoring, 2021. Available at: https://cfmm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CfMM-
Annual-Report-2018-2020-digital.pdf

METODOLOGÍA 2022, Observatorio de la Islamofobia en los Medios. Available at:
https://www.observatorioislamofobia.org/metodologia-2022/

GUIDE ISLAM, Muslims and Journalism:
- Spanish: Islam, personas musulmanas y periodismo
- English: Islam, Muslims and Journalism

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS, "Counter-Islamophobia Kit", 2019. Available at: https://cik.leeds.ac.uk/

A. SZILÁGYI. "Linguistic Guide Against Islamophobia", Get the Trolls Out!. Available at:
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee500d316a2470c370596d3/t/5f6dd0642e317976
f979a0d4/1601032297376/Guide+to+Islamophobia+-+Final.pdf

Appendix 3

SPAIN	BELGIUM
Anti-Discrimination Office of Barcelona City Council (Oficina por la No Discriminación del Ayuntamiento de Barcelona) https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/oficina-no-discriminacio/es	UNIA: national equality body known as Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities that specialises in policy on equal opportunity and non-discrimination. Below is the link to fill in a form to either ask questions about a case of potential hate speech or to directly lodge a complaint for hate speech: https://www.signalement.unia.be/fr/signale-le/questions
Reporting Service of Granada City Council (Servicio de denuncias del Ayuntamiento de Granada) Tel: 010 - 902 234 - 958 539 697	CIIB: Collectif pour l'Inclusion et contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique. You can ask for information or lodge a complaint regarding potential Islamophobic hate speech by sending an email to: **sos@islamophobia.be**
Diversity Management Unit of Madrid City Council (Unidad de Gestión de la Diversidad del Ayuntamiento de Madrid) https://www.madrid.es/portales/munimadrid/es/Inicio/El-Ayuntamiento/Centro/Direcciones-y-telefonos/Unidad-de-Gestion-de-la-Diversidad	MRAX: You can request information or lodge a complaint regarding potential hate speech by sending an email to: **juridique@mrax.be**

Appendix 4

SPAIN	BELGIUM
You can turn to the platforms Maldita and Newtral and to other services like the Stop Rumores campaign from the Andalucía Acoge federation, which provides a complaint form.	To combat the dissemination of hate mail, UNIA (national equality body) has developed the following webpage in which they deconstruct the hate message to demonstrate its falsity or manipulation. UNIA also suggests reacting to a chain of emails that has not yet been analysed by its collaborators by using a standard response that can be found on the same page.

Appendix 5

SPAIN	BELGIUM
Emergencies: 112	Urgent police assistance: 101
Spanish military police (Guardia Civil): 062	Emergencies, medical aid, and fire services: 112
National Police: 091	Online complaints
Alertcops App	Thanks to the circular on research and prosecution policy on discrimination and hate crime named COL13/2013, you should find in **every police area a police officer who is a reference for hate crimes.** Reference magistrates are also appointed for hate crimes in every jurisdiction.

SPAIN	BELGIUM
Anti-Discrimination Office of Barcelona City Council (Oficina por la No Discriminación del Ayuntamiento de Barcelona).	**UNIA:** national equality body https://www._signalement.unia.be/fr/signale-le/questions
Observatory of Islamophobia in Catalonia (ODIC, Observatori de la Islamofòbia a Catalunya) http://www.odic.cat/	**CIIB:** Collectif pour l'Inclusion et contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique. To help victims learn more about how to make an effective complaint to the police, the collectif also created the following website on which you can find a lot of information and support services: https://ccib-ctib.be/index.php/ flupcops/

SPAIN

BELGIUM

Reporting form from the Moroccan Association for the Integration of Immigrants (Aplicación de denuncias de la Asociación Marroquí para la Integración de Inmigrantes).
https://www.asociacionmarroqui.com/

MRAX: you can lodge a complaint by sending an email to: **juridique@mrax.be**

Contactez-nous

Expliquez-nous votre situation par téléphone ou par mail et nos juristes vous guideront.

Téléphone: 0477 88 40 52

First Instance Criminal Court (Juzgado de Instrucción) or Justice of the Peace (Juzgado de Paz) where you live.

There is a Hate Crimes and Discrimination Prosecutor's Office (Fiscalía de Delitos de Odio y Discriminación) in each province. It is called "Fiscal para la Tutela Penal de la Igualdad y contra la Discriminación" (Prosecutor for the Criminal Protection of Equality and Against Discrimination). A report can be made by filling out a form.

About the project:

MAGIC (Muslim women and communities Against Gender Islamophobia in society) is a project which aims to prevent gendered Islamophobia in Spain and in Belgium, in particular in media outlets, and to draw lessons useful for other European countries. It is funded by the European Commission, within the framework of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme.

In the span of two years MAGIC will work to map gender islamophobia in Belgian and Spanish newspapers with a twofold objective: to provide Muslim communities' leaders, Muslim women, and CSOs working on diversity with skills and tools to recognise and stand against stereotypes against Muslim women in public narratives and to promote inclusiveness of Muslim voices in the media.

MAGIC will do so not only through training of journalists & capacity enhancement and promoting awareness campaigns but also by fostering knowledge, dialogue, and mutual cooperation among Muslim communities' representatives, Muslim women, and CSOs and media practitioners.

Follow us at https://magic.iemed.org/