

Islamophobia Complaints Handbook

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FOREWORD

The UK is home to over 2.6 million Muslims from all different backgrounds. Our country's diversity, including our many Muslim communities, is a huge part of what makes us great.

However, disturbingly, Islamophobia is a lived reality for many Muslims in the UK. *Recent figures* released by the Home Office reveal that hate crimes against Muslims accounted for 42% of all recorded hate crimes in 2021/22. Sadly, this pattern has persisted over the past five years, with British Muslims subject to the highest proportion of religiously motivated hate crime year after year.

An *independent report* into the ruling Conservative Party has recently concluded that Islamophobia “remains a problem,” and more must be done to challenge discrimination. The former Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, has made a series of comments in recent years that have caused widespread fear, anxiety and distress, and they were associated with a *375% increase in hate crime* across the UK. The Conservative Party also rejected the All-Party Parliamentary Group for British Muslims' definition of Islamophobia in May 2019 – and remains the only political party in the UK to have done so. Instead, they vowed to create an alternative definition, but have now *dropped all plans* to do that too.

Within the Labour Party, *a report conducted* by the Labour Muslim Network (LMN) in 2020 uncovered concerns from Muslim members and supporters of the Labour Party relating to the management of Islamophobia. Further concerns were raised following the publication of the *Forde Report*, which revealed unacceptable incidences of racism (including but not limited to Islamophobia), misogyny and sexism, and other forms of discrimination. While many actions

have been taken within the Labour Party to combat unacceptable behaviour, there is undoubtedly more we all need to do to root out prejudice and discrimination.

Under these circumstances, we have created this handbook on Islamophobia. This handbook sets out how the Labour Party investigates complaints concerning Islamophobia, along with some useful resources.

This handbook builds on discussions with a range of Muslim stakeholders. Our ongoing stakeholder work is critical in ensuring that the interests of all communities are represented, as we aim to secure a greener and fairer future for Britain.

The handbook offers a nuanced overview of Islamophobia and illustrates how we can, as a Party, challenge it directly. Guidance and illustrative examples offer an insight into how we can assess allegations of Islamophobia and ensure that we are not perpetuating harmful stereotypes and demeaning tropes.

Labour prides itself on being an inclusive and welcoming party for all. That is why we must do everything in our power to root out Islamophobia, both in our Party and society. We hope that this handbook is a practical and valuable tool in our fight against Islamophobia.

Anneliese Dodds,
Labour Party Chair

BACKGROUND

Numerous organisations have defined Islamophobia and detailed its adverse impact on Muslim communities.

Among these, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims definition of Islamophobia is the most widely accepted. Working with academics, political parties, civil society, and activists, the APPG worked tirelessly to create a definition of Islamophobia that reflected widespread sentiment and discourse within Muslim communities.

Accordingly, the APPG defines Islamophobia as:

“... rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness”.

This definition has been adopted by over 900 organisations and all major political parties, except the Conservative Party. The Labour Party adopted the APPG definition and its examples in March 2019 as an important statement of principle, solidarity and legitimacy. The Labour Party's governing body and administrative authority, the National Executive Committee (the **NEC**) reaffirmed that position in 2021 when it adopted the Labour Party's Code of Conduct on Islamophobia. A working description of Islamophobia has helped draw boundaries between hate speech and legitimate dialogues, allowing the development of an education process and useful guidance for highlighting forms of discrimination and offence.

Under equality law, Muslims are a religious group and they do not comprise a distinct ethnic or national group. Unlawful discrimination against a person because they are Muslim is, therefore, a type of religious discrimination and not a type of race discrimination. Nonetheless, adherence to Islam may often be used as a proxy for race discrimination against people who are Muslim and from extra-European ethnicities. People may also perceive others to be Muslim and treat them detrimentally because they share perceived cultural or physical traits common to various ethnic groups: that may constitute hostility or prejudice based on race.

LIST OF TROPES

There are various offensive tropes and negative stereotypes that have gained prominence in recent years, all of which contribute to the rise of Islamophobia. The following sorts of treatment are likely to amount to prejudice or hostility based on the protected characteristic of Islam, ethnic or national origins:

- a. Inciting hatred or violence against Muslims and justifying actual or threatened harm.
- b. Engaging in derogatory or dehumanising stereotypes about Muslims. This includes typecasting Muslims and/ or making sweeping conclusions about beliefs, attitudes and values of the Muslim community.
- c. Suggesting that Muslims, individually or as a group in British society, pose a threat to British or European society, civilisation, or values.
- d. Requiring Muslims to act in a way not expected or demanded of any other group.
- e. Requiring Muslims to criticise terrorist acts more vociferously than other people or requiring Muslims to apologise for terrorism committed by extremists in the name of Islam or holding Muslims collectively responsible for the acts of Muslim majority countries, paramilitary groups or terrorists.
- f. Using slurs or grossly offensive imagery and language about Muslims and their religious practices.
- g. Mocking or belittling people's personal characteristics that are associated with their national or ethnic identities or origins.
- h. Objecting to the presence of Mosques or Koranic scripture because of their association with Islam or Muslims is very likely to be considered prejudicial.
- i. Making irrelevant references to the protected characteristic of being Muslim. This practice is often a form of discrimination and stereotyping.
- j. Accusing Muslims of being a “fifth column” or of lying or acting in ‘stealth’, and/or implying a Muslim, or Muslims in general, are inherently antisemitic, homophobic and/or misogynist.
- k. Minimising or justifying the persecution, oppression, or denial of the human rights of Muslims on the basis of concerns about ‘Islamic’ terrorism, or national security.
- l. Denying, or minimising the significance of, discrimination against Muslims may demonstrate hostility or prejudice because of religion.

HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

Details of how you make a complaint to the Labour Party about one of its members

The Labour Party expects its members to abide by the spirit and letter of its rules and to exhibit our shared values of solidarity, tolerance and respect at all times. We encourage people to report behaviour by our members that may constitute a breach of our rules or does not reflect our shared values. We take complaints of Islamophobia extremely seriously and we will assess every complaint received and take action where it is about an identifiable member or organisational body.

Any person can make a complaint about a Labour Party member by submitting an online complaint form at <https://labour.org.uk/complaints>.

When you submit the complaint form on the Party's website, you will receive an email acknowledgment. This tells you that it has been received. We will then assess your complaint to make sure that it does relate to a Labour Party member or organisational body.

Once a complaint has been received, assessed, and accepted for investigation, it will be allocated to a member of staff in the Party's Governance and Legal Unit (GLU), who specialises in this type of work. That member of staff will ensure they understand your complaint fully and will approach both you and the Labour Party member complained about (where appropriate) to ask for any further information they may need. They may need to talk to several people and will undertake a desk-based investigation in order to get sufficient detail and to establish the facts surrounding your complaint. Investigations can take some time.

Once an investigation is completed, a recommendation for the outcome is passed to the NEC for determination. In certain circumstances, the NEC may refer the case to the newly created Independent Complaints Board (the **ICB**). Such a referral is likely to occur where the complaint involves witnesses and cannot be determined on a written report and accompanying evidence alone. In these circumstances, the decision made by the ICB will be final.

You can find out more information about our Complaints Policy, and our regularly published complaints and disciplinary reports, by visiting www.labour.org.uk/complaints.

What to do when you experience/witness Islamophobia

Any person can make a complaint about a Labour Party member (see the above section).

In addition to those processes set out under the Party's rules, members of the public should continue to report, and where safe, challenge hatred and abuse wherever they see it. However, if you, or someone else, experience or witness Islamophobia, your safety is paramount.

In line with current national advice, if you feel it is safe to do so, you could consider challenging the behaviour or speech of the individual – **however, do not physically intervene**. It is always better to challenge what the person is saying, or how they are behaving, rather than challenging the person's attitudes or beliefs directly. It may be safer to withdraw and report the incident rather than challenging the individual.

It is vital that you do not put yourself in any danger. If it is safe to do so, record what you have seen (including as much detail as possible), heard or what was said on your mobile phone (photographs, videos, or voice notes) or with a pen and paper during the incident itself, or as soon afterwards as possible. These 'contemporaneous' notes can be helpful as evidence, and to help jog your memory when you report the incident to the police and/or the Party.

If you, or any other person, are in danger, contact the police immediately by dialling 999. If you believe that the incident is criminal, but no-one is in immediate danger, contact the police using the non-emergency number 101.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) have worked hard to empower Muslim communities to achieve a just, cohesive, and successful British society. Within the Labour Party, groups such as the Labour Muslim Network (LMN), British Muslim Friends of Labour and Labour Muslim MPs have worked tirelessly to promote Muslim engagement based on Labour values of social justice and equality. Along with organisations such as the Runnymede Trust, the rise of Islamophobia and its distressing and real-life implications for the Muslim community are well documented. We have included the resources below for those looking for more detailed information about Islamophobia and how we can combat it.

Labour Party's Complaints page

<https://labour.org.uk/complaints/>

Labour Party's Code of Conduct on Islamophobia

<https://labour.org.uk/members/my-welfare/rules-and-codes-of-conduct/labours-islamophobia-policy/>

Labour Muslims Network (LMN)

<https://www.labourmuslims.org>

Muslim Council of Britain (MCB)

<https://mcb.org.uk>

Islamophobia Awareness Month

<https://www.islamophobia-awareness.org/resources/>

Report hate crime (a GOV.UK website)

<https://www.gov.uk/report-hate-crime>

True Vision (reporting a hate crime online)

https://www.report-it.org.uk/your_police_force

Tell MAMA (a national project which records and measures anti-Muslim incidents in the United Kingdom)

<https://tellmamauk.org/>

[1] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/925968/hate-crime-1920-hosb2920.pdf

[2] https://singhinvestigation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Singh_Investigation_Report_for_download.pdf

[3] <https://www.labourmuslims.org/press>

Footnotes

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2021-to-2022/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2021-to-2022>

<https://singhinvestigation.co.uk>

<https://www.labourmuslims.org/research>

<https://www.fordeinquiry.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/The-Forde-Report.pdf>