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Anti-Muslim Racism Against Young People

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Table of Contents

Preface

Anti-Muslim Racism Kills 4

Forward

Why Strong Alliances Are Essential 6

**Anti-Muslim Racism Against
Young People** 8

Introduction 10

Anti-Muslim Racism in Germany 14

Anti-Muslim Racism's Impact on
Young People and the Challenges
It Poses 20

Recommended actions for more
visibility and awareness of young people
as targets of anti-Muslim racism 27

**Anti-Muslim Racism – a German
reckoning** Zubair Ahmad in conversation
with Saba-Nur Cheema 32

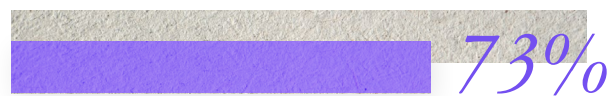
Young Islam Conference 42

Imprint 43

Anti-Muslim Racism Kills

According to the “Racist Realities” study published in May 2022 by the National Discrimination and Racism Monitor (NaDiRa), almost 73% of the young people between the ages of 14 and 24 surveyed said they had experienced racism at least once in their lives (NaDiRa 2022, p. 32). This racism can take on different forms. It can result in murder, as in the case of Marwa El-Sherbini, who was murdered because of her race in the Dresden Landgericht (District Court) by Alexander W. on July 1st, 2009. He had previously subjected her to verbal abuse, calling her “terrorist” and “Islamist” on a playground, which she reported to the police.

In Germany, on average, more than two anti-Muslim attacks take place every day, including verbal attacks, physical attacks resulting in injuries, and property damage. In the year 2022 alone, CLAIM, an alliance against anti-Islam and anti-Muslim hate, recorded 898 anti-Muslim incidents as part of their monitoring program. Anti-Muslim racism takes place in the forms of direct violence, but it also has the potential to prevent the social mobility of affected youth. Especially in areas central to society, such as the education system, racism can lead to exclusion of the affected, destroying their prospects for a self-determined life.



of young people between the ages of 14 and 24 surveyed say they have experienced racism at least once in their lives (NaDiRa 2022, p. 32).

These racist realities are embedded in a present beset with multiple crises such as wars, pandemics, climate disasters, and forced displacement. Inflation and increasing socio-economic inequalities are just a few of the consequences of these crises. Racist beliefs often use a repertoire of explanations to reduce social and economic crises to seemingly unambiguous and simple answers. All too often, the longing for an “intact” past is connected to ideas about a time that was allegedly homogeneous. Anti-Muslim racism plays a central role in these ideas. It provides a direct link between the many crises facing society and the figure of “the Other,” who is perceived as Muslim.

Society’s willingness to talk about racism, however, is growing steadily. Questions of structural and institutional racism are playing more and more important roles in political debates. An awareness of the need to address incidents of racism is also increasing. The shift in political and public awareness has an impact on the relevance of these issues, reflected not least in political reactions and decisions at the federal level, including the establishment of a cabinet committee to combat right-wing extremism and racism and the appointment of an anti-racism commissioner. At the same time, increased public awareness and an increased focus on racism do not automatically go hand in hand with a reduction in racism. Especially when the measures employed remain at a symbolic level. In addition, at present

an organized rejection of anti-racism perspectives and a disinhibition of political discourse is evident. To counteract these processes of open refusal of solidarity and the reinforcement of racist discourses, it is essential to reveal established racist belief structures and to recognize their effects on institutional practices. In this way, we can successfully identify starting points for anti-racist measures. Even if social conditions often breed powerlessness, fear, and frustration in those affected, we should not forget that racism has always given rise to organized resistance. The activists of today have been inspired by previous movements and continue to build on them. In this context, the Young Islam Conference makes an important contribution to counteracting racism. It establishes pathways for anti-racist knowledge to be transferred to politics, administration, (civil) society, and the media. Furthermore, it provides a platform for young people who are structurally disadvantaged and whose voices and perspectives are socially marginalized. They can use this platform to organize themselves and draw attention to their own concerns and needs.

Why Strong Alliances Are Essential

Anti-Muslim racism is not an abstract danger, but rather a painful part of everyday life for far too many people in Europe. It poses a serious threat – not just for Muslims or those who are perceived as Muslim, but also for our society and democracy as a whole. This is why, for over twelve years, we have advocated as the Young Islam Conference for increasing awareness of anti-Muslim racism, improving cultural competencies, speaking about the intersection of different experiences of discrimination, working together on changes, and also posing critical, sometimes uncomfortable questions.

In recent years, Muslims and those who are perceived as Muslim have experienced an increase in hate, discrimination, and attacks in Europe. As a network consisting of young people who position themselves in vastly different ways, we are a platform for dialogue and an empowerment space for questions related to Islam and the related issues of life together in a post-migrant society. Furthermore, we advocate for combating prejudice, intolerance, discrimination, and (anti-Muslim) racism, but we are also aware that we must redouble our efforts in a time in which racism and extremism threaten our society and democracy.

Especially for young people who are perceived as Muslim, discrimination and anti-Muslim racism are often a fixed part of their lived reality. In all spheres of their lives – in public spaces, in educational institutions, on the job market, and in government offices – they are frequently confronted with stereotypical attributions, made “foreign,” discriminated against, and in some cases targeted with verbal or even physical attacks.

This not only prevents participation in society but also has serious effects on the psychological and physical health of these young people and their respective ways of life and future plans. It is therefore essential that more attention be paid to protection from discrimination and racism and support for dealing with these issues. In order to achieve this, all of society must take a (self-)critical approach to addressing racist structures and their effects, must position themselves clearly against discrimination and racism, and consider and take into account the particular needs of young Muslims and others who are perceived as Muslim.

It is clear that anti-Muslim racism is an attack on the human dignity that German Basic Law guarantees to all of us. That is why we, as a society, are always called on to embody and defend our democracy and its values. This does not require a shared identity but shared values instead. An anti-racist and diverse post-migrant Germany can only be achieved by a collective. As the Young Islam Conference, we work on amplifying the voices and highlighting the needs of affected young people, in order to more effectively and sustainably shape our anti-racist work. This work requires allies, supporters, and robust alliances who take a decisive stand against the violence of anti-Muslim racism.



Anti-Muslim Racism Against Young People

Text from Zubair Ahmad

Introduction

“Racism prevents people from developing as individuals and from reaching their full potential, it undermines cohesion, demeans people, threatens their safety and their sense of belonging and is therefore opposed to the fundamental concept of an equal and diverse society laid out in the Basic Law.”

(Report on Racism in Germany, 2023)

6.4–6.7%

Percentage of Muslims in Germany

According to estimates from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), between 5.3 and 5.6 million Muslims are currently living in Germany. The proportion of the total population who are Muslim is therefore between approx. 6.4% and 6.7%, representing the second largest religion in Germany by population. Although Muslims and Islam have been part of our society for decades, they are repeatedly subjected to racist hate, marginalization, and exclusion because of their faith. This also applies to people who are thought to be Muslims, i.e., perceived as Muslims.

The data from representative studies and figures from national crime statistics, which began recording anti-Islam crimes separately in 2017, as well as documentation of anti-Muslim incidents from anti-discrimination agencies, now clearly show that anti-Muslim racism is not a marginal phenomenon in our society but has instead moved far closer to the mainstream and undergone normalization. Muslims experience the violence of racism consistently and on a daily basis in all areas of society. This endangers both Muslim life as well as a peaceful and diverse life together in our society.

The series of murders committed by the NSU, the founding and rise of PEGIDA, the AfD's entry into the German Bundestag, discussions generalizing Islam and Muslims in German public discourse, the widespread filtering of anti-Muslim attitudes into the mainstream, racist attacks on Muslims and mosques, and white supremacist terrorism in Munich (2016), Hanau (2020) and Halle (2022) are just a few of the horrific milestones in the history and present of anti-Muslim racism in Germany. For 2022, the Federal Criminal Police Office reported a good 7% increase in far-right extremism and racism and continue to see both as “the greatest threat to a free and democratic society.”

The current report on racism also states that Muslims – after Sinti and Roma – are “among the most unwanted minorities in Germany.”

As an anti-racist network that primarily counteracts anti-Muslim racism against young people, we are appalled by these statistics and developments. These developments not only endanger Muslim life in Germany, and those people who are perceived as Muslim, but also an open, diverse, and peaceful society as a whole. Current studies and our experience in the context of the JIK network's activities also make

it clear that young people in particular are affected more frequently by everyday anti-Muslim racism and that these incidents are less likely to be addressed and/or result in criminal proceedings. The aim of this publication is to make the topic of "Anti-Muslim Racism Against Young People" more visible, to raise awareness of it, and to formulate concrete recommendations for action for decision-makers in politics and civil society. Especially for the group of young people affected, there is a need for more visibility, sensitivity, and the social and political will to decisively oppose the racist conditions in our society.

7%

Increase in far-right extremism and racism in 2022 in comparison to the previous year
(BMI 2023)

The series of murders committed by the NSU, the founding and rise of PEGIDA, the AfD's entry into the German Bundestag, discussions generalizing Islam and Muslims in German public discourse, the widespread filtering of anti-Muslim attitudes into the mainstream, racist attacks on Muslims and mosques, and white supremacist terrorism in Munich (2016), Hanau (2020), and Halle (2022) are just a few of the horrific milestones in the history and present of anti-Muslim racism in Germany.

Anti-Muslim Racism in Germany

Racist beliefs are still widespread in German society. According to a representative study from the German Centre for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM) from the beginning of 2022, nearly half the population (49 %) still believes in the existence of human “races,” while a third of the population (33 %) are of the opinion that certain peoples or ethnic groups are “naturally harder workers” than others. 90 % of the population believe that there is racism in Germany and 61 % believe that it is an everyday reality. More than a fifth (22 %) also said that they had experienced racism themselves, while 58 % of those who identified themselves as a racialized minority said that they already had experienced racism at least once in their lives. The survey also showed that nearly half the population (45 %) had already witnessed a racist incident.¹

Anti-Muslim racism as a form of racism is based on the actual or attributed racialization of religious affiliation to Islam, which constructs a difference between Muslims and non-Muslims based on culture and biology.² In this context, it is important to emphasize the fact that anti-Muslim discourses have been developed and passed down over history and attributions along the lines of “foreignness” and “hostility” have a long history in German-speaking countries.³ These racist attributions, passed down over the centuries, renew themselves in current processes of

¹ Rassistische Realitäten. Wie setzt sich Deutschland mit Rassismus auseinander? Auftaktstudie zum Nationalen Diskriminierungs- und Rassismusmonitor (NaDiRa) des Deutschen Zentrums für Integrations- und Migrationsforschung (DeZIM). https://www.rassismusmonitor.de/fileadmin/user_upload/NaDiRa/CATI_Studie_Rassistische_Realit%C3%A4ten/DeZIM-Rassismusmonitor-Studie_Rassistische-Realit%C3%A4ten_Wie-setzt-sich-Deutschland-mit-Rassismus-auseinander.pdf (accessed 03.10.2023).

² For a detailed discussion of terms in German-speaking countries including further terms, see Anne Schönfeld, Forschungszugänge zum Themenfeld Islam-/ Muslimfeindlichkeit und Antimuslimischer Rassismus. Eine Bestandsaufnahme (Essen: MUTIK gGmbH, 2018); Yasemin Shooman, „... weil ihre Kultur so ist“: Narrative des antimuslimischen Rassismus, Kultur und soziale Praxis (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2014); Ilka Eickhof, Antimuslimischer Rassismus in Deutschland: Theoretische Überlegungen (Berlin: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Berlin, 2010); Iman Attia, Die „westliche Kultur“ und ihr Anderes. Zur Dekonstruktion von Orientalismus und antimuslimischem Rassismus (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2009), among other works.

exclusion and discrimination. The historical effectiveness of anti-Muslim racisms and attributions is an important factor which must be considered when combatting them. Without an awareness for and sensitivity to the history of the phenomena, opposition to it must necessarily remain incomplete. Thus, for example, European and German discourses not only have long histories of debates about Muslim women in headscarves (hijab) that stretch back to the 18th and 19th centuries,⁴ but also a continuity of historical attributions regarding Muslim women of color with headscarves.⁵ The effectiveness of racist continuity, however, cannot be addressed societally without an understanding of the long history of anti-Muslim racism.

The multitudes of anti-Muslim attributions and processes of exclusion and discrimination have, in the meantime, been sufficiently substantiated through representative studies, criminal statistics, and documentation gathered by anti-discrimination agencies, advisory organizations, and other NGOs. These empirical data produce significant momentum in combatting anti-Muslim racism, even though the estimated number of unreported incidents continues to be high.

In representative surveys such as the “Mitte” study, for example, more than a fifth of those surveyed (21.5 %) reported having negative views of Muslims.⁶ Furthermore, more than a third of those surveyed (36.9 %) shared the view that the number of Muslims in Germany should be limited, while 27.3 % were of the opinion that too many Muslims live in Germany.⁷ At the same time, 33.5 % believe that Muslim culture has a dangerous influence on German culture.⁸

The Leipzig Authoritarianism Study (2022)⁹ found, with respect to anti-Muslim racism, notably higher percentages, in part, in the eastern federal states. In eastern Germany,

³ Joseph Croitoru, Die Deutschen und der Orient. Faszination, Verachtung und die Widersprüche der Aufklärung (München: Carl Hanser Verlag); Sebastian Gottschalk, Kolonialismus und Islam (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verlag, 2017); Almut Höfert, Den Feind beschreiben. „Türkengefahr“ und europäisches Wissen über das Osmanische Reich 1450-1600 (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verlag, 2004); Tomaz Mastnak, Crusading Peace. Christendom, The Muslim World, and Western Political Order (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2002); Edward Said, Orientalism (London: Penguin Books, 1978); Andrew Shyrock, Islamophobia/Islamophilia: Beyond the Politics of Enemy and Friend (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

⁴ Meyda Yeğenoğlu, Colonial Fantasies. Towards a Feminist reading of Orientalism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁵ Talal Asad, Trying to Understand French Secularism. In: Hentde Vries und Lawrence E. Sullivan (Eds.), Political Theologies. Public Religions in a Post-Secular World (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006); Frantz Fanon, Algeria Unveiled, in: A Dying Colonialism (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2007); Birgit Rommelspacher, Emanzipation als Konversion, ethikundgesellschaft, 2/2010, <https://ethik-und-gesellschaft.de/ojs/index.php/eug/article/view/254/106> (accessed: 04.10.2023).

⁶ Andreas Zick, Beate Küpper (Eds.), Die geforderte Mitte. Rechtsextreme und demokratiegefährdende Einstellungen in Deutschland 2020/21 (Bonn, 2021), p. 187.

46.6 % of those surveyed said that they agreed at least “for the most part” with the statement, “Muslims should not be permitted to immigrate to Germany,” and only a minority strongly opposed it. In comparison, agreement with that statement is clearly lower in western Germany at 23.6 %. For the second statement, the difference is less dramatic, but still indicative of the pattern: 42.7 % in eastern and 36.6 % in western Germany sometimes feel like “a foreigner in their own country because of all the Muslims here.” When interpreting these figures, it is important to consider the significantly lower percentage of people of the Muslim faith in eastern German states (East: 0.7 %-2.9 %, West: 4.4 %-10.8 %) ¹⁰. More frequent (potential) contact with Muslims, therefore, cannot be the key factor in the higher level of agreement with these statements.

A defensive attitude appears in parts of the German population with regard to the social advancement of Muslims as well. Many Germans in both eastern and western states do not want to see Muslims in leadership positions, increasingly regard their improved educational upward mobility as a burden, and are afraid of them having equal status. In a more recent study, almost every other person in eastern Germany (47.6 %) and a third of western Germans said that they would be uncomfortable with Muslims advancing to important leadership positions on the job market. ¹¹ Even though the defensiveness against the social advancement of Muslims is stronger in eastern Germany, it is still high in western Germany as well. 40.4 % of eastern Germans are of the opinion that it must be ensured that the educational successes of Muslims do not result in a detriment to the rest of the population, while a third of western Germans (33.1 %) agreed with that statement. Furthermore, 53.1 % of eastern Germans are of the opinion that the better off Muslims are, the more demands they will make. 37.5 % of western Germans share this fear.

⁷ Andreas Zick, Nora Rebekka Krott, Einstellungen zur Integration in der deutschen Bevölkerung von 2014 bis 2020. Studienbericht zur vierten Erhebung im Projekt ZuGleich – Zugehörigkeit und Gleichwertigkeit (Bielefeld, 2021), p. 26.

⁸ Zick, Andreas, Nora Rebekka Krott, Einstellungen zur Integration in der deutschen Bevölkerung von 2014 bis 2020. Studienbericht zur vierten Erhebung im Projekt ZuGleich – Zugehörigkeit und Gleichwertigkeit (Bielefeld, 2021), p. 26.

⁹ Oliver Decker, Johannes Kiess, Ayline Heller, Elmar Brähler (Eds.), Autoritäre Dynamiken in unsicheren Zeiten. Neue Herausforderungen – alte Reaktionen? (Gießen: Psycho-sozial-Verlag, 2022), p. 71.

¹⁰ Kerstin Tanis, Muslimisches Leben in Deutschland (2020). Fact Sheet zur regionalen Verteilung muslimischer Religionsangehöriger mit Migrationshintergrund aus einem muslimisch geprägten Herkunftsland nach Bundesland. (Nürnberg: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2021). <https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Forschung/Forschungsberichte/Kurzberichte/tb38-muslimisches-leben-factsheet.pdf> (04.10.2023).

¹¹ E.g. Naika Foroutan, Coskun Canan, Frank Kalter, Mara Simon, Ostmigrantische Analogien I: Konkurrenz um Anerkennung (Berlin, 2019), p. 28 f.

Even though prejudices and discriminatory views are not the same as discriminatory behaviors with regard to minorities, they can still encourage those discriminatory behaviors. The fact that a large portion of the population endorses withholding equal rights and opportunities from Muslims corresponds to the fact that Muslims and people perceived as Muslims have a significantly higher risk of experiencing discrimination. This appears particularly clearly in the level of discrimination, as well as verbal and physical violence, that Muslims are threatened with. The rate of anti-Muslim incidents has remained high for years. In the year 2022, CLAIM – Alliance Against Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate – documented a total of 898 anti-Muslim incidents as part of a community-based monitoring program. These include acts of discrimination as well as verbal and physical attacks. The report states “that, even in 2022, anti-Muslim racism is an everyday experience for those affected and that anti-Muslim racism has spread throughout all areas of society.” ¹² (see Figure 1).

¹² CLAIM, Zivilgesellschaftliches Lagebild antimuslimischer Rassismus. Antimuslimische Vorfälle in Deutschland in 2022 (Berlin 2023), p. 22, https://www.claim-allianz.de/content/uploads/2023/06/20230622_zivilgesellschaftliches_lagebild_antimuslimischer_rassismus_2022_claim_web-1.pdf?x65074 (accessed: 17.10.2023).

Experiences of Anti-Muslim Racism Spheres of Life:

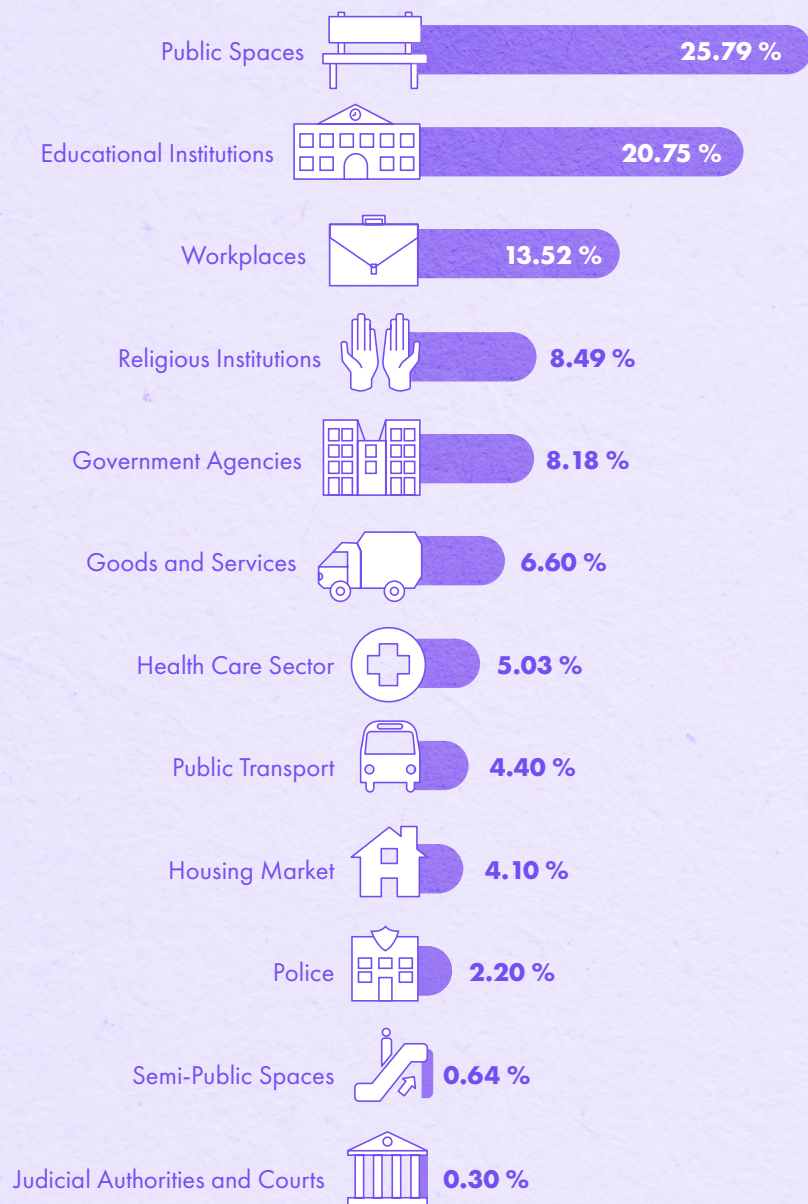


Fig. 1

Experiences of Anti-Muslim Racism Targets:

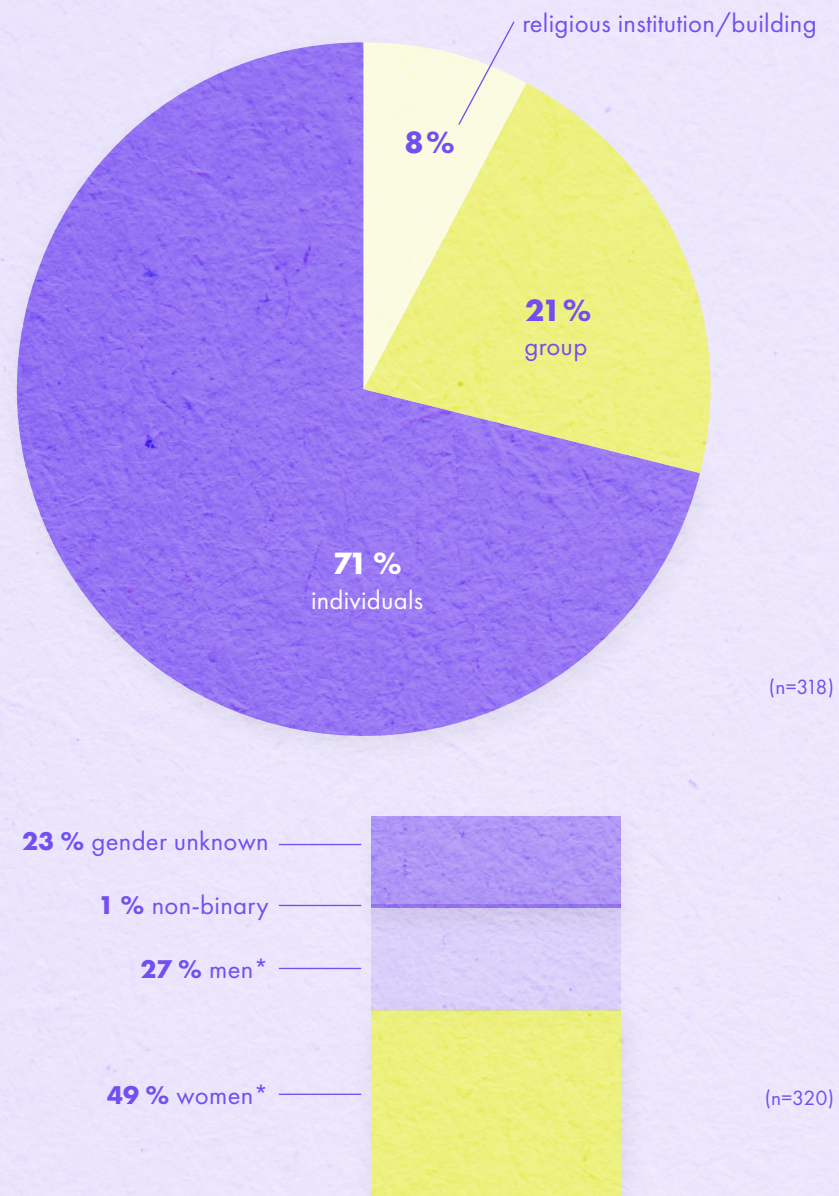


Fig. 2¹³

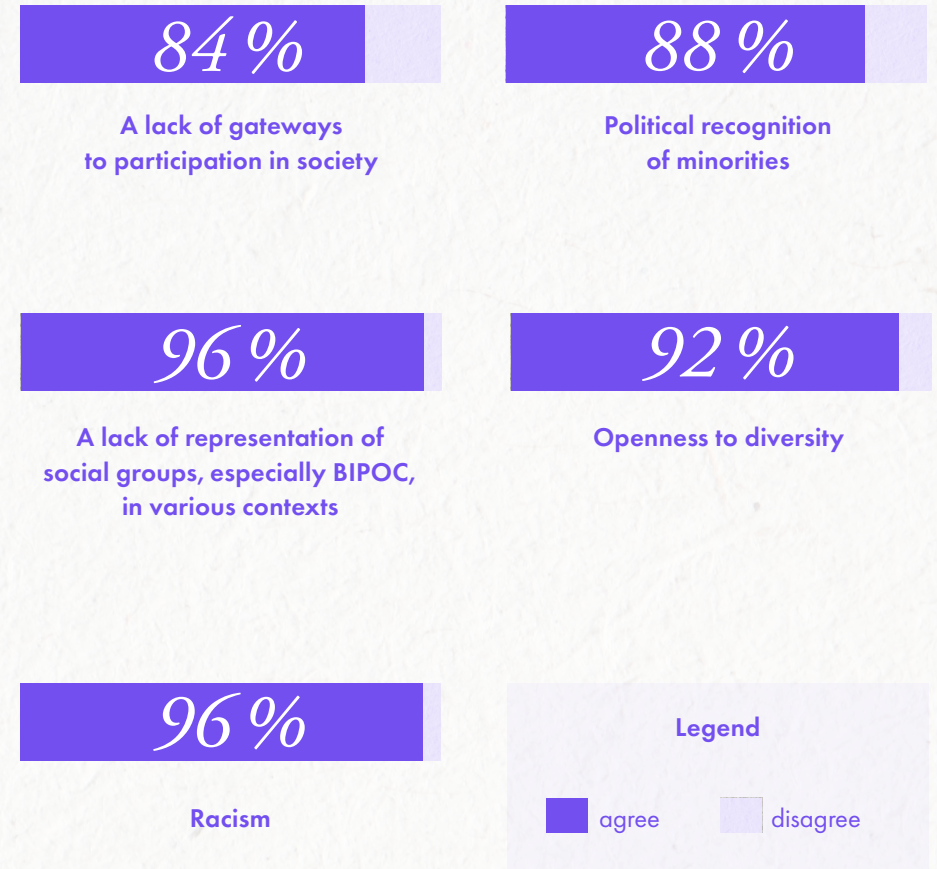
¹³ CLAIM, Zivilgesellschaftliches Lagebild antimuslimischer Rassismus. Antimuslimische Vorfälle in Deutschland in 2022 (Berlin 2023), p. 27, https://www.claim-allianz.de/content/uploads/2023/06/20230622_zivilgesellschaftliches_lagebild_antimuslimischer_rassismus_2022_claim_web-1.pdf?x65074 (accessed: 17.10.2023).

Anti-Muslim Racism's Impact on Young People and the Challenges It Poses

The Young Islam Conference (JIK) was founded in Berlin in 2011 as a joint project from the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and the Stiftung Mercator. At its founding, the idea behind the project was the development of counter narratives to growing anti-Islam sentiments and blanket generalizations. Ever since, the JIK has provided young people with a platform in the debate around Islam and Muslims in Germany and stood for the credo of "values, not origins." Behind this idea is the fundamental value of a radically diverse society in which pluralist post-migrant perspectives, lifestyles, and realities encounter one another, engage in constructive dialogues, and position themselves regarding issues related to our life together.

In our day-to-day work with young adults, however, it becomes clear again and again that the pluralist German democracy hasn't been able to keep its promise of security and physical safety for all citizens up to this point. This failure becomes especially apparent in not only the racist NSU murders, the attack in Hanau, antisemitic assaults and attacks on synagogues, but also anti-Muslim positions, attitudes, and incidents in mainstream society. In addition, examining issues such as recognition, equality of opportunity, and participation in society reveals that not all citizens of Germany are de facto equal.

In your opinion, what are the greatest challenges facing the realization of a post-migrant society?



Note: Online survey conducted during the 2020 JIK federal conference, n=40, multiple responses allowed

According to a poll¹⁴ that we conducted within the JIK network, 96 % of those surveyed were of the opinion that racism continues to be one of the greatest challenges facing our post-migrant society.

Over the past several months and years, quantitative and qualitative data have been collected to increase the visibility of anti-Muslim racism, its forms and modes of operation, as well as the experiences and perspectives of those affected. At the same time, the currently available data do not provide information on where and in what ways young adults between 17 and 27 years old are specifically affected by anti-Muslim racism. It is striking that, for a long time, the perspective of those affected was not taken into account or taken seriously. For example, people affected by racism are regularly subjected to prejudices and discrimination during police investigations.¹⁵ In comparison to the average age of the entire German population, Muslims are relatively young, with an average age of 32 years.¹⁶ This means that the percentage of young adults in this demographic group is higher than in the general population. And yet anti-Muslim racism and how it intersects with the age distribution of those affected remains little researched.

Recently published studies, such as the *Zivilgesellschaftliches Lagebild antimuslimischer Rassismus* (Civil Society Status Report on Anti-Muslim Racism) from CLAIM and the report from the Unabhängiger Expertenkreis Muslimfeindlichkeit (Independent Group of Experts on Anti-Muslim Hate, UEM), for example, paint a picture of young adults as an especially affected group. First of all, they make it clear that the majority of racist incidents take place in public space (25.79 %), where Muslim women in particular, and those perceived as such, are subjected to verbal abuse and physical attacks.¹⁷ For this sphere of public space, however, nothing more precise can be said yet with regard to the age distribution of those affected.

14 These data are based on the JIK study by Zubair Ahmad and Asmaa Soliman titled *Kritik und Vision einer postmigrantischen Gesellschaft. Perspektiven junger Menschen auf das Zusammenleben* (Critiques and Visions for a Post-Migrant Society: Young people's perspectives on living together in Germany, 2022), which was conducted between October 2020 and December 2021. The study can be found on the JIK homepage: www.junge-islam-konferenz.de. During the study, we asked participants and speakers at the 2020 JIK Federal Conference for their thoughts on post-migrant societies. The data was collected during the federal conference using the participant observation method, from an online survey filled out by 40 participants, and during 9 qualitative interviews. The focus group was made up of Germans with histories of migration and forced displacement as well as Germans without histories of migration from a variety of different locations throughout Germany, all situated in and dealing with a variety of lived realities.

15 Amnesty International, *Polizei – Einsatzarbeit gegen Rassismus*. <https://www.amnesty.de/informieren/aktuell/deutschland-sechs-forderungen-antirassismus-in-polizeiarbeit> (accessed: 17.10.2023).

16 Deutsche Islam Konferenz, *Daten und Fakten über den Islam in Deutschland*, 29.06.2023, https://www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de/DE/DatenFakten/daten-fakten_node.html (accessed: 17.10.2023).

17 CLAIM, *Zivilgesellschaftliches Lagebild antimuslimischer Rassismus. Antimuslimische Vorfälle in Deutschland in 2022* (Berlin, 2023), p. 26,

For the sphere of education, Aliyeh Yegane from the Contact Point for Protection from Discrimination at Schools (ADAS) states, however, that school is the place “where most incidents of discrimination occur.”¹⁸ For 2022, their documentation shows that 86% of reported cases of discrimination affected pupils and 7% affected parents. One particularly shocking finding is that, in far more than half of cases (72 %), the school itself engaged in the discrimination and, for the most part, educators were responsible. A significant portion of cases of discrimination can therefore be traced back to schools as institutions, underlining the structural dimension of racism and/or discrimination that young people are subjected to in this institution on a daily basis. In this manner, schools as places of learning create an environment of exclusion which reproduces and encourages discriminatory behavior.

As part of a quantitative study, ADAS also observed that, due to debates around German identity, a considerable number of those surveyed experienced a rejection of their identity as Germans. 70 % experienced the attribution of “non-German” due to their name, while 67 % experienced a denial of their German identity due to their religious affiliation with Islam.¹⁹ **Our survey conducted in 2023 also makes it clear that schools are not neutral places in which societal mechanisms of inequality and discrimination stop having an effect.**²⁰ **70 % of those surveyed stated that they had experienced anti-Muslim racism at school.** Those affected often aren't certain that what they experienced counts as anti-Muslim racism until after they have left school. Several participants in our survey stated that it's “often subtle discrimination” that takes place over a scholastic career and that “it wasn't until afterwards (that they) recognized” that it was racism. Another surveyed person stated that their “time in school was very much shaped by anti-Muslim racism, on the part of educators, but also from other non-Muslim pupils.”

https://www.claim-allianz.de/content/uploads/2023/06/20230622_zivilgesellschaftliches_lagebild_antimuslimischer_rassismus_2022_claim_web-1.pdf?x65074 (accessed: 17.10.2023).

18 Antimuslimischer Rassismus und Islamfeindlichkeit in der Schule, in: CLAIM, *Zivilgesellschaftliches Lagebild antimuslimischer Rassismus. Antimuslimische Vorfälle in Deutschland in 2022*, p. 81, https://www.claim-allianz.de/content/uploads/2023/06/20230622_zivilgesellschaftliches_lagebild_antimuslimischer_rassismus_2022_claim_web-1.pdf?x65074 (accessed: 17.10.2023).

19 LIFE e.V., ADAS, Aliyeh Yegane, Joachim Willems, Joshua Moir, *Religion und Glauben an der Schule. Diskriminierungserfahrungen muslimischer Jugendlicher in Berliner Schulen* (Berlin, 2021), https://adas-berlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Religion-und-Glauben-an-der-Schule_Studie.pdf (accessed: 04.10.2023).

20 The survey is based on questions which were posed to JIK network members between January and June 2023. As part of the survey, we asked JIKers about their experiences with and thoughts on anti-Muslim racism. In total, 30 JIKers participated in the survey.

Our survey conducted in 2023 also makes it clear that schools are not neutral places where societal mechanisms of inequality and discrimination stop having an effect.¹⁹



70 %

of those surveyed stated that they had experienced anti-Muslim racism at school.

Another important educational sphere comprises institutions of higher education. Over half of those surveyed in our study (52.17 %) said they had experienced anti-Muslim racism in one of those institutions. **In comparison to schools, institutions of higher education have been little investigated as places where anti-Muslim racism occurs.** Thus, the UEM, for example, concludes that studies specifically focusing on experiences of anti-Muslim discrimination at higher education institutions are “currently lacking.”²¹ According to the report, there’s a “backlog” in this area.²² Based on the sphere of education examined here as an example, it becomes clear that anti-Muslim racism is a widespread phenomenon. At this point it’s especially important to highlight the sphere of education in schools, because school, as a compulsory institution, “plays a significant role in the development of identity and personality for children and adolescents.”²³ Both those affected by anti-Muslim racism as well as allies²⁴ within the JIK report on the everyday nature and the impact of anti-Muslim racism in their lives. In the poll we conducted, 88 % of those surveyed that they had been **personally** affected by anti-Muslim racism, while 83 % of the same group said they had **experienced** anti-Muslim racism, **without being the target of it.** Almost 56 % of those surveyed also stated that they were **frequently** the target of anti-Muslim racism and 65 % of those surveyed in our network had **frequently noticed** anti-Muslim racism **without being the target of it themselves.**

In recent years important studies and data have been collected that make anti-Muslim racism more visible and shed some light on the lack of empirical data regarding anti-Muslim racism. This data, however, must be made more specific in regard to the age distribution of those affected, in order to determine and implement concrete measures. We continue to see recommendations for action that tend toward general formulations. One exception to this is the category of gender, which, sensibly, has been included in many considerations.

²¹ Unabhängiger Expertenkreis Muslimfeindlichkeit, Muslimfeindlichkeit – eine deutsche Bilanz, 2023, p. 153. https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/publikationen/themen/heimat-integration/BMI23006-muslimfeindlichkeit.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=18 (accessed: 04.10.2023).

²² Unabhängiger Expertenkreis Muslimfeindlichkeit, Muslimfeindlichkeit – eine deutsche Bilanz, 2023, p.152.

²³ Unabhängiger Expertenkreis Muslimfeindlichkeit, Muslimfeindlichkeit – eine deutsche Bilanz, 2023, p.140.

²⁴ Allyship describes the process of a privileged person actively allying themselves with a socially oppressed group. An in-depth discussion of the term can be found at #Allyship - FUMA Fachstelle Gender & Diversität NRW (gender-nrw.de) (accessed: 04.10.2023).

But because the category of age is not usually factored in, there is little empirical data on to which empirical extent and in what form anti-Muslim racism specifically affects young people. At the same time, based on our experience, as well as the extensive prevalence of anti-Muslim racism in the spheres of public discourse and education, it can be concluded that young people comprise a particularly vulnerable group of affected persons, but that exact figures about the extent of their vulnerability are lacking.

As a platform for dialogue and empowerment space for young people between 17 and 27 years old, we see that experiences of racism pose a risk to the psycho-social development of young people and adults, significantly limit their participation in society, and have a considerable negative impact on their educational success and their choices of career. Experiences of racism, however, are always violent experiences of powerlessness as well.

As part of our work, we have seen that enormous efforts are required to collect the everyday experiences of anti-Muslim racism among young adults and thoroughly analyze them. As long as the modus operandi of anti-Muslim racism with respect to age distribution in general, and specifically with regard to young people aged 17 to 27, remain unclear, the formulation and implementation of effective countermeasures will be impeded or at least limited. As a network of young people, we would, for these reasons, like to propose recommendations for action that increase the visibility of this group and can raise more awareness in society of the relevant issues.



Recommended actions for more visibility and awareness of young people as targets of anti-Muslim racism:



01

Fundamental acknowledgement of young people's vulnerability to anti-Muslim racism.

02

Greater socio-political awareness of and visibility for anti-Muslim racism as it affects young people aged 17 to 27 through the implementation of age distribution as a category for analysis in future studies and surveys, in order

to understand and identify in greater detail the extent, effect, and modus operandi of anti-Muslim racism for young people.

03

Development of effective countermeasures for young people as an affected group based on the results of future surveys.

04

Special attention to increasing awareness of anti-racist approaches in the sphere of education.

05

Establishment of independent complaints offices to combat discrimination in the sphere of education.

06

Consideration of young people's particular needs in anti-discrimination law and changes made if needed.

07

Build expertise in and financial sustainability for programs and structures empowering young people affected by anti-Muslim racism.

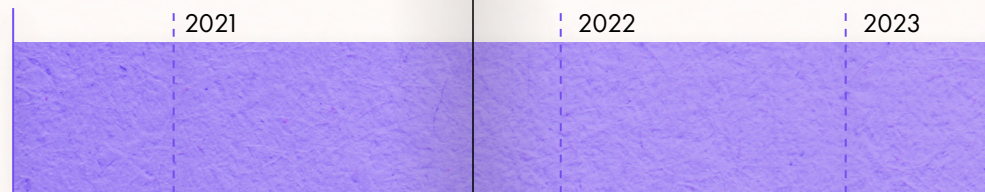
Anti-Muslim Racism – a German reckoning

Zubair Ahmad in conversation
with Saba-Nur Cheema

The Unabhängige Expertenkreis Muslimfeindlichkeit (Independent Expert Group on Anti-Muslim Hate, UEM) began its work in September 2020 and ended it on June 30th, 2023. Over a total of 90 sessions in plenum, working group meetings, and discussions with experts, the UEM conducted a comprehensive investigation of the phenomenon of anti-Muslim hate. With its conclusions regarding this phenomenon, which is the subject of little consideration in society and just as little research, the report makes a significant contribution to visualizing and describing it in both its overt and subtle manifestations and modes of operation.

September 2020

The Independent Expert Commission on Anti-Muslim Hate (UEM) begins its work.



30 June 2023

Independent Expert Commission on Anti-Muslim Hate (UEM) ends its work.

ZA: Saba, you were part of the first group of experts commissioned to investigate anti-Muslim hate, a historic and significant milestone. What socio-political significance did the establishment of the group have and what socio-political significance does the report have for us now as a post-migrant society?

SNC: The group was convened after the racist attack in Hanau in February 2020. That was the impetus for taking more decisive action against anti-Muslim hate in Germany. It was an important signal, first and foremost to the Muslims who have been putting the topic on the political agenda for years. A range of participants in the German Islam Conference had, for example, brought up the subject again and again, saying, we have to take a look at how Muslims in Germany are actually doing. Since 2017, anti-Islam crimes have been accounted for as part of the PMK (politically motivated criminality) statistics, but the attack in Hanau made their relevance to society at large even clearer.

In the long run, we also need to continue to address this topic simply because we need to create effective measures to combat it. That is why it is also an important signal for society as a whole.

As for what will happen with the recommendations in the report, we'll actually have to wait and see. Overall, my sense is that there was a large and positive response, more than I expected, and in the media as well. Almost all of the major media outlets covered it. It's still too soon, however, to say where else the report will have an impact.

ZA: That is good to hear, those are important signals, that the report appears to have sparked a discourse and thereby have an effect.

SNC: I would also say that we made some progress in the eternal debate about whether "Islam belongs to Germany." Now we have this report, with the title *Muslimfeindlichkeit – Eine deutsche Bilanz* (Anti-Muslim Hate – a German reckoning). Now, that sounds like the recognition

of anti-Muslim hate has something to do with the recognition of Muslims. Yes, there is a connection. Muslims are here, they live here, they are German Muslims, which is why it's important to know what is happening with regard to their participation in society.

ZA: The report was delivered to important political institutions and offices. For example, you handed over the report to a state secretary at the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, Juliane Seifert, and you were also at the Office of the Federal President with Frank-Walter Steinmeier. What did you think about these and other responses from politicians, or how do you think about these meetings in the context of political work against anti-Muslim hate?

SNC: We presented the report to State Secretary Juliane Seifert because it was commissioned by the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI). Actually, we would have liked to give it to Federal Minister of the Interior Nancy Faeser herself. She was unable to be there, which we only found out about at short notice. We expressed our regret about that publicly because, for us, the federal minister of the interior's presence – on a purely symbolic level – would have been an important signal. It would have been, on the one hand, an important moment to acknowledge the work of the commission, and on the other, a moment to acknowledge of all

those people affected by anti-Muslim hate. The invitation to the Office of the Federal President was something else, it wasn't a given. When the federal president publicly shows a significant interest in something, it has a ripple effect.

He spent more time with us than was planned and did not answer the question of "Islam belonging to Germany" at all – for him, this question shouldn't even have to be asked. He emphasized his view that we are a "country with roots in migration." That is his answer to this debate, that covers everything for him. So one could conclude that the problem of discrimination against Muslims is being seen and acknowledged on a political level more and more.

ZA: Thank you for your assessment. To what extent can institutions like, for example, the Young Islam Conference, but others as well, have an impact now, so make use of the current momentum? The *Anti-Muslim Hate* report was an important publication. Over the course of 2023 we also had the status report on racism in Germany from the federal anti-racism commissioner as well as a significant publication from CLAIM on the extent of anti-Muslim racism in civil society. Furthermore, last year the Berlin Commission of Experts on Anti-Muslim Racism also released recommendations for action. Would you say that it's an important moment in time for civil society organizations

to coordinate or strengthen their activities?

SNC: That's a good question, and important too! It is actually a very important moment to keep reminding everyone about implementing these recommendations. Because there is no mechanism for follow-up. What I mean is, who is actually going to examine what is happening now with the many conclusions and recommendations for the protection of Muslims against discrimination? The commission was dissolved when the report was delivered and now there's no organization that's responsible for further action. We did recommend a commissioner for anti-Muslim hate to correspond to the others such as the commissioner for antisemitism and anti-Romani hate. But that also comes along with the danger that everything is dumped onto one person, and then everyone looks to them to do something. But to date there have been no further developments, at least as far as I can see.

Civil society is therefore important to the extent that it reminds politicians and the government of their duties. So, to what extent they follow these recommendations, be it in education, or the sphere of the police and the courts. We also recommend more support through the funding of civil society projects and initiatives against anti-Muslim hate. Here there is also the question of when which processes should begin. And what's the status now of the monitoring offices we so urgently need? What's happening with the schoolbooks

that need to be changed? Is there anyone who's checking if that's being examined by the conference of education ministers as well?

We're in contact with representatives in the Bundestag here and there, and there are only a very few who have committed to dealing with this issue.

ZA: Overall, as part of the current discourse, there are a variety of terms being used to describe anti-Muslim phenomena in our society: islamophobia, anti-Islam hate, anti-Muslim hate and/or anti-Muslim racism. How did you handle this diversity with regard to terms and to what extent did your definition of terms take this diversity into account?

SNC: Because *Muslimfeindlichkeit* (anti-Muslim hate) was stipulated, it is the central term that appears throughout our report. As a commission we did have very different positions and, in part, did use different terms for what was actually the same phenomenon — sometimes with little differences, sometimes almost identically. And we, in the end, decided to interpret this diversity of concept as an asset. In the next step, we said we would describe the phenomenon in great detail by looking at different spheres and describing them precisely – but, in this debate on terms, we do not want to say which term is right or wrong. And for the reason that such a debate has yet to lead to anything except distractions from the actual phenomenon.

It is actually a very important moment to keep reminding everyone about implementing these recommendations. Because there is no mechanism for follow-up. What I mean is, who is actually going to examine what is happening now with the many conclusions and recommendations for the protection of Muslims against discrimination?

What we can immediately agree on is that islamophobia isn't a term that has any use in the German context. That's also not controversial in research. Even those who have problems with anti-Muslim racism would prefer to use anti-Islam hate instead of islamophobia.

In English there is an increase in the usage of "anti-Muslim racism" as opposed to "islamophobia." We used *Muslimfeindlichkeit* and *antimuslimischer Rassismus* (anti-Muslim hate and anti-Muslim racism) as synonyms in our working definition.

ZA: The report is based on a very large amount of data, taking into account representative studies, criminal statistics, and documentation of incidents of anti-Muslim hate. In addition, you held what were called "Hearings" – group sessions focusing on anti-Muslim racism from the perspective of those affected by it. Can you explain what, in addition to the empirical data, the relevance of the perspective of those affected was for the report and why it was important for the group of experts?

SNC: The perspective of those affected by phenomena of discrimination is now, almost without question, a relevant aspect whenever a specific form is addressed. When we talk about antisemitism or sexism, it's clear that the perspective of those affected plays an important role. In keeping with that, whether or not to include the perspectives of Muslims in the report was not even a question.

The perspectives of those affected are frequently associated with pity, emotionality, and victimization. But it's not about the direct experience of discrimination at all, it's actually about the understanding, acquired by those affected through their experiences, of what the problem really entails. That's what we learn from working with those people who are affected by a particular type of discrimination such as, for example, people with disabilities. So, how are they doing, what do they experience, and what do they need because of that? In this case, those who are affected are (also) the experts. I can only turn my attention to certain spheres of life when someone tells me that they're relevant. How do we, for example, get the idea to look at the healthcare system and find out the extent to which people experience discrimination there? Yes of course, because people who've experienced it have told us, they've spoken up about it. Why do we know that stairs prevent people in wheelchairs and families with strollers from accessing many places? That's what the people who are affected point out, otherwise stairs would continue to be built. And I think that this increased focus on the perspective of those affected not only makes individuals more visible but also migrant advocacy groups and self-led organizations as well. Which is also an important thing in a pluralist society!

ZA: The JIK defines itself as a platform for dialogue and empowerment space for questions related to Islam and the related topics of living together in a post-migrant society, so of course

we're interested, as Young Islam Conference, in the extent to which the age distribution of those affected, especially those between 17 and 27 years old, played in the report?

SNC: We commissioned studies and conducted group sessions with various organizations. In the study, the people who were surveyed were primarily between 18 and 50 years old. That means that there were some participants who were between 18 and 27 but we don't know exactly because there is no specific analysis of this age group. I would argue that this age group should receive more attention as a special group. There is a BAMF study, which will be published soon, in which people from the age of 16 are surveyed. We touch upon the results of this study in the report. One important realization though, which we and other studies have come to, is that younger people (including those born here) speak up about discrimination much more frequently than older people. That is often connected to a greater awareness of what discrimination looks like.

ZA: Is it possible to make general statements about how this group of young adults between 17 and 27 is affected by anti-Muslim racism and by what types?

SNC: When you look at the available data, it's clear that schools are a very relevant place where discrimination and racism

occur. One study of Muslim pupils was conducted by ADAS in Berlin. It is still the only study where Muslim youth are asked about the extent to which they experience discrimination in school. And it is actually around 90 % of pupils who report experiencing discrimination – and over 70 % of these experiences started with educators. In the group sessions it also became clear that experiences in schools have a significant impact, people carry them with them, so to speak, for a long time. There are two ongoing projects that we draw attention to, which address the fact that it is Muslim youth who are often the target group in public safety discussions and intervention measures. One project calls that the “racist side effect” of the prevention of extremism. I think that's a good expression for calling attention to the racist normalization and institutionalization of certain discourses. Many experiences repeat themselves and or continue in a different way in vocational training programs and on the job market in general. Some studies show how difficult it is for a Muslim woman in a headscarf. It can already be said that Muslim women who wear headscarves are the most severely affected by anti-Muslim racism. The more visible someone is as a Muslim, the more vulnerable they are. As for experiences in higher education, it must be said that there is a massive gap in our knowledge.

ZA: What was the status of this specific group of affected persons in the group of experts' work and report?

Are there recommendations for action that take the particular needs of this group into consideration?

SNC: There are multiple places where we give special consideration to Muslim women who wear headscarves and their vulnerability. On the one hand, we recommend adapting the Berlin Neutrality Act to comply with the tenets on the status of religion enshrined in the Basic Law. That is, for example, something that very explicitly addresses this group. Another sphere is the justice system and government administration. In that sphere we recommend ending the stigmatization of and discrimination against Muslim women in headscarves in public service, because women who wear headscarves should fundamentally have the right to serve in all public offices in the justice system and in government administration. We know that the whole debate around teachers wearing headscarves had a huge influence on nearly all areas of work for women, for example in retail or in private enterprise. So women who wear headscarves are subjected to an almost completely unavoidable barrier to getting their foot in the door of the job market. At this juncture, what I can share from our work is that we considered Muslim women in headscarves in particular, when we formulated and drafted the first fundamental recommendation for action – the state is to ensure the protection of Muslims in all public spaces.

ZA: While the gendered discourse around the headscarf has Muslim women of color at its center, debates on circumcision, honor killings, and political Islam(ism) construct and reproduce Muslim men of color, in particular, as victims and perpetrators of an archaic traditional religion. To what extent can statements be made about how anti-Muslim debates affect Muslim men of color?

SNC: Yes, that is the other side of the coin. When we talk about anti-Muslim discourse and the gender question, and the image of the submissive, defenseless, oppressed Muslim woman is constructed, she's opposed by the overpowering, aggressive Muslim man. Men probably experience fewer physical hostilities than, for example, the (headscarf-wearing) Muslim woman, because they are imagined to be aggressive, perpetrators, organized in a gang, someone who would murder their sister when she does something to damage their “honor” and who could potentially become an Islamist or Jihadist. The stereotype of the dangerous and threatening Muslim is firmly anchored in society. That's why I often hear, “Oh, my Muslim neighbor is different.” That means that a nice and friendly Muslim is not the rule, but the exception instead. The Islamist attacks have contributed to this image, of course – they were always carried out by men. Those affected are often confronted with this image, from the classroom to the workplace. For example, a study showed that a third of

educators are of the opinion that Muslims are more aggressive than non-Muslims – and they're thinking about Muslim teenage boys in particular.

ZA: What do politicians need to do first and foremost to make sure that democracy's promises are also kept for Muslims?

SNC: In addition to the clear acknowledgement of Muslim life, as well as the exclusion experienced by many Muslims, politicians at the state and federal level need to engage with the implementation of this acknowledgement in practical measures. Our recommendations for action address a range of spheres – be it schools or cultural institutions – and now we need other agents to take up these recommendations, determine opportunities for action, and create change. Otherwise, it will remain nothing more than a document for the archives.

ZA: What does anti-racist work currently require to achieve the sustainability it so urgently needs in these times?

SNC: Actually, what we need is for the law supporting democracy (*Demokratieförderungsgesetz*) to finally pass, in order to sustainably strengthen the work being done in civil society. Short-term project-based funding is a problematic situation for recipients because it does not allow them to ensure continuities with regard to content or

personnel. Therefore, we need long-term, structural funding of anti-racist, anti-antisemitic, and anti-discrimination work in civil society. So that organizations are not forced to compete, a broader offer of funding opportunities than what we have previously had is necessary – also in order to give different organizations and initiatives the opportunity to help shape anti-racist work. Often smaller organizations, which work in smaller towns and cities, don't end up receiving any funding. But we need each and every little initiative to advance anti-racist work!

The interview was conducted by **Zubair Ahmad**, Outreach Project Manager, Young Islam Conference.

Saba-Nur Cheema is a political scientist and was appointed by Federal Minister of the Interior Seehofer to serve on the independent group of experts on anti-Muslim hate. Composed of twelve representatives from both academic research and organizations in the field, the group investigated anti-Muslim hate and formulated practice-oriented approaches. Their report, with recommendations for action in politics, administration, and society at large was published by the Federal Ministry of the Interior in June 2023 under the title *Muslimfeindlichkeit – Eine deutsche Bilanz* (Anti-Muslim Hate – a German reckoning).

Actually, what we need is for the law supporting democracy (*Demokratieförderungsgesetz*) to finally pass, in order to sustainably strengthen the work being done in civil society. Short-term project-based funding is a problematic situation for recipients because it does not allow them to ensure continuities with regard to content or personnel. Therefore, we need long-term, structural funding of anti-racist, anti-antisemitic, and anti-discrimination work in civil society.

Young Islam Conference



The **Young Islam Conference (JIK)** is a platform for dialogue and a space for empowerment that deals with questions relating to Islam and related issues of living together within a post-migrant society. As a political education program, our events and other forums are aimed at young adults between the ages of 17 and 27 in particular. Our focus is on working with those affected by racism and with allies. At JIK, every voice is heard. We are committed to engaging in respectful dialogue with all people, a dialogue that takes diversity into account. We are also committed to treating all people equally and taking diversity into account in the process. We create opportunities for young people to meet and encourage our network of young people to take part in public debates and work towards shaping an inclusive society. As an agent within civil society, we work with stakeholders from politics, academia, the media, and other civil society agents to discuss Islam and Muslims within Germany, as well as diversity, participation in society, and representation.

The non-partisan **Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe** was founded in Hamburg in 1971 by Pauline Schwarzkopf. The Schwarzkopf Foundation's vision is a Europe of openness, solidarity, and democracy and an inclusive, open, pluralist European civil society which is shaped by young people. To pursue this vision, the foundation advises, trains, and supports young Europeans through events, workshops, prizes, professional development opportunities, trips, and platforms for dialogue and education, for example, through youth-led networks such as the European Youth Parliament, Understanding Europe, Young Ambassadors against Antisemitism, and Young Islam Conference.

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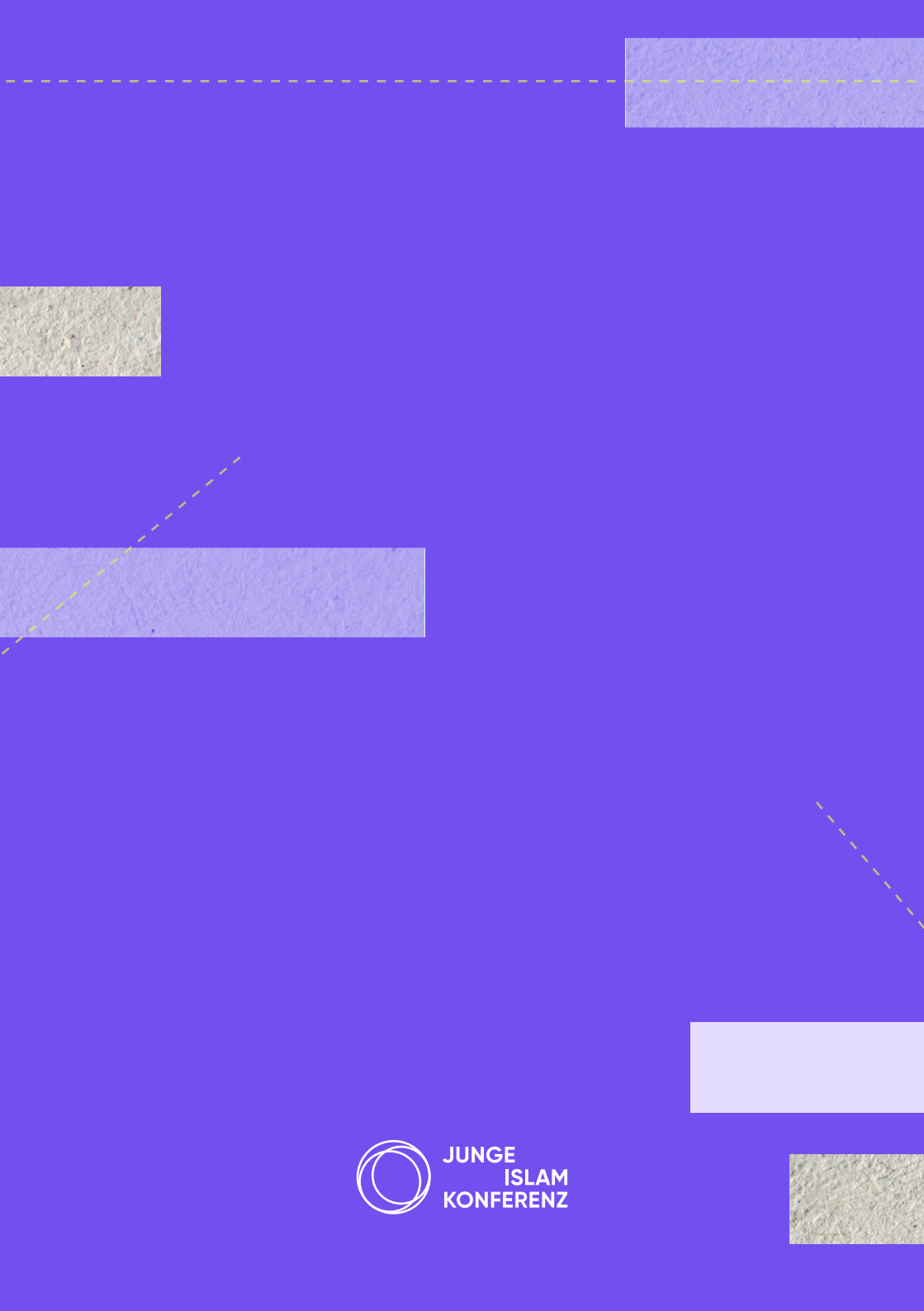
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