MEND's Easy Read Guide to

Why Councils Should Adopt the APPG Definition of Islamophobia

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What is the Definition of Islamophobia?

In its 2018 report, *Islamophobia Defined*, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims formulated the following definition of Islamophobia:

"Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness."

Source: All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, "Islamophobia Defined: The inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia", 2018, https://appgbritishmuslims.org/publications

So far, the APPG definition of Islamophobia has been adopted by:

Labour

Liberal Democrats

SNP

Scottish Conservative & Unionist

Plaid Cymru Party of Wales

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

Birmingham City Council

City of BRADFORD METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Hackney

Harrow COUNCIL LONDON

Newham London

Lambeth

MAYOR OF LONDON

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MCB Muslim Council of Britain

And more...

Why is This Particular Definition a Useful One?

Muslims are racialised through Islamophobic tropes stereotyping them as a homogenous group that is fundamentally different from the rest of society. At the same time, Islamophobia manifests itself in the same way as other forms of racism and functions as a form of racism.

By conceptualising Islamophobia as "a type of racism", we come to understand that Muslims are victims of more than just overt expressions of religious hatred and abuse, but **are subject to a system of discrimination, control, and socio-economic exclusion.**

Consequently, hate crime, harassment, and abuse in public places is just the most visible and overt form that Islamophobia can take. In reality, we have to understand how it manifests in areas such as education, employment, politics, and policing, to name just a few areas.

In this way, the APPG definition is capable of capturing all the different forms of Islamophobia that may otherwise go unnoticed.

But Is It Enough?

The APPG definition is useful in framing Islamophobia as a form of racism and a socio-political and economic system of exclusion. However, the definition is theoretical, broad, and as such, open to interpretation.

Therefore, **MEND believes the definition should be applied in conjunction with the following explanatory guidelines put forward by the Coalition Against Islamophobia** to illustrate how Islamophobia functions in practice and ensure robust, policy-applicable understanding of the term.

Islamophobia is demonstrated in, and articulated through, speech, writing, behaviours, structures, policies, legislation or activities that work to control, regulate or exclude Muslim participation within social, civic, economic and political life, or which embody hatred, vilification, stereotyping, abuse, or violence directed at Muslims.

Taking into account the overall context, examples of Islamophobia in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere may include (but are in no way limited to):

- Any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference against Muslims that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. *(e.g. employment discrimination against Muslims).*

- Causing, calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Muslims or those perceived to be Muslim due to their religious identity. *(e.g. anti-Muslim hate crime, including against non-Muslims misidentified as Muslim, such as Sikhs).*

- Causing, calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of individuals due to their perceived or actual connection to or support of Muslims.

- Charging Muslims with conspiring to harm humanity and/or the Western way of life or blaming Muslims for the economic and social ills of society. *(e.g. accusing Muslims of being responsible for the spread of COVID-19).*

- Making mendacious, dehumanising, vilifying, demonising, or stereotypical allegations about Muslims. *(e.g. media bias against Muslims).*

- Objectifying and generalising Muslims as different, exotic or underdeveloped, or implying that they are outside of, distinct from, or incompatible with British society and identity. *(e.g. racialising Muslims through certain ethnic/cultural markers such as having a beard or speaking a foreign language like Arabic).*

- Espousing the belief that Muslims are inferior to other social or religious groups.

- Accusing Muslims as a collective of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Muslim person, group or nation, or even for acts committed by non-Muslims. *(e.g. associating Muslims as a whole with terrorism).*

- Applying double standards by requiring of Muslims a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other social, religious or ethnic group.

- Applying ethnocentric approaches to the treatment of Muslims (judging another culture solely by the values and standards of one's own culture). For example, evaluating Muslim women's choice of dress exclusively through the speaker's expectations

and without reference to the personal cultural norms and values of the women in question.

- Acts of aggression within which the targets, whether they are people or property – such as buildings, schools, places of worship and cemeteries – are selected because they are, or are perceived to be, Muslim(s) or linked to Muslims. *(e.g. attacks on mosques and the desecration of Muslim gravestones).*

While criticism of Islam within legitimate realms of debate and free speech is not in itself Islamophobic, it may become Islamophobic if the arguments presented are used to justify or encourage vilification, stereotyping, dehumanisation, demonisation or exclusion of Muslims. For example, by using criticism of religion to argue that Muslims are collectively evil or violent.

Why is a Definition of Islamophobia Necessary?

"Movements against discrimination do not begin until a commonly understood label evolves that brings together under one banner all forms of that particular prejudice."

Gottschalk and Greenberg

Source: Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), p. 11

Established definitions of terms such as sexism, racism, and anti-Semitism became important tools to oppose and tackle various discriminations and prejudices that had previously remained unchallenged.

We can only tackle Islamophobia effectively if we know what it means and entails. In the absence of a definition of Islamophobia, understandings of this phenomenon remain highly subjective, lacking the clear and established principles that this definition and the accompanying guidelines provide.

A formal definition will allow policymakers to identify how Islamophobia manifests itself and functions and therefore, devise meaningful strategies to tackle it.

Furthermore, adopting the APPG definition of Islamophobia would signal to British Muslim communities that their local councils recognise the hardships they face, and reassure them that combatting Islamophobia is a priority.

What Does the Law Say?

As per the **Public Sector Equality Duty** (Section 149 of the 2010 Equality Act), public bodies such as local councils must give due regard to the need to:

"Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act" - this includes forms of racism, such as Islamophobia.

"Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not" - religion is a protected characteristic.

Islamophobia is one of the principal barriers to the participation of Muslims in public, economic, political, and social spheres of life. Adopting a definition of Islamophobia is a critical step in tackling this phenomenon, such that Muslims are able to participate in society on an equal footing with their non-Muslim counterparts.

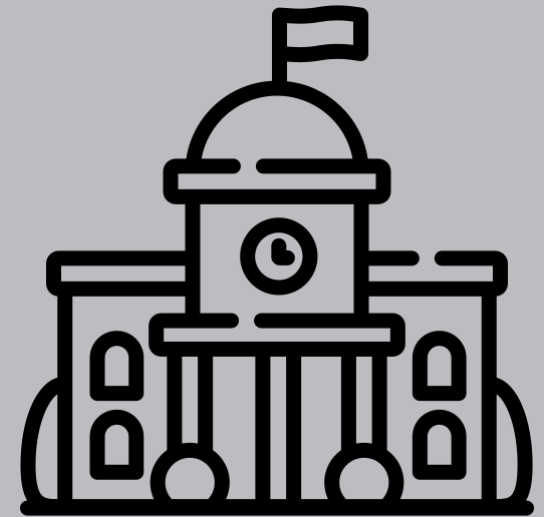# How Can I Get My Council To Recognise Islamophobia?

- **Check if your council has adopted the APPG definition of Islamophobia:** www.coalitionagainstislamophobia.org

- **If they have not adopted the definition, write to your local councillor:** www.gov.uk/find-your-local-councillors

- **Using the information contained in this guide, tell them:**

  - What the APPG definition is
  - Why a definition is necessary to tackle Islamophobia
  - Why their Council should adopt the definition

- **If you require further support, please contact MEND:** info@mend.org.uk

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Key Organisations

MEND:
www.mend.org.uk

Coalition Against Islamophobia:
www.coalitionagainstislamophobia.org

Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU):
www.theiru.org.uk

#AdoptTheDefinition

Muslim engagement
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