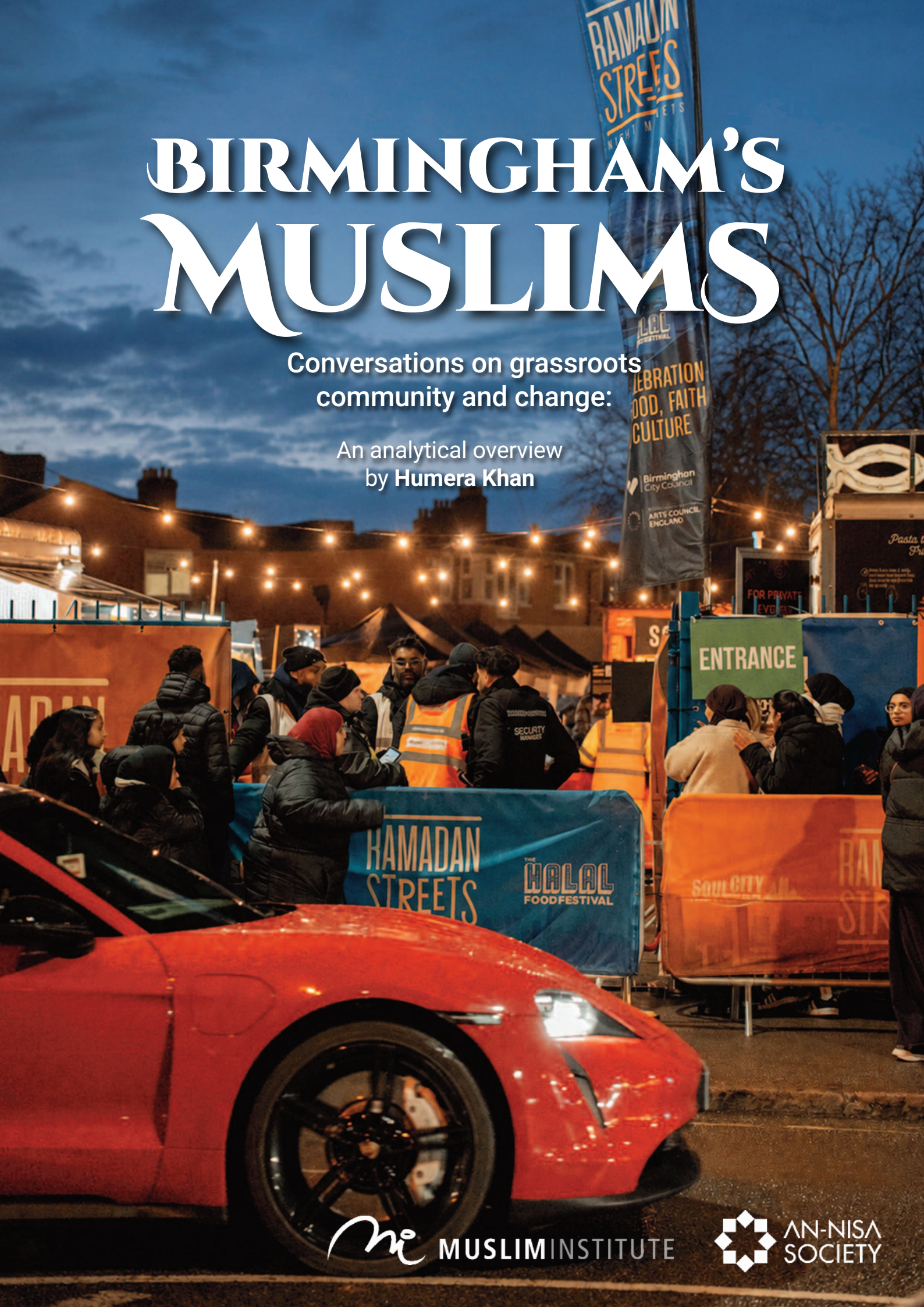


BIRMINGHAM'S MUSLIMS

Conversations on grassroots
community and change:

An analytical overview
by Humera Khan



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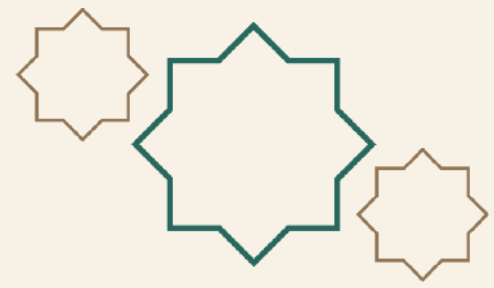


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Birmingham's Muslims: Conversations on grassroots community and change. An analytical overview

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Foreword

Hassan Mahamdallie

Director Muslim Institute

The Muslim Institute, established in 1973, is an independent platform for Muslim thought, debate and action across Britain. From the outset it has considered ideas and ideals as inseparable from practice. This excellent and enlightening report into grassroots community and change in the Muslim communities in Birmingham, researched and written by Humera Khan, is a valuable expression of that mission. We hope that people read it, consider its evidence, listen carefully to the voices it amplifies, and act to further its recommendations.

Alongside its intellectual work — including the Winter Gatherings, the annual Ibn Rusht and Ibn Sina lectures, and its journal Critical Muslim — the Muslim Institute has consistently engaged with the practical concerns of British Muslim life. It helped establish institutions that have shaped our community, such as the Muslim Women's Institute (1991), the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain (1992), and the Halal Food Authority (1994). The Institute's willingness to address difficult and sensitive issues within the community produced its Guideline Report on Child Protection in Faith-Based Environments (2006) and Muslim Marriage Contract (2008).

The combination of independent thought and practical engagement has always been central to our mission. The Institute approached Humera Khan of the highly regarded An-Nisa Society to write this report, because we see her and An-Nisa's work as very much sitting in the same tradition, reflecting a commitment to dignity, justice, and accountability for all.

In 2023, the Muslim Institute established the Community Empowerment Fund to support grassroots work more directly. Over £25,000 has been invested to date. The Fund is intended to seed resources in areas of concern that have long been part of its mission.

From 2026, the Institute will begin funding work in three interconnected areas where community-led responses are needed: community wellbeing, supporting young people, and defending civil liberties. It will allocate a budget of £100,000 through its Community Empowerment Fund to sustainably support initiatives over the next 3-5 years.

Each strand reinforces the others, helping to sustain the conditions in which interdependent, ethical and confident communities can thrive. This report should be viewed as a valuable underpinning to that venture.

Introduction

Humera Khan

Founding Member An-Nisa Society

This research study is informed by more than four decades of community-based work through An-Nisa Society. My involvement in An-Nisa Society on initiatives addressing anti-Muslim and anti-Islam discrimination, women's development, fatherhood, youth engagement and wider community issues has brought me into contact with a wide range of individuals, organisations and communities. This has shaped my understanding of both the opportunities and challenges facing Muslim communities and influenced the questions explored in this research. While this report is grounded in the voices of those who participated, it is also informed by a long-standing commitment to listening to communities, amplifying underrepresented perspectives and supporting positive social change.

This research does not claim to speak for all Muslims in Birmingham. Rather, it offers a snapshot of the experiences, concerns, aspirations and emerging trends shared by those who participated in the research. The interviews provide insight into the changing realities facing Birmingham's Muslim communities. They also demonstrate that analysis alone is insufficient. Meaningful change requires sustained attention to the structural and social factors that shape community experiences, together with a commitment to developing practical, long-term solutions. There is considerable scope for further community-based research shaped by community priorities rather than being driven primarily by controversies, crises or the demands of the statutory sector. Birmingham's Muslims need to be seen outside of the deficit model of community engagement and towards a more future potential model.

Thanks to the Muslim Institute for this opportunity to do this research recognising the value of qualitative community inquiry sitting alongside more conventional policy and academic approaches. It is hoped that the findings will contribute to further discussion, reflection and investment in the issues and initiatives identified throughout the research.

I am grateful to all the individuals and organisations who so generously gave their time and expertise. Their contributions made this report possible. Much appreciation also to Musab Bora for his contribution to this report and his local knowledge, insight and support throughout the research process.



Research Methodology

This research was designed to capture the experiences, perspectives and emerging issues affecting Birmingham's diverse Muslim communities, with particular attention to voices that are often underrepresented in policy discussions and internal Muslim debates. These included women, young people, converts, African and Arab Muslim communities, and smaller grassroots organisations operating with limited resources. In doing so, the report seeks to complement existing academic, policy and statistical research by bringing together lived experience and community-based perspectives.

Undertaken between November 2025 and June 2026, the study combined semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with participants drawn from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. Participants included community leaders, youth workers, academics, women activists, mental health practitioners, grassroots organisers, creatives, Muslim professionals, converts and young people. The research deliberately brought together established organisations alongside emerging community initiatives, reflecting the evolving diversity of Birmingham's Muslim population and the range of voices shaping its future.

Participants were selected to reflect the key areas of interest identified for this study. While each interview was tailored to the participant's expertise and experience, a broadly consistent set of questions was used throughout. Interviews explored participants' backgrounds, the nature of their work, their observations of emerging challenges and opportunities, and their recommendations for strengthening Birmingham's Muslim communities in the future.

The analysis adopted a thematic approach. Rather than applying a predetermined framework, the key themes emerged through careful analysis of the interview material. Recurring issues raised across multiple interviews were identified as cross-cutting themes, while topics unique to particular participants or communities were presented as distinct issues where they offered important insights. This approach enabled both areas of broad consensus and the diversity of experiences within Birmingham's Muslim communities to be reflected in the findings.

All participants were provided with a summary of their interview for review and approval, together with the final draft of the report prior to publication. The interviews did not explore confidential or personal casework. Instead, they drew upon participants' professional knowledge and experience, offering insight into the broader trends, challenges and opportunities observed through their work within communities and related professional settings.

The research was not intended to produce a statistically representative account of Birmingham's Muslims, nor to provide a comprehensive analysis of every issue affecting its communities. Instead, it sought to identify some key themes, challenges, opportunities and examples of community-led responses. In doing so, it highlights



several areas requiring further investigation and more specialised research.

Although the report acknowledges the impact of institutional shortcomings within the statutory sector, these issues are not its primary focus. The structural challenges affecting Birmingham’s Muslim communities—including questions of policy, representation, discrimination and public service engagement—have been examined more extensively by academics, researchers and policy specialists. References to some of this literature is provided in Appendix 7.

This research argues that meaningful engagement with statutory institutions depends upon a strong, well-developed voluntary and community sector with the knowledge, expertise and organisational capacity to represent community interests, advocate effectively and contribute to long-term change. Strengthening this infrastructure emerged as a consistent theme throughout the study and is presented as a necessary foundation for addressing wider structural challenges.

Recommendations

1. Investment in Muslim Community Infrastructure

Long-term investment in Birmingham's Muslim community infrastructure should be recognised as a strategic priority for Muslim charitable foundations and philanthropic funders. Investment should focus on strengthening community organisations, expanding local initiatives and supporting community development, poverty reduction and neighbourhood resilience. Building this social infrastructure will create stronger, more resilient communities and reduce reliance on short-term crisis interventions.

2. Organisational Capacity Building

Dedicated investment should support organisational development specialists who can work alongside emerging Muslim organisations to strengthen governance, legal compliance, leadership, fundraising and strategic planning. Building organisational capability will enable community organisations to become financially sustainable, employ professional staff and deliver long-term impact.

3. Early Intervention and Preventative Support

Greater investment to be directed towards early intervention and preventative services that address mental health, domestic abuse, family breakdown, housing insecurity, social isolation and other emerging social needs before they escalate into crisis. Priority should be given to neighbourhoods experiencing the highest levels of deprivation, where early intervention has the greatest potential to reduce long-term social and economic problems.

4. Youth Development and Mentoring

Community organisations, mosques, schools and funders need to expand access to youth mentoring, leadership development and identity-building programmes that strengthen resilience, positive relationships and community belonging. Investment should also be made to strengthen the professional Muslim youth work sector, enabling experienced practitioners to train, mentor and support the next generation of youth workers.

5. Women's Leadership and Wellbeing

The contribution of Muslim women to Birmingham's social infrastructure to be recognised and supported through sustained investment. Funding should prioritise programmes that strengthen Muslim women's leadership and build on their expertise in mental health, family support, safeguarding, domestic abuse advocacy and community wellbeing. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that this work, much of which is currently undertaken on an unpaid or under-resourced basis, is adequately recognised and resourced.

6. Leadership and Professional Workforce Development

Scholarships for professional development schemes to be established to increase the number of Muslims working in youth work, counselling, mentoring, social work, family support, creative industries and community development. Funding should be made available especially for those in more socially deprived areas who are interested in taking on this work but lack financial backing.

7. Collaboration Across Communities and Institutions

Muslim organisations across Birmingham to develop stronger, long-term multi-disciplinary partnerships to address the complex and interconnected challenges facing Birmingham's diverse Muslim communities. By bringing together expertise from health, mental health, education, youth work, housing, social care, policing, academia and the voluntary and community sector, partners can develop shared understanding, coordinate strategy and services, share learning and co-produce more effective responses.

8. Challenge Anti-Muslim Discrimination and Build Trust

The statutory sector should adopt a more proactive and accountable approach to tackling anti-Muslim and anti-Islam discrimination and embedding equalities across policy and service delivery. This to include strengthening institutional trust, improving representation, ensuring meaningful engagement with Birmingham's diverse Muslim communities, and creating clear mechanisms through which communities can influence decision-making and hold institutions to account.

9. Build Genuine Partnerships

The relationship between the statutory sector and Muslim organisations should move beyond consultation and transactional engagement towards long-term strategic partnership. Muslim organisations should be recognised not only as service providers, but as trusted community institutions with valuable expertise, local knowledge and leadership that can help shape more effective and equitable public policy and service delivery.

10. Support Birmingham's Diverse Muslim Communities

Policies services and community initiatives should better reflect the diversity of Birmingham's Muslim population, including African, Arab and other minority Muslim communities, converts, mixed-heritage families and younger generations. Efforts to address racism and anti-Blackness should form part of this work.

Key Insights

Birmingham has, for several decades, been a focal point for national debates concerning Muslim communities, integration, social cohesion, extremism and security. Events such as the Trojan Horse controversy, the implementation of Prevent-related policies, periods of intense media scrutiny and wider public debates about Islam and British Muslim identity have all contributed to shaping relationships between Muslim communities and public institutions. The research indicates that these experiences continue to erode trust in public institutions, feelings of belonging and patterns of civic participation among some sections of Birmingham's Muslim population.

Concern continues about the presence of anti-Muslim and anti-Islam narratives within public discourses and the growing visibility of far-right and anti-Muslim activism nationally. Many interviewed felt that insufficient attention has been given to understanding the cumulative social, psychological and civic impact of these challenges.

"The dominant discourses always paint Muslim communities as somehow always a problem...Switch on the TV, read a newspaper, go online, and it's full of nonsense... [After events in the 1990s] Muslimness and Islam became understood in a more global context rather than localised." - **Professor Tahir Abbas.**

Across the interviews and focus groups, a consistent picture emerged. Despite the extreme challenges, Birmingham's Muslim communities have worked hard to develop their commercial and social assets, leadership and build resilience. Yet these strengths are often constrained by persistent structural inequalities and a failure to fully recognise the growing diversity of the city's Muslim population. While many of the challenges are not new, what is obvious is the need to move beyond short-term responses and towards a more strategic, long-term vision that strengthens community capacity, wellbeing and social cohesion.

"What Muslims do have is social capital and cultural capital...They support each other. They help each other with businesses...There are people creating despite the challenges, and that's always encouraging." - **Professor Tahir Abbas.**

Four overarching concerns emerged from the research:

1. Grassroots capacity and investment.

Grassroots initiatives continue to operate with little or no funding, relying heavily on volunteers. Many provide valuable services and respond to pressing local needs but lack the governance, capacity and infrastructure needed to access funding streams. They often fall outside the priorities of both statutory funders and Muslim funding bodies. Consequently, some of the most innovative and responsive work remains under-resourced despite its social impact.

“People look down on youth work when actually it should be valued because it’s doing the real work...you can’t just do a six-week programme and think that’s enough...We’re trying to get young people to build something where there’s an actual outcome and a legacy.” - Yasin Erkul, Founder/Director of The Hotspot.

2. Internal social challenges.

Greater attention is needed to address issues such as mental health, domestic abuse, family instability, youth vulnerability and harmful cultural practices. Frontline practitioners emphasised the importance of recognising where cultural norms or selective interpretations of faith may be used to justify behaviours that undermine wellbeing, family relationships and community cohesion. Issues highlighted included coercive control, emotionally absent parenting, mental health stigma, and the impact of unregistered or secret marriages on women and families.

“The disconnect is between what is happening with young people and parental and community lack of understanding or denial of it...People start acting too late because they’re in denial.” - Dr Laura McDonald, founding director of ConnectFutures.

3. Recognising Birmingham's changing diversity.

Birmingham's Muslim population has become increasingly diverse, yet public discourse, service provision and engagement often continue to reflect assumptions shaped by earlier migration patterns. While the city's Muslim population remains predominantly of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage, a broader understanding is needed that also recognises African, Arab, Turkish, Kurdish, convert, mixed-heritage and other Muslim communities. Although many challenges are shared, experiences and needs are not uniform and cannot be understood through a single cultural lens.

"Birmingham, like many other cities in England, is changing its demographic... it's not what we remember it to be... People are far more British. They see themselves as British, they are integrating more in that way." - **Sufia Hussain, diversity, equity and inclusion consultant.**

"Caribbean Muslims specifically... we've always been a minority within the minority community... You know you're part of Islam, but the community around you don't include you." - **Aisha Siddiqua, Afro-Caribbean heritage convert.**

4. Strengthening civic understanding.

There is a need for Muslim communities to develop a better understanding of how institutional anti-Muslim and anti-Islam discrimination operates, together with the legal and policy frameworks available to challenge it. Greater awareness of these mechanisms would strengthen civic engagement, advocacy and participation in public life. For a fuller discussion of anti-Muslim discrimination and recommendations for action, readers are referred to *Islamophobia: From Denial to Action* (see Appendix 7).

"If you're suffering from lots of things, you have to invest... We don't know how to lobby for that... Where does a young Muslim go to understand the dilemmas they're facing without the shame and the judgement?" – **Sufia Hussain.**

Context

Birmingham's Muslim communities have evolved within a wider context of industrial decline, restructuring, deprivation and periods of intense scrutiny. At the same time, the city is undergoing significant regeneration and economic transformation, creating new opportunities for some while leaving others vulnerable to further exclusion. This broader context is essential to understanding contemporary community experiences.

Muslim communities first settled in Birmingham in small numbers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, arriving from regions including Yemen and pre-partition India. The largest wave of migration occurred between the 1950s and 1970s, when labour shortages in the city's manufacturing industries attracted migrants from Mirpur in Azad Kashmir, Punjab and the Sylhet region of Bangladesh. Since the 1980s, migration has become increasingly diverse, including arrivals from Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan, Nigeria, Ghana, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and other Arab and African countries, alongside refugees and asylum seekers. There has been the growth of second and third-generation British Muslims, increasing numbers of intercultural marriages and conversions from a wide range of backgrounds.

"In school you were never represented in the history that they teach...When they talk about Birmingham's industrial history, they don't talk about other communities who contributed their whole lives and their bodies to that...There's a lot of history that you have to impose yourself into." - Ferdous Al-Audhali, Head of Youth Services at The Muath Trust.

As citizens and taxpayers, Birmingham's Muslim communities have a reasonable expectation that public services will be accessible, equitable and responsive to their needs. However, interviewees frequently expressed concern that public services and engagement strategies do not always reflect the changing realities of Birmingham's Muslim population. The findings suggest that a more nuanced understanding is required—one that better recognises the complexity of contemporary Muslim life in the city (see Appendix 2 & 3: Census 2021).

While the statutory sector remains an important and major source of support, it is not the only means through which communities respond to need. Across Birmingham, Muslim communities have developed a wide range of self-funded and community-led initiatives, alongside projects supported through a combination of public and community funding.

"The Hotspot isn't just for Muslims... it's to up-level young people physically, mentally, and spiritually." - Yasin Erkul.

Many participants in this research argue that local organisations possess a deep understanding of the challenges facing their communities and are therefore well placed to design relevant and effective responses. Successful partnership working depends on communities feeling valued by public institutions and confident that their knowledge and experience are recognised.

*“We are inundated with people who want to do research on Muslim women, want our data, want access to our communities, but no one wants to recognise or resource us properly.” - **Muslim Women’s Network UK.***

However, many community-led initiatives operate with little or no dedicated funding, relying heavily on volunteers, donations and informal networks, while others receive inconsistent public sector support. This limits their capacity and reduces their ability to influence policy and long-term change. A notable exception is Muslim Women’s Network UK, whose combination of local service delivery, evidence-based research and policy engagement demonstrates how strong community infrastructure can successfully influence practice and public policy.

*“The real social issues are being dealt with in organisations which are not funded and often done on a voluntary basis.” - **Ferdous Al-Audhali.***

*“The stats that come from [our] helpline then inform our campaigns, research and advocacy.” - **Muslim Women’s Network UK.***

Funding relationships are rarely neutral. Different sectors bring different priorities, expectations and accountability requirements that inevitably shape service delivery. Public bodies often prioritise statutory duties, measurable outcomes and policy objectives, while community organisations place greater emphasis on trust, long-term relationships and responding flexibly to locally identified needs. Balancing these differing expectations remains an ongoing challenge for many community-led organisations (see Appendix 6).

This research suggests that strengthening Birmingham’s Muslim voluntary and community sector is not only a matter of increasing funding. It requires sustained investment in organisational capacity, leadership, governance and evidence-building so that community organisations can become confident partners in shaping the city’s future.



Key Themes

The interviews conducted for this report highlight the close interconnection between identity, belonging, family life, wellbeing and community leadership. Experiences of exclusion and discrimination undermine a sense of belonging, while economic pressures, family instability and social isolation can contribute to poor mental health and reduced wellbeing.

Sustained relationships, trusted institutions and effective local leadership have emerged as important sources of support, resilience and social cohesion. Despite often operating with limited resources, these networks play a vital role in helping individuals and families navigate social, economic and personal challenges.

Public Discourses and Anti-Muslim Discrimination

The research found that Muslim communities continue to be perceived through the lens of security, integration and social problems rather than being recognised for their wider contributions to Birmingham's economic, cultural and civic life. Added to this is that hostile public narratives, periods of heightened political attention and negative media coverage have contributed to mistrust of institutions, reduced confidence in public services and weakened feelings of belonging among some communities. Interviewees including Professor Tahir Abbas, Sufia Hussain and Dr Laura McDonald highlighted how these experiences continue to shape civic participation, mental wellbeing and relationships with wider society. Anti-Muslim discrimination therefore emerged not simply as an issue in itself but as a cross-cutting factor influencing identity, wellbeing, community confidence and trust.



*"If you're suffering from lots of things, you have to invest...We don't know how to lobby for that...Where does a young Muslim go to understand the dilemmas they're facing without the shame and the judgement?" – **Sufia Hussain.***

*"The far right are strategic, playing on mainstreamed Islamophobic narratives, saying 'the Muslims are this and that', so it becomes very difficult to deal with your own issues when someone else is battering you...The community retracts because it is attacked from many different angles." - **Dr Laura McDonald.***

*"There's lots of talent there... but it's all in silos...We Muslims have to self-organise." – **Professor Tahir Abbas.***

Youth

Youth identity and wellbeing emerged as one of the most significant themes across the research. Many young Muslims are navigating complex questions of identity, social pressure and emotional wellbeing within a rapidly changing world shaped by social media, economic uncertainty and shifting family structures. Concerns relating to masculinity, belonging and family stability appeared consistently across interviews and focus groups. Participants frequently highlighted the absence of positive role models and sustained mentoring relationships, particularly for young men growing up in single-parent households and facing wider social disadvantage.

*"Some people don't have that type of people that guide them at home, so sometimes they have to go to the streets to find help." – **Young person, The Hotspot.***

One of the strongest findings was the growing emotional vulnerability of many young people. Across the interviews, participants consistently emphasised the need for safe spaces where young Muslims can build confidence, explore questions of identity and access mentors who understand both their faith and the realities of British life. The research also highlighted a growing need for positive models of masculinity rooted in emotional maturity, responsibility, compassion and service to others. While these issues are by no means unique to Muslim communities, participants consistently argued that faith-informed mentoring and trusted role models can play an important role in helping young men navigate changing family structures, social expectations and online influences.

Projects such as The Hotspot in Nechells in central Birmingham and the Muath Centre in Sparkbrook demonstrate the value of long-term relationship building and community-rooted approaches to youth development. Despite limited resources and heavy reliance on volunteers, these initiatives provide critical spaces that are often unavailable elsewhere. Their work highlights the importance of early intervention and sustained investment in youth provision.

"The root issue of all of this is not having a person to guide you, like a mentor, from the start." – Young person, The Hotspot

"Mosques in the UK need to do more to engage young people and address their needs...They're living in a different time zone to what young people are actually experiencing." - Ferdous Al-Audhali.

Youth initiatives with Muslim girls and young women continue to face distinct challenges despite their strong educational achievement as a cohort. Issues of safety, opportunity, cultural expectation and participation remain significant. Effective interventions (as explained by the Sisters Youth Worker at The Hotspot) were found to be those that work collaboratively with mothers, families and community networks rather than attempting to operate independently of them.

Women

The experiences of Muslim women highlighted both the significant contributions and continuing challenges. Reflections from Dr Saleema Burney and Muslim Women's Network UK demonstrated the vital role women play, while also revealing ongoing concerns relating to mental health, domestic abuse, family relationships and access to appropriate support. Participants emphasised the importance of recognising Muslim women not simply as service users but as community leaders, knowledge holders and agents of social change.

"As women matured, they became more confident, they actively were seeking areas of work with people outside their community." - Dr Saleema Burney.

"Mainstream services often assume Muslim women are powerless and voiceless...Specialist organisations are referring people to us because they don't have the capacity or understanding to support Muslim women properly." - Muslim Women's Network UK.

Women's study circles, faith-based gatherings, community groups and informal support networks were frequently described as important sources of emotional support, spiritual resilience and social connection. Through these spaces women often provide mentoring, practical assistance, pastoral care and advice. These informal networks serve as the foundation for wider community initiatives, demonstrating how acts of care, leadership and mutual support can evolve into more structured forms of community organisation and social action.

Faith emerged as an important source of stability and resilience for many women. Across organisations such as the Muath Trust and Muslim Students House, women described the value of trusted spaces where they could strengthen their faith, build relationships and seek guidance on personal and family matters. At the same time, participants noted that access to trusted and appropriately trained religious support is not always available, highlighting the need for greater recognition of the pastoral and advisory role that faith institutions could play within community life.

It is important to recognise that anti-Muslim hostility disproportionately affects visible Muslim women, creating additional pressures around safety, participation and belonging. Despite these challenges, the research found that Muslim women continue to be among the most active contributors to resilience, networks and change across Birmingham's Muslim communities.

Minority Muslim Communities

Alongside Birmingham's larger and more established Muslim institutions, the research highlighted the emergence of smaller organisations serving African, Arab and other minority Muslim communities. These organisations often address needs not fully recognised within larger community structures. Their development reflects wider demographic changes within the city's Muslim population and the importance of ensuring that future policy, funding and engagement approaches recognise and support this diversity.

The experiences of convert Muslims highlighted the continuing importance of addressing issues of race, ethnicity and belonging within Muslim communities. Internal discrimination and cultural exclusion were highlighted as an overlooked reality, particularly for Black converts and those from minority ethnic backgrounds. Aisha Siddiqua, a convert of Afro-Caribbean heritage, described how conversion is not only a spiritual journey but also a social one.

While many converts enter Muslim spaces with sincerity and commitment, they may encounter culturally defined expectations of what a "real" Muslim looks like, alongside experiences of cultural gatekeeping and exclusion. Added to this is the loss of community that converts often leave behind and being without a space to fully call home.

"I think for a lot of my generation, as Black people in England, we didn't feel like we belonged... Islam gave me what my purpose is in life... but I don't necessarily think it gave me that community." – **Aisha Siddiqua.**

Aisha's reflections highlighted the importance of creating Muslim spaces that are genuinely welcoming and inclusive. It was emphasised that mosques, community organisations and Muslim leaders have an important role to play in addressing internal



discrimination, challenging assumptions and ensuring that all Muslims are able to participate fully in community life.

“Caribbean Muslims specifically... we’ve always been a minority within the minority community... You know you’re part of Islam, but the community around you don’t include you.” - Aisha Siddiqua.

Mental Health

Mental health emerged as one of the most significant cross-cutting issues throughout the research.

Although comprehensive Muslim-specific mental health data for Birmingham remains limited, available research and community testimony indicate significant levels of unmet need. Participants described how poverty, economic insecurity, housing pressures, family instability, social isolation, anti-Muslim discrimination and experiences of exclusion can combine to create long-term emotional and psychological strain. The cumulative impact of these pressures is often underestimated within both public policy and community responses.

“Mental illness can occur at any stage of one’s life, from birth with neurodevelopmental or genetics-related conditions, to older age with cognitive and memory impairments. It is important to emphasise that there are a wide range of struggles under the umbrella of ‘mental illness’, which are sometimes forgotten...You can have faith, you can engage in your community, you can engage in your belief system, but you can still have mental illness” – Muslim Health Professional.

Mental health challenges were raised across all age groups. Young people were described as facing increasing pressures. Concerns were also raised about the emotional consequences of absent parenting, family conflict and a lack of positive mentoring relationships. Women highlighted the hidden emotional burdens associated with caring responsibilities, domestic abuse, relationship breakdown and social isolation. Converts and members of minority Muslim communities spoke of experiences of exclusion, loneliness and difficulties finding spaces where they felt fully accepted and understood.

Stigma remains a significant barrier to seeking support. The research consistently points to mental health difficulties that are still often misunderstood, minimised or framed solely as personal or spiritual shortcomings. While faith can provide an important source of resilience, interviewees emphasised the need for greater understanding of how faith-based support and professional mental health services can work together in complementary ways.

“The diaspora are still holding on to certain shame and stigma, while the communities back home have actually advanced so much. I think for me, my whole journey has been about recognising the gap and wanting to contribute something towards changing it.” – Muslim Women’s Network UK.

The mental health professionals welcomed the growing availability of culturally informed and faith-sensitive services, including counselling and wellbeing initiatives developed by Muslim organisations and practitioners. However, significant gaps remain. Greater collaboration is needed between policymakers, service providers, faith institutions and communities to ensure that support services are informed by and better aligned with community needs. Building trust, improving cultural competency, increasing visibility and reducing barriers to access were identified as essential steps towards improving mental wellbeing across Birmingham’s Muslim communities.

“While the girls are far more confident... the issues underneath are still the same...Outwardly confident... but internally they’re still struggling.” – Sufia Hussain.

The findings suggest that mental health should not be viewed as a standalone issue but as closely connected to wider questions about identity, discrimination, family relationships, inequality and wellbeing. Addressing mental health effectively therefore requires both accessible support services and broader efforts to improve the social conditions that enable individuals, families and communities to thrive.



Creativity as Community Infrastructure

Creativity was consistently described as going beyond artistic expression, viewing it as an important form of community development capable of strengthening confidence, belonging and civic participation. In recent years Muslim creativity has become increasingly more ambitious and outward-looking, moving beyond reactive responses to produce work that contributes to the city's wider cultural life.

Mohammed Ali, founder of Soul City Arts, argued that creative expression enables communities to tell their own stories, celebrate their heritage and develop confidence in their identities. Creativity was seen as a means of strengthening belonging, particularly among younger generations negotiating multiple identities, while creating opportunities for wider society to engage with Muslim experiences and viewpoints beyond stereotypes.

At the same time, it was highlighted that there is a significant gap between creative talent and institutional development. Although Birmingham has a growing number of artists, filmmakers, performers and cultural practitioners, relatively few Muslim-led organisations have established the long-term governance, partnerships and funding relationships needed to sustain this work. As a result, much creative activity remains dependent on short-term projects rather than developing permanent cultural institutions.

"We pat ourselves on the back a lot, but really we're not there at all. Where are our institutions that we should have now, 20 or 30 years later?"
- Mohammed Ali, Soul City Arts.

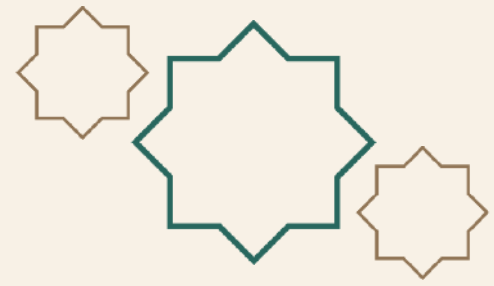
This research suggests that arts and culture should be recognised as an important element of community infrastructure rather than as a peripheral activity. Investment in sustainable Muslim-led cultural organisations has the potential not only to preserve heritage but also to develop creative and youth leadership.

Art, music, spoken word, theatre and other forms of creative expression can also provide constructive outlets for managing stress, exploring identity and expressing emotions and ideas that can be difficult to communicate in other ways. For many young people, creative practice was seen as building confidence, strengthening resilience, reducing feelings of isolation and creating a sense of belonging through shared experiences.

Investment in creative opportunities should therefore be viewed not simply as enriching cultural provision, but as part of a broader approach to promoting wellbeing and community resilience.

"I need to create a system where the Muslim community recognises the real value of art in bringing change... to deal with tangible, real-life problems." **- Mohammed Ali.**





Conclusion

The question facing Birmingham is no longer whether Muslim communities possess the capacity to contribute to the city's future. That capacity and the potential it carries already exists in its community organisations, women-led initiatives, youth projects, entrepreneurs, artists, professionals and volunteers.

The challenge for the coming decade is therefore not whether these assets exist, but whether public institutions, funders, philanthropists and Muslim communities themselves are prepared to recognise, strengthen and invest in them. The future wellbeing of Birmingham's Muslim communities will depend not only on addressing structural inequalities, but also on recognising and investing in the community infrastructure that is already creating positive change.



Appendix 1

Extended Interviews Summaries

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Professor Tahir Abbas

Academic

Tahir Abbas is a British sociologist, criminologist and leading scholar on Islamophobia, radicalisation, ethnicity, and Muslim communities in Europe. He is currently Professor of Criminology and Global Justice at Aston University. His research focuses on the intersections of social exclusion, identity, extremism, migration, and political violence, particularly in relation to Muslim communities in Western societies

This interview with Tahir Abbas presents a reflective and critical account of the development of Muslim communities in Birmingham, tracing the city's post-war migration history through to contemporary debates around identity, policy, social exclusion and community capacity. He situates Birmingham's Muslim presence within the wider post-war labour migration that brought South Asian communities to Britain's industrial centres during the 1950s and 1960s. Birmingham's manufacturing economy, affordable housing and kinship-based migration patterns created concentrated Muslim settlements in the city's inner ring, while white working-class populations gradually moved to newer housing developments on the outskirts. Professor Abbas argues that this pattern of residential clustering and structural inequality existed from the beginning and formed the basis for many of the tensions concerns that later emerged.

A central theme throughout the discussion was that Muslim communities were initially rendered largely invisible within British public discourse, subsumed into broader racialised categories such as "Asian". According to Professor Abbas, it was the Rushdie Affair that fundamentally altered this dynamic, bringing Muslims into public visibility as a distinct religious and political category. This moment also politicised a younger generation of British Muslims, exposed generational tensions within communities and marked the beginning of a more confrontational challenging relationship between Muslims, the state and sections of the liberal establishment. He argues that this visibility came with significant consequences, as Muslims increasingly became framed through narratives of crisis, extremism and incompatibility with British society.

The interview also highlights the relationship between structural economic change and the evolution of Muslim identity politics. Deindustrialisation, Thatcherite economic reforms and the collapse of traditional manufacturing industries disproportionately affected Birmingham's inner-city communities. Younger generations experienced increasing politicisation through global events such as Bosnia, the War on



Terror, Iraq and 7/7.

"The dominant discourses always paint Muslim communities as somehow always a problem...Switch on the TV, read a newspaper, go online, and it's full of nonsense... [After events in the 1990s] Muslimness and Islam became understood in a more global context rather than localised."

There was an emphasis on the role of dominant political and media narratives in shaping public perceptions of Muslims, with Professor Abbas arguing that events such as the "parallel lives" debates following the 2001 disturbances, the War on Terror and the Trojan Horse affair created a sustained climate in which Muslims were repeatedly positioned as a social problem. The 'Trojan Horse Affair' is described as particularly damaging for Birmingham's confidence and educational progress, with Muslim-majority schools penalised despite delivering strong academic outcomes in disadvantaged areas. The success of these schools challenged assumptions about class, education and social mobility within Britain, but was ultimately reframed through the lens of security and suspicion.

Alongside external structural pressures, Professor Abbas reflects critically on internal community challenges. He acknowledges persistent issues linked to poverty, patriarchy, generational tensions, domestic violence and limited institutional capacity within some Muslim communities. He repeatedly stresses that Muslims have nevertheless developed significant forms of social and cultural capital through strong family networks, mutual support systems, entrepreneurship and educational aspiration.

A recurring concern is the lack of adequate institutional understanding of Muslim communities at the point of service delivery. Professor Abbas argues that many professionals and public institutions continue to approach Muslims through securitised or deficit-based narratives, leading to mistrust, alienation and reluctance among Muslims to seek support through mainstream services. While individual Muslim professionals and organisations are carrying out important work, he argues that efforts remain fragmented, under-resourced and lacking coordinated strategic investment.

"People at the point of local authority service delivery are affected by what they think they know about Muslims... There's nowhere I we can send [Muslim] people with complicated social problems... The system doesn't understand the nuances."

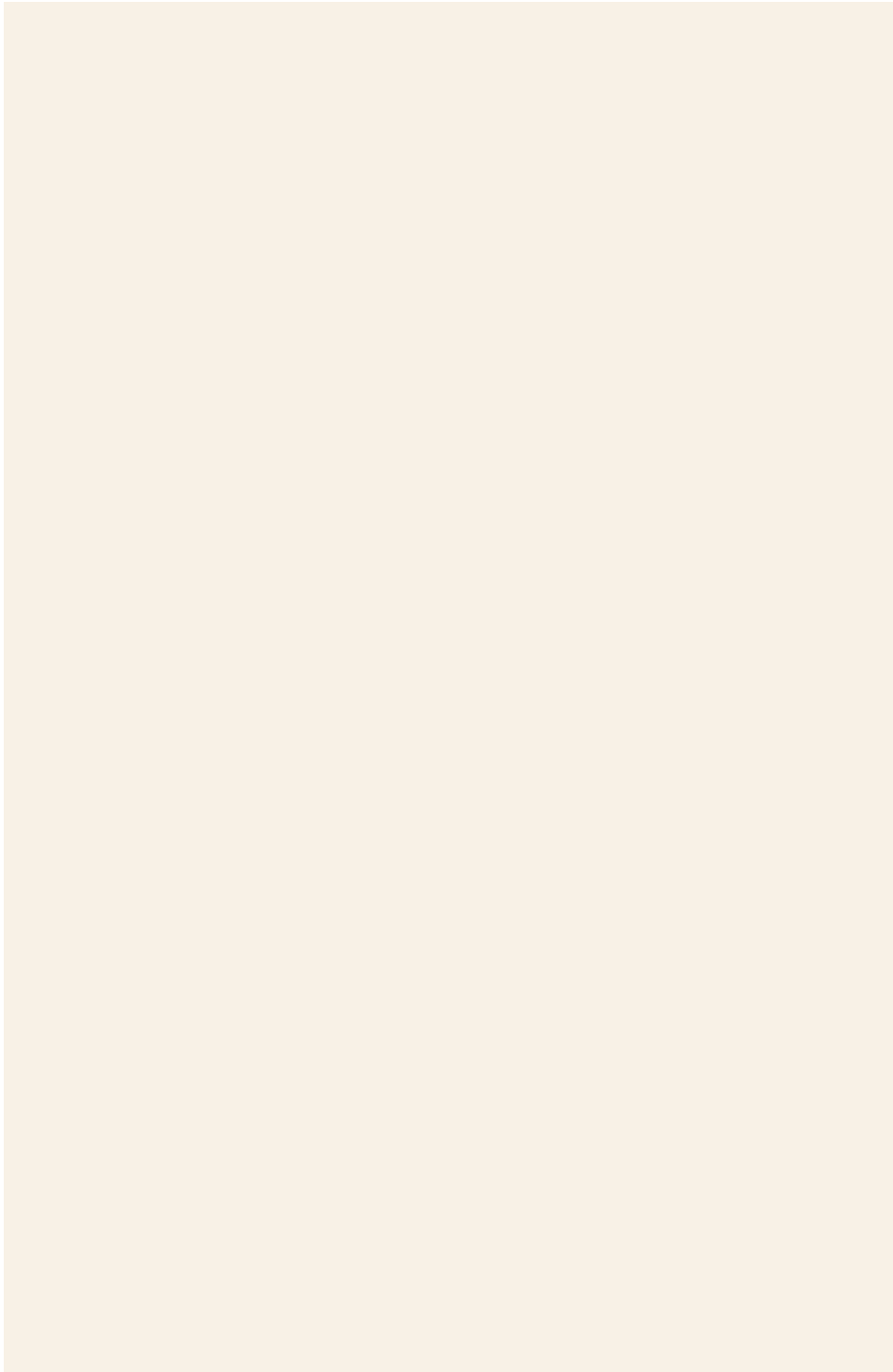
The interview also identifies an emerging crisis around Muslim masculinity and generational change. Professor Abbas notes that young Muslim women are increasingly outperforming men educationally and professionally, while many young men struggle to adapt to changing economic realities and shifting gender expectations. The discussion suggests that some young Muslim men remain caught between traditional patriarchal models and a rapidly changing social landscape in which women are increasingly mobile, educated and independent.

"What Muslims do have is social capital and cultural capital... They support each other. They help each other with businesses... There are people creating despite the challenges, and that's always encouraging."

Despite the challenges outlined, the overall tone of the interview remains cautiously hopeful. Professor Abbas points to growing educational attainment, increasing representation in public life, entrepreneurial success and the emergence of confident second and third-generation Muslim women as evidence of significant

progress. Birmingham is described as a city in which Muslim cultural life has become deeply embedded and increasingly diverse, reflected in business activity, food cultures and professional participation across multiple sectors. However, it can't be ignored that continued austerity, economic inequality and hostile media narratives reinforce cycles of exclusion. Ultimately, he argues that meaningful progress will require both structural policy change and stronger forms of Muslim self-organisation.

"Muslims are doing all sorts of great things which never become part of the story...We're always focusing on the negatives...There are people making progress quietly and efficiently."



Sufia Hussain

Founder RB Plus

***Sufia Hussain** is a diversity, equity and inclusion consultant whose work focuses particularly on faith inclusion, identity and belonging within professional and institutional settings. Drawing on more than two decades of experience in global corporate environments, she established consultancy RB Plus to help organisations better understand and support the experiences of Muslim employees and other faith communities.*

A key theme throughout this discussion was the changing demographic and social landscape of Birmingham's Muslim population and highlighted that Birmingham can no longer be understood through older assumptions centred primarily on settled Pakistani communities. Alongside this demographic change, recognition that younger Muslims are entering professional sectors, creating new initiatives, using creative arts, philanthropy and self-help approaches, and developing forms of leadership outside traditional mosque and organisational structures. At the same time, long-standing structural problems continue to persist and, in certain neighbourhoods, have become normalised.

The conversation repeatedly returned to the idea that both mainstream institutions and Muslim institutions suffer from structural limitations. On one side, statutory systems were described as still unable to properly understand or respond to Islamophobia and the specific needs of Muslim communities. On the other side, many mosques, charities and Muslim organisations were described as remaining narrowly focused, often lacking the tools, vision or institutional flexibility required to address complex social realities.

A substantial part of the discussion focused on Sufia's experiences within corporate and institutional settings, particularly around faith inclusion. She reflected on her over two decades working within global advertising agencies and described how diversity and inclusion policies frequently fail to address religion and belief in meaningful ways. While organisations may have established pathways to support gender or race-based inclusion, there was a strong sense that Muslim employees often remain invisible within workplace structures. Experiences shared included difficulties accessing prayer spaces, exclusion through alcohol-centred networking cultures, lack of halal food provision, discomfort around openly



expressing religious identity, and fears that speaking openly about discrimination could negatively affect career progression.

After Sufia stepped away from the corporate sector, she set up a consultancy called RB Plus. She described RB Plus as emerging from her own experience of working in predominantly white corporate environments where religion and faith were largely absent from diversity and inclusion frameworks.

A key focus of RB Plus is therefore helping organisations understand faith inclusion as a serious structural issue rather than symbolic representation. Sufia argued that many Muslims still do not feel psychologically safe enough to openly express their needs or concerns, fearing exclusion or damage to career progression. She described how many professionals continue to “code-switch” or perform acceptable versions of themselves to fit into corporate environments, rather than being able to work authentically as Muslims.

Her consultancy work focuses on supporting organisations to think more deeply about religion, identity and belonging within workplace culture. She also linked this work to broader demographic change, arguing that as Muslim participation in professional sectors continues to grow, organisations will increasingly need to understand how to recruit, retain and support people from faith backgrounds.

RB Plus reflects the emergence of a new generation of Muslim professionals attempting to reshape institutional culture from within while navigating ongoing tensions around representation, identity and belonging.

“We’re still apologetically Muslim...If you code-switch enough then they will accept you enough... but the reality is you’re still performing...You’re not being yourself.”

Another major theme concerned the limitations of symbolic inclusion. Sufia criticised superficial forms of representation in which organisations celebrate Muslim identity through seasonal campaigns or visible gestures while failing to address deeper institutional inequalities. The discussion suggested that recent events, particularly the war in Gaza, have exposed the fragility of many corporate inclusion frameworks and intensified feelings of vulnerability among Muslim employees.

“Where does a young Muslim go to understand the dilemmas they’re facing without the shame and the judgement?”

There was also discussion about generational change and the emergence of new forms of Muslim leadership outside traditional hierarchies. Reference was made to programmes working with Muslim students from working-class backgrounds, where outward confidence often masked ongoing struggles with self-worth, exclusion and limited access to opportunities.

“While the girls are far more confident... the issues underneath are still the same...Outwardly confident... but internally they’re still struggling.”

Overall, the conversation presented Birmingham as a city undergoing significant transformation within its Muslim communities. The discussion emphasised the emergence of new voices, new professional pathways and new forms of social engagement. Rather than focusing solely on crisis or controversy, the discussion highlighted the importance of documenting these quieter forms of change, resilience and development that are shaping the future of Muslim life in Birmingham.

Dr Laura McDonald

Founding director ConnectFutures

Dr Laura Zahra McDonald is a founding director of ConnectFutures, a Birmingham-based community interest organisation that works with young people, schools, communities and professionals on issues including youth violence, exploitation, extremism, misinformation, safeguarding and social cohesion. She has a background in academia as well as community practice and previously worked as a research fellow and lecturer at the University of Birmingham.

The discussion reflects a deep concern with the growing disconnect between research, policy discourse and the lived realities facing many Muslim communities in Birmingham. Dr McDonald expressed frustration that Muslim communities remain heavily analysed and subjected to endless recommendations, yet little meaningful or sustainable action follows. Throughout the interview there is a strong emphasis on sustainability, with the view that short-term funding cycles and fragmented interventions cannot address entrenched social problems.

The conversation places current challenges within a broader historical and institutional context. Dr Laura argued that both institutions, and - within their capacities - Muslim communities, failed to address structural issues over several decades. This dual failure is described as producing a “double-edged sword”, where unresolved social, cultural and economic issues became increasingly difficult to discuss openly.

“The far right are strategic, playing on mainstreamed Islamophobic narratives, saying ‘the Muslims are this and that’, so it becomes very difficult to deal with your own issues when someone else is battering you... The community retracts because it is attacked from many different angles.”

A significant theme is the need to bridge research and practice. Dr McDonald explained that while academic research can offer theories and frameworks, the reality of working with young people in pupil referral units, alternative provisions and economically deprived neighbourhoods reveals a far more complex picture. ConnectFutures works across Muslim and non-Muslim communities, deliberately inclusive and intersectional in order to reduce stigma on different communities and identities and reflect the broader social nature of the issues being addressed. The work spans schools, colleges, youth settings and family support, particularly focusing on young people.

The discussion highlights how many of the current challenges are not uniquely “Muslim problems” but reflect wider social breakdown affecting poorer and marginalised com-



munities across Britain. Issues such as gang culture, online extremism, misogyny, fraud, violence and hyper-capitalist “hustle culture” are described as increasingly normalised among young people from a range of ethnic and religious backgrounds. However, Muslim communities are also deeply affected, particularly because young Muslims continue to strongly identify as Muslim culturally and emotionally, even where religious practice may be inconsistent. This creates a tension between identity, faith, aspiration and lived reality.

Rather than traditional ideological radicalisation, practitioners are now observing young people consuming violent and disturbing content from multiple sources simultaneously, including old ISIS videos, sexual abuse material and cartel violence. The conversation suggested that current institutional responses are poorly equipped to deal with these hybrid and rapidly evolving forms of harm.

“Young Muslims aren’t getting groomed into ISIS like we saw in 2015 anymore – they’re getting groomed into criminal hyper-capitalism, misogyny and hustle culture.”

The interview also explored the growing appeal of figures from the online red pill manosphere among some young Muslim men. The attraction is linked less to religion and more to ideas of masculinity, status, wealth and power. Young people involved in fraud or criminal activity often justify their behaviour in pragmatic terms, speaking about wanting to support their families, gain respect, attract partners and achieve financial success. The discussion repeatedly returns to the idea that many young men feel there are few alternative pathways to dignity or social status.

“The fathers may be emotionally absent or punitive, and the young people don’t see religious values lived in reality...This is not a Muslim problem – but Muslims need to talk about it honestly.”

Another major concern raised is the inability within many Muslim communities to discuss difficult issues openly. Shame, fear of reputational damage and anxiety about reinforcing Islamophobic stereotypes often prevent honest engagement with problems such as abuse, criminality, forced marriage, misogyny, mental health struggles and sexual exploitation. Dr McDonald noted that this culture of silence can be particularly damaging for young men in prison or involved in gangs, many of whom become isolated from their families precisely when support is most needed.

“The disconnect is between what is happening with young people and parental and community lack of understanding or denial of it...People start acting too late because they’re in denial...Many of the boys who are in prison – their families just pretend they’ve gone abroad.”

Dr McDonald was concerned about the limitations of existing forms of religious education and community leadership. She argued that a significant amount of religious teaching is no longer “fit for purpose” because it focuses heavily on prohibitions and abstract theological debates while failing to equip young people to navigate contemporary realities. She expressed frustration that communities may spend considerable time debating issues such as nail varnish or minor theological disputes while ignoring urgent social harms affecting young people. At the same time, she recognised that mosques and religious leaders alone cannot realistically carry the burden of solving these issues without wider support.

“People think religion becomes this punitive safety net where you frighten people into behaving – and it’s just not working...We’re told what’s haram, but nobody teaches young people how to live well in their current environments.”

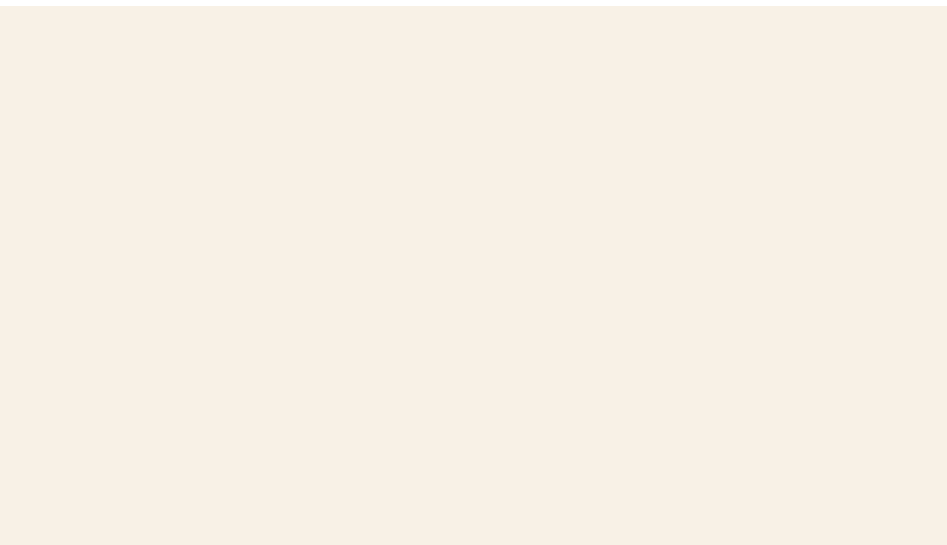
The conversation repeatedly returned to the need for practical, credible and community-rooted interventions. Effective youth work is described as relying heavily on trusted messengers who can speak authentically to young people. Programmes focusing on financial literacy, emotional regulation, media literacy and resilience are presented as more effective than punitive or moralistic approaches. Parents and teachers are also identified as needing support and education, particularly around understanding online harms and contemporary youth culture. However, the lack of long-term funding and the collapse of youth services in cities such as Birmingham are seen as major barriers to meaningful change.

The discussion also reflected on wider social fragmentation and changing family structures. Dr Laura talked about intergenerational tensions, coercive marriage practices, emotionally disconnected parenting and unresolved trauma within some families. However, these concerns are balanced with recognition that Muslim communities also possess significant assets and strengths, including enduring family networks, religious identity and increasing intercultural mixing among younger generations. She also added that many young Muslims continue to seek meaning, belonging and spirituality, even amid confusion and dysfunction.

“The community has to take responsibility for its own issues, and that is going to be uncomfortable... We have to address things through truth, not through the false image we want to project... The framework has to develop – the old ways are not enough for today.”

Towards the end of the discussion, there was a broader reflection on the intellectual and moral frameworks needed for the future. Dr Laura questioned whether older theological and social approaches remain adequate for addressing contemporary realities and expressed interest in developing new forms of thinking grounded both in prophetic ethics and contemporary human rights frameworks. There is a sense that Muslim communities are entering a period where inherited models are no longer sufficient, yet no clear alternative has fully emerged. The conversation ended with cautious optimism that new forms of leadership, research, community engagement and youth work could help shape more constructive futures if communities are willing to confront difficult realities honestly and collectively.

“We must not think all this experience has been for nothing. It has to go somewhere.”



Yasin Erkul

Founder/Director of The Hotspot

Yasin Erkul is a Birmingham-based youth mentor, community organiser and co-founder of The Hotspot Youth Club. Alongside his grassroots work, he has delivered workshops nationally on issues including online safety, racism and youth resilience, and has also contributed to suicide prevention and research projects focused on disadvantaged communities. He is currently studying an MSc in Mental Health at the University of Birmingham and has been recognised for his youth work through awards such as Youth Mentor of the Year at the Muslim Youth Engagement Awards.

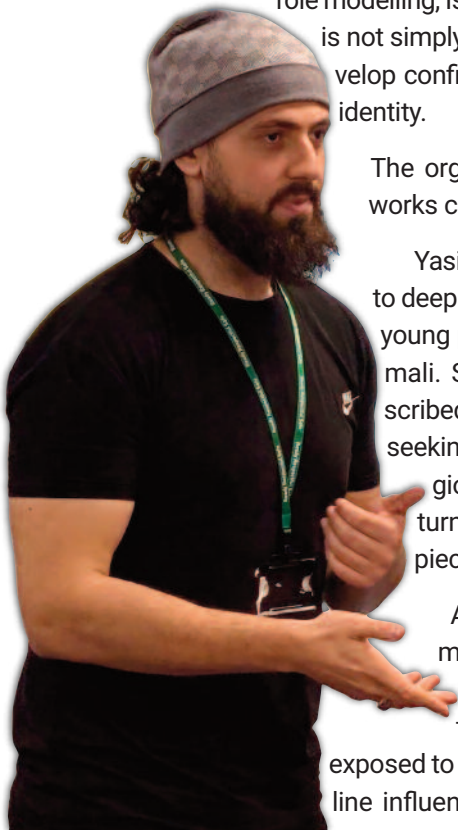
"The Hotspot isn't just for Muslims... it's to up-level young people physically, mentally, and spiritually."

The Hotspot was established 18 months ago to provide meaningful support for young people in an area with limited culturally and faith-sensitive youth provision. The organisation offers a combination of sports, mentoring, Islamic learning, emotional support and community-building. Its programme includes football, boxing, mentoring, role modelling, Islamic reminders, spirituality, and informal discussions. The aim is not simply to provide recreational activities, but to help young people develop confidence, resilience, belonging, purpose and a stronger sense of identity.

The organisation is located in Nechells district of Birmingham and works closely with the Quba Mosque.

Yasin explained that the emergence of The Hotspot was a response to deep social, emotional and identity-based challenges facing Muslim young people in Birmingham, particularly within a first-generation Somali, Sudanese and Eritrean first-generation communities. He described their work not simply as a sports or youth club, but as a space seeking to provide belonging, mentoring, emotional support and religious grounding for young people. The conversation repeatedly returned to the idea that many young people are "left to pick up the pieces" of fractured family situations.

A strong emphasis was placed on the importance of identity formation. Yasin argued that many young people struggle to understand how Islam relates to their lives growing up in Britain and that this creates confusion. He described how young people are exposed to contradictory pressures through peer culture, social media, online influencers and wider society, particularly around gambling, drugs,



fraud, relationships and masculinity. The Hotspot therefore sees its role as creating environments where young people can reconnect faith, identity and every day. Many young people disengage from formal mosque settings around the age of thirteen, precisely at the point when they most require guidance, mentoring and spaces for open discussion.

"If you don't have an identity, all of your actions are going to be chaotic."

Activities such as football and boxing were used not simply as recreation but as entry points into mentoring relationships, emotional conversations and discussions about values, responsibility and self-worth. Faith-based discussion was embedded naturally into activities rather than delivered through formal instruction alone. The organisation repeatedly emphasised *tarbiyah* (nurturing and development), arguing that young people respond positively when they feel recognised, valued and safe.

"The youth need people that offer them spaces to discover and talk about Islam which are not pressurised or rigid."

Particular attention was given to the experiences of boys and young men, especially those growing up without fathers. A 2026 MCB statistical analysis reported that "the proportion of Muslim households in the 'Lone Parent with dependent children' category (10.3%) is higher than the overall population (6.9%)". See Appendix 7.

The conversation explored how absent male role models can leave young men searching for belonging and validation elsewhere, including online spaces, peer groups and gangs. Yasin said that many boys lack healthy models of masculinity and therefore become vulnerable to harmful online narratives. However, rather than rejecting masculinity itself, he argued for a faith-based understanding of masculinity rooted in emotional regulation, empathy, communication, listening and responsibility. Weekly masculinity sessions with boys focused on these themes alongside Islamic teachings and the example of the Prophet Muhammad. Yasin described this as long-term work requiring sustained relationships with young people over many years rather than short-term interventions.

Alongside this, significant discussion focused on girls and young women and the wider impact of the changing gender dynamics within Muslim communities. The conversation suggested that many young women are increasingly becoming more educationally and socially successful, while some young men are struggling. Yasin argued that exposure to misogynistic online content was shaping unhealthy attitudes amongst boys towards women. He described examples of young boys consuming degrading social media content about women and then struggling to relate positively to confident or independent women in real life.

"If a mother is now tasked with the responsibility to look after a child solely on her own, the deficit is huge and the young person feels that deficit."

The discussion also acknowledged the realities faced by many Muslim women experiencing domestic abuse, coercion and lack of support. Reference was made to the difficulties women face in seeking accountability within community and religious structures. He recognised that Muslim women often carry heavy responsibilities within single-parent households.

The Hotspot also tries to support mothers and women via coffee mornings, and discussion sessions focused on understanding the pressures affecting boys and young men. These sessions were framed as attempts to equip mothers with greater

awareness of the changing realities facing their children. At the same time, Yasin acknowledged that engaging girls and young women consistently remained difficult and that there was insufficient support for women-led youth provision despite recognition of its importance. The discussion suggested that women continue to play a central role in holding communities together, often without adequate support or investment.

"I'm finding it difficult to engage sisters in this type of work...Self-harm is increasingly likely amongst our young women...Muslim women are more likely to experience certain kinds of social problems."

Mental health emerged as another major theme. Yasin linked anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidal intention to identity struggles, Islamophobia, family instability and social pressures. The discussion highlighted how mental health issues remain heavily stigmatised within Muslim communities and are sometimes reduced solely to spiritual explanations, preventing access to wider therapeutic or clinical support. Yasin advocated for approaches that combine spiritual understanding with psychological and medical models of care.

"People look down on youth work when actually it should be valued because it's doing the real work...you can't just do a six-week programme and think that's enough...We're trying to get young people to build something where there's an actual outcome and a legacy."

The organisation itself was described as operating almost entirely through voluntary labour despite providing intensive and sustained youth support across the week. The initiative currently receives no formal funding and relies on the personal income and business contributions of those running it to pay rent and maintain activities. Despite this, Yasin articulated ambitious aspirations to develop a scalable model of Muslim youth work. The discussion repeatedly stressed that such youth work is often misunderstood or undervalued as merely recreational activity, when in reality it functions as a critical form of informal safeguarding, emotional support and leadership development within communities.

Young People's Experiences of The Hotspot

This interview was with 8 young users of The Hotspot. Seven young men and one woman aged between 13-22.

The young people describe Hotspot as: a safe, welcoming environment, a place for mentorship, friendship, and belonging, a project helping young people spiritually, emotionally, and socially and a source of confidence, guidance, and structure

This discussion explored how young people experience The Hotspot, what brings them there, the challenges they face in Birmingham, and what support they feel young Muslims need. The young people described The Hotspot as a space that gives them friendship, direction and a sense of community. One young person explained that after leaving college and not going to university, he came because he "needed some friends" and found a place where "we'd just be chilling, just be relaxing." Others said they were already connected to the mosque or local area and became involved because they trusted what the project stood for: "good community" and support for young people.

Participants generally felt that Birmingham, especially their local area, felt like home,

their neighbourhood has a strong Muslim and multicultural community and growing up around diversity helped them connect with people from different backgrounds.

A strong theme was local belonging. Several young people spoke warmly about Nechells and Birmingham as home. One participant said, "I love this area," explaining that he had watched it "develop and grow" and that it "feels like home, it feels like childhood." Another said Birmingham helped him meet people from different backgrounds and learn "a little bit of their language," which made him feel more connected.

At the same time, the young people were clear that their area faces serious challenges. They spoke about poverty, single-parent households, pressure on young men, jealousy, comparison, drugs, violence, and the desire for "quick money." One young person said that some young people "don't have that type of people that guide them at home," and therefore "have to go to the streets" to find help. Another identified comparison as a major issue, saying, "Comparison is the thief of joy."

The discussion also highlighted how young people feel judged or misunderstood. One young person said, "If we go outside with our friends, please don't assume we're selling drugs." Parents' fears were also discussed. Some young people felt their parents restricted them because of concerns about drugs, stabbings and mistaken identity. One explained that his mother worries he could "get stabbed over a mistaken identity" or fall in with "the wrong people."

The Sisters' lead youth worker explained that the girls' experience was similar to the boys' but often less visible. She explained that girls face many of the same pressures, but "the boys, it's more publicly seen sometimes than the girls." She also said girls often face "more backlash and criticism," and that parents may be more reluctant to let daughters attend youth activities.

The young people were very clear about the value of mentoring. They described The Hotspot as a place where they can talk openly, receive advice and learn how to navigate life beyond their immediate community. One participant said that mentors help young people understand "how to go to the bigger world" and "how to handle certain things." Another said, "If I have any problems, I can go to him and speak to him... he'll be able to give me advice."

The project was also seen as helping young people bridge Muslim and non-Muslim spaces. One participant said The Hotspot had helped him communicate more confidently with non-Muslims and take part in wider events. He felt the project was helping "bridge their gap together" in Birmingham.

Towards the end, the young people described The Hotspot in very powerful terms. They called it a "strong community," "brotherhood, sisterhood," "welcoming," "open to different communities," and "like a school." One described the Hotspot as "a family... you meet lifelong friends." Another gave a particularly strong personal testimony, saying, "Hotspot is the reason why I have a thriving business right now," and credited Yasin's motivation with helping him move away from financial difficulty and old patterns.

Overall, the young people presented The Hotspot as a protective, nurturing and transformative space. It offers friendship, mentoring, confidence, Islamic grounding, social connection and practical direction. Their voices suggest that youth work of this kind is essential, especially for young people who may not receive consistent guidance at home or school. As one participant put it, "More youth clubs need to be [there], and more kids do need to be reached."

Mohammed Ali MBE

Founder Soul City Arts

Mohammed Ali is one of Britain's leading Muslim artists and cultural leaders. An internationally recognised artist, curator and founder of Soul City Arts, he has spent more than three decades pioneering innovative approaches to community arts, cultural heritage and public engagement. His work combines artistic excellence with social impact, using creativity to strengthen identity, build community confidence and create new conversations between Muslim communities and wider society.

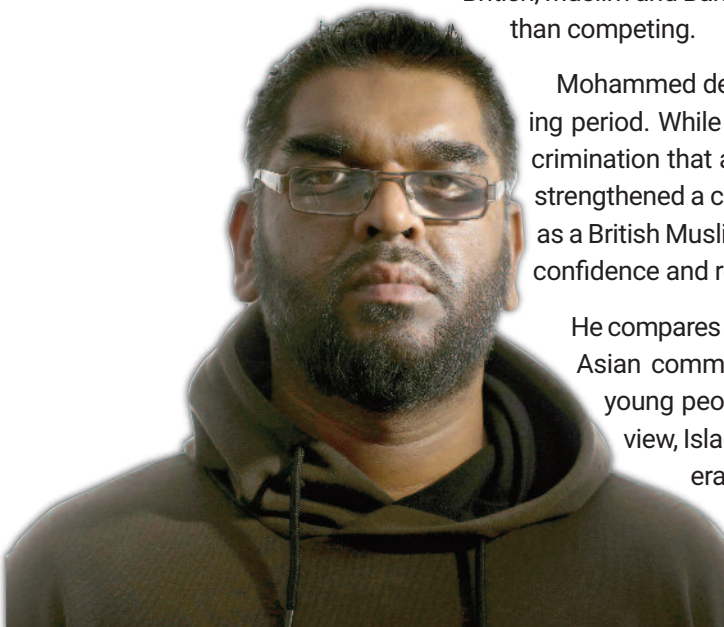
Mohammed Ali's interview provides an important perspective on the changing nature of Muslim identity, creativity and cultural leadership in Birmingham. His personal journey reflects wider shifts experienced by many second-generation British Muslims, moving from questions of identity and belonging towards a confident expression of faith, culture and civic contribution. Through his work he demonstrates how the arts can strengthen communities, challenge stereotypes and create new spaces for dialogue.

Mohammed reflected on growing up in Birmingham during the 1980s as the son of Bangladeshi migrants. As a young person, he rarely identified publicly as Bangladeshi, instead viewing this part of his identity as something to conceal rather than celebrate.

It was only later that he consciously reclaimed his Bangladeshi heritage, describing this as completing a full circle in his understanding of himself. Today, he sees his British, Muslim and Bangladeshi identities as complementary rather than competing.

Mohammed describes the years following 9/11 as a defining period. While acknowledging the fear, suspicion and discrimination that accompanied this era, he argues that it also strengthened a collective Muslim identity. Publicly identifying as a British Muslim became, for many young people, an act of confidence and resistance rather than something to hide.

He compares this period with the anti-racist mobilisation of Asian communities during the 1970s and 1980s, when young people organised against racist violence. In his view, Islamophobia unintentionally encouraged a generation of Muslims to develop greater religious confidence, stronger solidarity and a deeper sense of belonging to the global Muslim community.



This identity, however, was never static. As he matured, Mohammed increasingly recognised that embracing a confident Muslim identity did not require abandoning his cultural heritage. His later work has consistently demonstrated that faith, ethnicity and British identity can coexist without contradiction.

Mohammed explained that his introduction to graffiti emerged from growing up in working-class Birmingham during a period of economic decline, social marginalisation and limited opportunities. Influenced by hip-hop culture from New York, graffiti represented far more than an artistic style. It gave young people who often felt invisible a means of making themselves visible within the city.

"Graffiti was literally the voice of the people...When I painted a building, I owned it...We felt powerless and invisible. Graffiti changed that."

For Mohammed, painting public walls became symbolic of reclaiming space within a city where many young people from migrant backgrounds felt excluded. It transformed invisibility into confidence and enabled creativity to become a form of civic presence.

Mohammed is now widely recognised for pioneering the combination of Islamic calligraphy with contemporary graffiti. Rather than seeing any contradiction between Islamic art and graffiti, he argues that both traditions share a focus on the written word. Graffiti celebrates writing as an expression of human identity, while Islamic calligraphy elevates it through revelation. Bringing these traditions together created a visual language that resonated strongly with Muslims seeking contemporary forms of cultural expression rooted in faith.

"It was the word of man meeting the Word of God."

Importantly, he notes that the response from Muslim communities was overwhelmingly positive. At a time when many young Muslims were seeking to reconcile their faith with life in Britain, his work demonstrated that Islamic artistic traditions could evolve while remaining authentic.

A recurring theme throughout the interview is confidence. Mohammed argues that creativity has enabled many British Muslims to move beyond defensive responses towards producing culture that is ambitious, confident and outward-looking.

Rather than simply documenting Muslim history, he seeks to create immersive experiences that draw audiences emotionally into these stories. Projects exploring migration, heritage and the history of Britain's Bangladeshi restaurant industry are designed not only to inform but also to foster empathy and emotional connection.

Mohammed also reflects on the importance of continual reinvention. Having gained international recognition through graffiti, he consciously chose not to remain defined by a single artistic style. Instead, he expanded into theatre, live performance, museum exhibitions, filmmaking and community heritage projects.

"If I'm going to tell the stories of my community, do it big or don't bother...Tell the stories of our community in such a way that people are spellbound."

He describes this evolution as a refusal to become creatively static. This willingness to evolve reflects a wider argument running throughout the interview: communities must continually develop new ways of telling their own stories rather than relying on inherited models or waiting for others to represent them.

Following this journey, he gradually abandoned the name "Aerosol Arabic" and be-

came increasingly committed to celebrating his Bangladeshi heritage publicly.

Mohammed repeatedly returns to the idea that artists have responsibilities beyond producing attractive work. Creative practice should build confidence, create dialogue and help communities see themselves differently. Storytelling, when undertaken with imagination and excellence, has the capacity to transform how both Muslims and wider society understand one another.

His experience across museums, galleries, theatres and public spaces demonstrates that creative projects can become forms of civic leadership.

Mohammed's journey also demonstrates how cultural confidence develops over time. It suggests that investment in creative leadership, cultural initiatives and community storytelling has significant potential to strengthen both community resilience and the city's wider cultural life.

Towards the end of the interview, Mohammed reflects on what he sees as one of the greatest structural challenges facing Muslim creative organisations. While there is no shortage of talented Muslim artists, very few organisations have succeeded in building long-term institutional relationships with mainstream public funders. He argues that this has prevented Muslim-led creativity from becoming embedded within Britain's wider cultural infrastructure.

Drawing on his own experience, he explains that Soul City Arts has spent many years learning to navigate the complex world of public arts funding, governance and cultural partnerships. This requires far more than artistic talent. Organisations must develop professional structures, build credibility with public institutions, demonstrate social impact and operate within funding systems that many community organisations struggle to access. Consequently, very few Muslim-led organisations have made this transition.

Regular public investment, he argues, provides far more than financial security. It enables organisations to employ staff, build long-term programmes, influence cultural policy and become recognised partners within the wider arts sector.

He expresses concern that, despite the growth of Muslim creativity over the past three decades, the community has yet to develop the institutional infrastructure needed to sustain this work. Too often, artists remain isolated, project-funded or dependent on short-term initiatives, while Muslim philanthropy continues to prioritise mosques, schools and overseas charitable causes over investment in culture. He argues that creativity should be recognised as an essential element of community development.

"I need to create a system where the Muslim community recognises the real value of art in bringing change... to deal with tangible, real-life problems."

For Mohammed, the long-term challenge is not simply to produce more successful Muslim artists, but to build sustainable organisations capable of bridging Muslim communities and the mainstream. Such organisations can translate community experience into publicly recognised cultural programmes, attract significant investment and demonstrate that creativity can contribute to addressing wider social challenges. In his view, this remains one of the most important—and largely untapped—areas of development for Britain's Muslim communities over the coming decades.

Aisha Siddiqua

Afro-Caribbean convert

*The conversation with **Aisha Siddiqua**, an Afro-Caribbean heritage convert living in Birmingham, explored themes of identity, belonging, faith, marriage and community life.*

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was the experience of Afro-Caribbean Muslims as a “minority within a minority”, often lacking the numbers or institutional presence needed to shape mosque culture or establish community structures of their own. She observed that many mosques in Birmingham continue to be organised largely along ethnic and national lines, with Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali communities forming the dominant congregations. As a result, Afro-Caribbean Muslims have often gravitated towards more ethnically diverse spaces such as Green Lane Mosque and Salafi Masjid, where diversity is more visible and younger generations are able to build broader friendship networks and support systems.

“Caribbean Muslims specifically... we’ve always been a minority within the minority community... You know you’re part of Islam, but the community around you don’t include you.”

Reflecting on her own journey to Islam during the 1980s, Aisha explained that Islam was not entirely unfamiliar to her. Within Birmingham’s Afro-Caribbean community however, it was commonly perceived as a “Pakistani religion” or an “Asian religion”, with little awareness of the rich history and global contributions of Black Muslims. Beyond historical figures such as Malcolm X and Bilal, she felt that Black Muslim experiences and achievements were rarely acknowledged or celebrated within mainstream Muslim discourse. She recalled reading introductory Islamic literature available at the time, much of it originating from the Indian sub-continent, including the writings of Maryam Jameelah and the widely used children’s text *Islam: Our Basic Creed*, which provided her with an accessible introduction to Islamic beliefs.

“A lot of Afro-Caribbean people who aren’t Muslims still kind of look at it as a Pakistani religion or an Asian religion... The history of Black people in Islam isn’t exactly advertised or celebrated.”

“I think for a lot of my generation, as Black people in England, we didn’t feel like we belonged... Islam gave me what my purpose is in life... but I don’t necessarily think it gave me community.”

She described embracing Islam gradually and privately, slowly adapting her lifestyle, dress and daily practices before openly identifying as Muslim. Looking back, she felt the process of conversion lacked structure and preparation. Although local Muslims



encouraged her to take *shahada*, there was often little discussion about the practical realities and long-term commitments of Muslim life. Comparing this with her previous church experience, where formal instruction and preparation were expected before membership, she argued that Muslim communities still lack sufficiently developed support systems for converts, particularly for women.

The issue of belonging emerged repeatedly throughout the discussion. While Islam provided a strong spiritual foundation, she often felt that Afro-Caribbean Muslims remained on the margins of wider Muslim communal life. Rather than framing this solely as overt hostility, she described it as a deeply embedded social reality shaped by ethnicity, culture and familiarity. She recalled a “honeymoon period” following conversion when Birmingham’s revert community was relatively small and tightly connected. Converts regularly attended each other’s weddings, social gatherings and religious events, creating a supportive network that offered companionship and solidarity. Over time, however, she became increasingly aware of the social boundaries that remained difficult to cross.

“There is that kind of honeymoon period... the revert community was kind of small anyway, everybody knew everybody... They’re happy to say, ‘Oh, you’re Muslim,’ but then... they wouldn’t marry their son to you.”

The conversation also explored how ethnicity and culture continue to shape marriage patterns within Birmingham’s Muslim communities. Contrary to assumptions that younger generations are increasingly moving beyond ethnic boundaries, she observed that intermarriage between different Muslim ethnic groups remains relatively uncommon. While some mixed marriages occur among European Muslims or between Afro-Caribbean and African Muslims, marriage into Pakistani or Somali communities remains relatively rare. She viewed this not simply as prejudice but also as a reflection of strong family structures, cultural continuity and ongoing transnational marriage practices. She acknowledged that maintaining cultural traditions can be important for migrant communities while also recognising the feelings of exclusion this can create for those outside established networks.

“People are happy to see you as a Muslim, but obviously they’re not used to seeing Afro-Caribbean Muslims... When they speak about the men, they’ll say, ‘Oh, they became Muslim in prison... For women... they become Muslim because they married somebody.”

“I would like to see more respect... more acknowledgement of the Afro-Caribbean experience... People don’t really have it on their radar, to be honest.”

The conversation highlighted how Black Muslim women may experience multiple layers of disadvantage linked to race, gender and religion. Aisha reflected that conversion often involves the loss of established social networks without necessarily gaining equivalent support structures. This echoed wider concerns that some Afro-Caribbean Christians who are interested in Islam hesitate to convert because of fears that they will lose the strong communal support found within Black churches while finding limited social support within Muslim spaces. She regarded this as one of the most significant unresolved challenges facing British Muslim communities.

On the issue of family life and emotional wellbeing Aisha felt that Muslim communities frequently fail to prepare individuals realistically for marriage. She advocated for more structured pre-marital education and more open discussions around intimacy, conflict resolution, emotional expression and gender roles. In her view, many

people rely on unrealistic images of relationships shaped by popular culture because they lack healthy models of Muslim marriage. She also felt that unresolved experiences of racism, family instability and intergenerational trauma within Afro-Caribbean communities often remain unaddressed, creating additional pressures within marriages and family life.

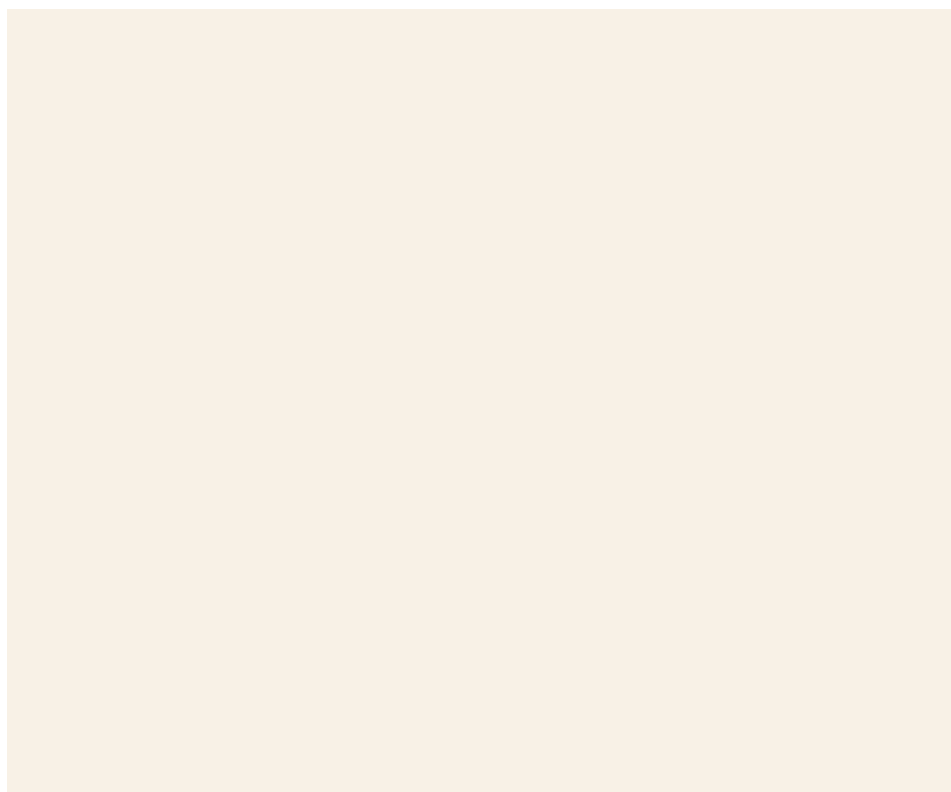
“The racism, prejudice and some of the family trauma that the Afro-Caribbean community have been through are not being addressed in the community.”

She further highlighted the limited availability of pastoral and counselling support for couples, particularly within Afro-Caribbean Muslim communities. While men sometimes seek guidance from respected male figures within mosques, women often lack equivalent sources of support. She noted the presence of a small number of Afro-Caribbean Muslim counsellors in Birmingham but felt that broader institutional provision remains insufficient.

Towards the end of the conversation, Aisha reflected on her personal priorities and future aspirations. While she no longer places community-building at the centre of her own life, focusing instead on spiritual growth, learning and strengthening her relationship with God, she nevertheless expressed a desire for greater recognition of the Afro-Caribbean Muslim experience. She questioned why public discussions about converts often foreground white converts while Afro-Caribbean Muslim experiences remain largely invisible.

Overall, her reflections revealed a strong sense of faith, resilience and realism, coupled with an enduring awareness of exclusion, under-recognition and the continuing need for more inclusive, emotionally supportive and culturally aware Muslim institutions.

• *We use the term Afro-Caribbean throughout as this is Aisha Siddiqua's preferred self- description.*



Ferdous Al-Audhali

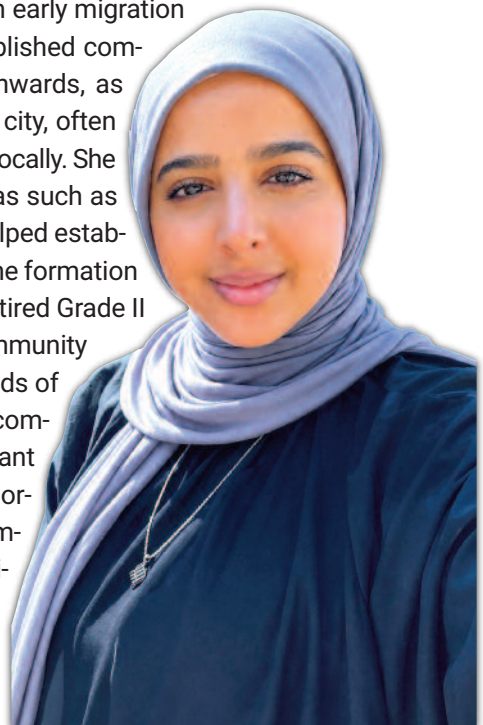
Head of Youth Services at The Muath Trust

Ferdous Al-Audhali is Head of Youth Services at The Muath Trust in Birmingham, where she leads programmes supporting the wellbeing, identity and development of young people from diverse backgrounds. Her work focuses on creating opportunities for young people to develop confidence, leadership skills and a strong sense of belonging, while strengthening connections between families, communities and civic life.

Ferdous highlights the important role played by the Yemeni and wider Arabic-speaking Muslim community in Birmingham, particularly through the work of the Muath Trust and its community centre. The charity has been both a personal and communal anchor for Ferdous, reflecting on her own experiences of growing up connected to the centre through family, youth initiatives, Arabic schooling, community activism and its mosque. She explained that the organisation gave young people a sense of belonging, purpose, and opportunity. Her own experiences which motivated her to return in a professional capacity as a youth worker.

"Growing up, it was always about representing Islam in the best way and being the best person I can be...I loved opportunities where I'm around Muslims because it felt like I could grow into the identity of who I am."

Ferdous traces the history of the Yemeni community in Birmingham, identifying it as one of the city's oldest Muslim communities, with early migration to the UK beginning in the 19th century. A more established community in Birmingham developed from the 1930s onwards, as men entered industrial and manual labour across the city, often coming alone before later bringing families or marrying locally. She explains that early community life was centred in areas such as Balsall Heath and later Sparkbrook, where migrants helped establish mosques and community institutions, leading to the formation of The Muath Trust in 1990 through the purchase of a tired Grade II listed building. The building was renovated into a community centre, with the aim of educating and meeting the needs of the community. This gradually evolved into a wider community organisation serving diverse Muslim and migrant populations, particularly Arabic-speaking groups. The organisation now functions as a main hub for these communities and a key point of contact for newly arrived migrants, asylum seekers and refugees because of its established reputation and Arabic-speaking support network.



A strong theme throughout the interview was the importance of identity, belonging and representation. Ferdous reflects positively on growing up as a visibly Muslim young person in Birmingham and described Birmingham as a place where she was able to develop confidence in her Muslim identity through access to Muslim youth groups, scouts, Arabic classes and community spaces. At the same time, Ferdous notes that Muslim histories and contributions are often absent from mainstream narratives about Birmingham and Britain and spoke about the need for communities to “impose themselves” into historical narratives because schools and wider society rarely acknowledge the role of Muslim migrants in Britain’s industrial history or national development.

“When they talk about Birmingham’s industrial history, they don’t talk about other communities who contributed their whole lives and their bodies to that... There’s a lot of history that you have to impose yourself into.”

Growing to be one of the largest community-led third sector initiatives in the UK, the Muath Trust provides services “from daycare to elderly care”, including youth programmes, supplementary schooling, women’s groups, adult education and training, employment support, elderly activities, exercise classes and community events. Emphasis is placed on the centre’s youth work, which supports hundreds of young people weekly through sports, mentoring, leadership skills development and youth-led programming. Ferdous repeatedly stresses the importance of providing safe environments for young people in deprived inner-city areas where gang activity, drugs, and social isolation are significant risks.

“A lot of young people grow up and outside of school they don’t have anything. The best thing we can offer to these young people is a space to be in that’s safe.”

The conversation highlighted concerns around deprivation and the lack of opportunities within the local and surrounding areas, which have large Muslim populations. In particular, the Sparkbrook and Balsall Heath East ward, where the centre is based, has consistently been ranked as Birmingham’s most deprived ward. Ferdous argued that educational underachievement is often linked to wider socio-economic issues, including intergenerational poverty, language barriers, limited parental knowledge of the education system and lack of professional connections. To address this, the organisation developed initiatives such as “Meet the Young Professionals”, bringing successful professionals from similar backgrounds back into the community to mentor young people and broaden their aspirations.

Ferdous places considerable emphasis on the importance of mentorship, representation and community-led youth work. She argues that many young Muslims require spaces where they can feel confident in their identity while also developing skills, networks and aspirations. Accordingly, young people benefit greatly when they see role models who “look like them” and have overcome similar barriers. She also stresses that mainstream education often fails to meet the emotional, cultural and social needs of Muslim youth, particularly in deprived communities.

“Mosques in the UK need to do more to engage young people and address their needs... They’re living in a different time zone to what young people are actually experiencing.”

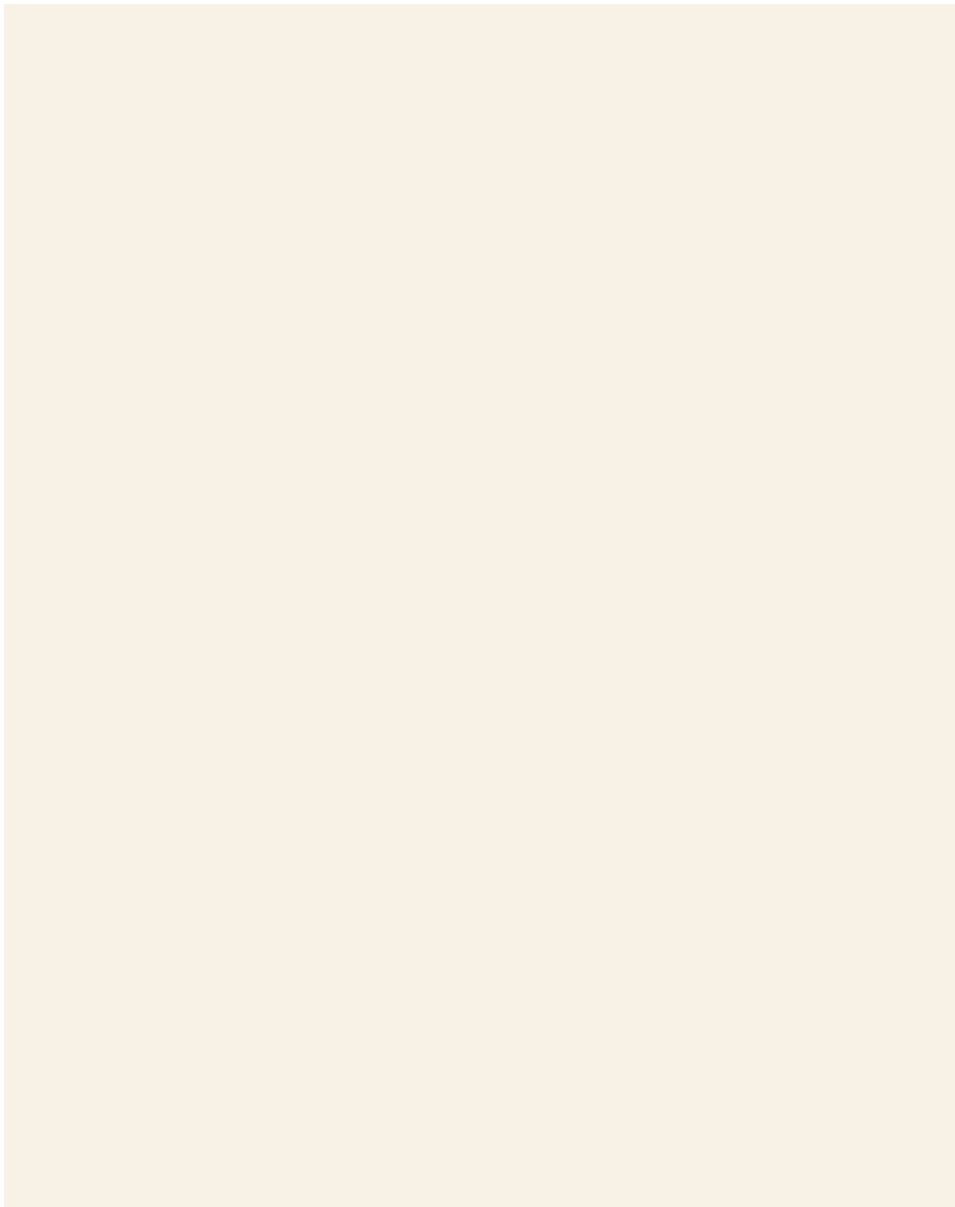
Ferdous reflected that many mosques and religious institutions are not adapting quickly enough to engage younger generations meaningfully because young people often seek a sense of belonging, acceptance and genuine connection rather than

purely formal religious instruction. Alternatively, there is also a growing sense amongst some young Muslims who feel disengaged from religion entirely because they cannot see how it connects to their lived realities.

“A lot of young people feel this when they come to the mosque for Taraweeh— they may not be going to pray, let’s be honest, they’re going for the vibe, they’re going to feel part of something.”

Ferdous describes the current climate as one of the most hostile periods she has experienced as a British Muslim, even more intense than the post-9/11 period. She also discussed how negative narratives about Birmingham and Muslim communities contribute to feelings of exclusion and misunderstanding.

Towards the end of the interview, the discussion turns to sustainability and funding. Ferdous feels frustration at the short-term project funding model commonly imposed on community organisations. She argues that meaningful long-term change cannot be achieved through temporary, unstable funding streams. Instead, she advocates for sustained, multi-year investment in grassroots Muslim organisations that are already trusted by their communities and addressing real social needs.



Iman, Sami, Aysha

Muslim Health Professionals

Interview with three professional Muslim women in Birmingham working across mental health, psychiatry, education and community support. The conversation explored the experiences of diverse Muslim communities in Birmingham, particularly Arab, North African, Yemeni, Somali and refugee-background communities, and reflected on the challenges surrounding identity, mental health, education, integration and access to support services.

The participants described Birmingham as home to highly diverse Muslim communities, many of whom have arrived through political asylum, refugee routes, work visas or family migration. Recognition was given to the role of Muslim Students House Mosque & Community Centre, originally established in the 1970s as a hub for Arab students and migrants who lacked communal spaces. Over time it evolved into a wider community centre. The mosque was described as one of the most ethnically diverse in Birmingham.

A major theme was the experience of newly arrived Muslim communities, particularly Egyptian and refugee-background families, who are trying to balance preserving their religious and cultural identity with adapting to life in Britain. Participants described parents struggling to understand the British education system. There was also discussion about tensions around language and religious education, with some parents questioning why mosque activities and teaching are delivered in English rather than Arabic. Community workers explained that accessibility for all Muslims, including non-Arabic speakers and children raised in Britain, is essential.

The conversation highlighted increasing concerns around children with special educational needs and neurodiversity, including autism and ADHD. Participants described how many Muslim parents remain reluctant to acknowledge diagnoses due to fear, stigma and previous negative experiences with community institutions. One speaker explained that some parents worry their child will be excluded from mosque activities if their needs become known. However, examples were also shared of inclusive approaches within mosque programmes, where children with additional needs were welcomed and supported.

"Things get contained and managed within the community, within households, within extended families... There's almost a hesitancy... I don't know how much of it is fear or shame or denial, but it's almost as if we keep it within."

Mental health stigma emerged as another central issue. The psychiatrist described how many Muslims struggle to reconcile faith with concepts of mental illness, often questioning whether difficulties stem from spiritual weakness, lack of

faith or supernatural causes such as *jinn*. They also highlighted the tendency within Muslim families to manage problems privately within the household or wider family network rather than approaching external services early.

“Mental illness can occur at any stage of one’s life. It is important to emphasise that there are a wide range of struggles under the umbrella of ‘mental illness’, which are sometimes forgotten...You can have faith, you can engage in your community, you can engage in your belief system, but you can still have mental illness”.

Participants acknowledged improvements within Birmingham’s mental health and social care systems over the past decade, including greater diversity among professionals and increased cultural awareness. However, they also spoke candidly about ongoing experiences of institutional bias, stereotyping and racism. One participant reflected that visibly Muslim women are still often assumed to be uneducated or unable to speak English fluently. Others described concerns about how Black Muslim boys and men are disproportionately criminalised and heavily medicated within mental health systems.

Participants also reflected on how Birmingham’s segregated geography shapes community experiences. Unlike cities such as Manchester, which they described as more integrated, Birmingham was portrayed as divided into distinct ethnic and religious “hotspots.” While this creates strong support networks and feelings of safety for some Muslims, it can also reinforce isolation, limit interaction with wider society and perpetuate stereotypes on both sides.

Despite these challenges, participants emphasised that Birmingham has developed a significant ecosystem of community-based support services. Many of these operate through partnerships between grassroots Muslim organisations and statutory services. The participants particularly praised organisations providing parenting support, women’s support and culturally adapted therapies.

“Most of the things that I come across are difficulties in terms of intimate relationships and navigating complex relationships...The kind of things that we may say lightly but actually are a really big burden on a lot of women.”

A key conclusion from the discussion was that access to services is not always the main issue; rather, trust, fear, stigma and previous experiences shape whether people are willing to engage. At the same time, they acknowledged that younger generations are increasingly aware of support through online resources and community networks.

The final part of the discussion focused on what kinds of projects most urgently require support and funding. Participants strongly identified youth work for teenage boys and young men as a major gap within Muslim communities. Parenting support was also identified as critically important, especially programmes that intervene early to strengthen families before problems escalate.

Muslim Women's Network UK

***Muslim Women's Network UK** is a Birmingham-based national charity that works to advance social justice, equality, and safety for Muslim women and girls across the UK. Founded in 2003, the organisation brings together women from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds and combines frontline support work with policy advocacy, research, and campaigning. The organisation is particularly known for its culturally and faith-sensitive approach to issues affecting Muslim women, including domestic abuse, mental health, forced marriage, discrimination, Islamophobia, economic abuse, and social exclusion. One of its central services is the national MWN Helpline, which provides multilingual advice, emotional support, counselling referrals, and advocacy support for women facing complex personal or family difficulties.*

The discussion with staff from the Birmingham based Muslim Women's Network UK (MWN UK) provided a detailed insight into the evolving challenges facing Muslim women and the ways in which grassroots Muslim-led organisations are attempting to respond to them. Across the conversation, participants repeatedly described how their own professional journeys had led them to recognise gaps within mainstream services when working with Muslim communities, particularly around domestic abuse, mental health, cultural sensitivity and women's rights. Many had originally worked within generic sectors such as social work, mental health services, refugee support, local government research and community development before eventually moving into Muslim-specific work.

One participant described being the only Muslim worker within a mental health organisation and becoming increasingly aware that many conversations around Islam, culture and women's experiences were either misunderstood or entirely absent. Another reflected on how social work practice often approached Muslim families with assumptions and predetermined narratives, without understanding family structures, religious frameworks or the pressures women experienced within their communities.

"Mainstream services often assume Muslim women are powerless and voiceless...Statutory organisations are referring people to us because they don't have the capacity or understanding to support Muslim women properly."

The complexity of issues emerging were highlighted through the MWN helpline. Staff explained that while domestic abuse remains the most consistent issue reported, cases are rarely straightforward or isolated. Women frequently contact the helpline regarding housing, divorce, child custody, immigration, financial hardship, coercive control or mental health concerns, with multiple issues often overlapping.

Workers explained that service users may initially describe problems in indirect ways rather than explicitly identifying abuse, reflecting both stigma and the normalisation of harmful behaviour within some family and community contexts. Staff therefore described the importance of taking time to listen, unpack experiences and identify the wider patterns affecting women's lives.

"There are services that are not culturally sensitive, and a lot of women feel that they won't be understood...When Muslim women talk to other Muslim women, they are able to reveal a bit more, feel comfortable telling us more, so we can advocate for them more effectively."

Participants explained that the helpline now records more than forty issue categories, many of which have expanded in recent years in response to changing patterns of abuse and vulnerability. New areas include economic abuse, tech abuse, coercive control, spiritual abuse, non-fatal strangulation and transnational abandonment. Staff noted that domestic abuse had consistently remained one of the highest reported issues, while mental health concerns increased significantly during the Covid-19 period. Housing insecurity, relationship breakdown and homelessness were also identified as recurring themes. Workers described how individual callers often experience several forms of abuse simultaneously, requiring the organisation to develop increasingly sophisticated procedures and referral systems.

The discussion also revealed how religious and cultural issues intersect with women's experiences of abuse. Staff described numerous cases involving Islamic divorce, coercion around marriage, misuse of religious authority and spiritual manipulation. One major issue discussed was the difficulty many women face in obtaining Islamic divorces, particularly when some Sharia councils are reluctant to grant an annulment even in cases involving extensive evidence of abuse. Participants argued that some women remain trapped in harmful marriages due to fears about community reputation, future remarriage prospects or pressure from religious authorities. Staff also spoke about how cultural practices are often incorrectly presented as religious obligations, leading women to believe they must remain patient and endure abuse to preserve family honour or fulfil expectations of being a "good Muslim woman."

"On average, victims experience 50 incidents of abuse before receiving effective help... Nobody wants to talk about it, nobody wants to link to it because of cultural taboos and honour...The issue often is that religion has been used to say to women, 'just be patient, put up with him, if you're good to him, he might change.'"

Another important theme was the role of cultural silence and stigma. Participants from Afghan, Yemeni, Pakistani and wider Muslim backgrounds are often discouraged from speaking openly. One participant described how younger generations sometimes remain tied to older cultural norms that have become "fossilised" within diaspora communities, even while attitudes in countries of origin may have evolved. Others highlighted the fear many women have regarding the consequences of seeking support.

Participants repeatedly stressed the importance of culturally and faith-sensitive support. Examples were given of women disclosing experiences of coercive control, abuse or mental distress only after establishing trust with staff who understood both Islamic concepts and family dynamics. Staff described situations where mainstream professionals, including police and health services, failed to recognise forms of abuse such as coercive control or spiritual abuse until MWN UK intervened and ad-

vocated on behalf of service users. In several cases, the organisation had to educate statutory agencies directly about domestic abuse dynamics affecting Muslim women.

MWNUK has also launched the Muslim Safety Net (MSN) Helpline in response to a report BY MWNUK published following the racially and religiously aggravated riots of summer 2024. The report, *Anti-Muslim Hate – Concerns and Experiences*, found that 80% of victims do not report anti-Muslim incidents, indicating that the true scale of hatred and discrimination is likely to be significantly underestimated.

“The stats that come from the helpline then inform our campaigns, research and advocacy.”

The conversation also explored the broader structural pressures facing Muslim-led organisations themselves. Staff described continual struggles for recognition and funding despite carrying out specialist work that mainstream organisations increasingly rely upon. Participants explained that larger organisations frequently approach MWNUK for access to Muslim communities, research participation or specialist expertise while failing to adequately resource or acknowledge the organisation’s contribution. Staff expressed frustration that Muslim-led organisations are often expected to fill gaps left by statutory services while simultaneously having to constantly prove their legitimacy.

“We are inundated with people who want to do research on Muslim women, want our data, want access to our communities, but no one wants to recognise or resource us properly.”

Alongside its crisis support work, the organisation has also developed wider projects aimed at shifting public narratives around Muslim communities. Participants discussed initiatives such as Muslim Heritage Month and the Muslim Creators Network, which were created in response to increasing anti-Muslim hostility and negative media portrayals.

The discussion ultimately portrayed MWNUK as operating not simply as a support service but as a bridging space between Muslim communities and wider British institutions. Staff positioned their work as both practical and political: supporting women through immediate crises while also attempting to challenge structural inequalities, institutional failures and negative assumptions about Muslim communities. Throughout the conversation there was a strong sense that much of the organisation’s work involves bridging worlds – combining professional expertise with religious literacy, advocating within mainstream systems while maintaining community trust, and attempting to create culturally grounded responses to issues that are often poorly understood within wider policy and service frameworks.

Dr Saleema Burney

Academic

Saleema Burney is a British Muslim researcher and sociologist of religion whose work focuses on British Muslim communities, Muslim women's identities, lived religion, integration, social cohesion, and the role of religion in contemporary British society. She has been affiliated with the University of Birmingham as a Research Fellow.

Dr Saleema Burney's research investigated Muslim women navigating multiple identities and responsibilities across family, community and wider society. Her PhD, *British Muslim Women Between Community, Country and God*, explored the experiences of publicly active Muslim women and challenged common stereotypes that portray Muslim women as passive or isolated. Instead, she found that many develop what she calls "hybrid identities", combining strong religious commitments with active engagement in wider British society.

"As women matured, they became more confident, they actively were seeking areas of work with people outside their community."

Dr Burney's reflections highlighted the persistent misrepresentation of Muslim women and the ways in which this continues to obscure their significant social, civic and community contributions. She emphasised that Muslim women are often framed through narrow public narratives that fail to recognise their resilience, leadership and proactive engagement with wider society.

She noted the important generational shift through which many older Muslim women, having navigated the demands of family and community life, emerge as confident and outward-facing contributors who actively build bridges across communities and create opportunities for social change. Dr Burney underscored the role of faith as a source of resilience and balance, enabling Muslim women to negotiate multiple responsibilities while sustaining meaningful community engagement.

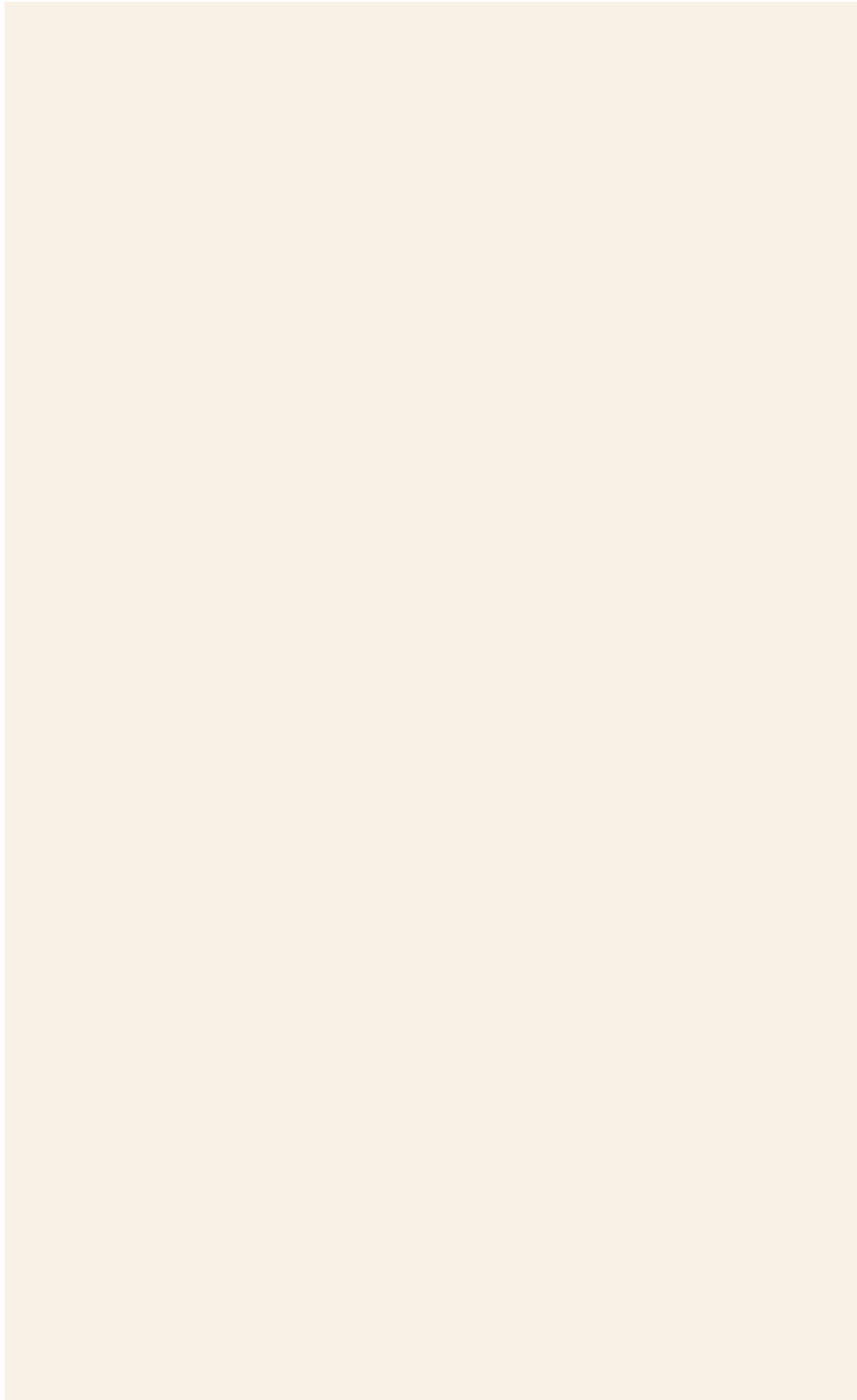
"The faith aspect came out really strongly and I couldn't ignore that... This succinctly highlights the importance of faith as a motivating force in women's lives and community work."

At the same time, she pointed to ongoing challenges and stressed the need for more strategic engagement with government and public institutions, stronger support for grassroots women-led initiatives, and greater collaboration with male community leaders if meaningful and lasting change is to be achieved.



"They were working in ways that were giving back to the British community at the same time the communities are getting lambasted for being insular...We should be able to be a faith community and citizens in the same place."

Her reflections reinforced the importance of recognising Muslim women not as passive subjects of policy concern, but as active agents of community development whose experiences and leadership offer critical insight for shaping more inclusive and effective responses to contemporary social challenges.



Appendix 2

Key:
 Ward Boundaries in force from May 2018
 Constituencies Boundaries 2024
 City Boundary

BIRMINGHAM WARD MAP (As of 3rd May 2018)



Produced by the Survey and Mapping Team, Transportation and Connectivity, Place, Prosperity & Sustainability Directorate, Email: survey&mapping@birmingham.gov.uk Tel. 303 3867.
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P:\ArcGIS\CityMap\CityMapA3 - New Wards 2018.mxd

Birmingham Ward map with districts 2024 Ref: Birmingham City Council

Birmingham's Muslims: Conversations on grassroots community and change: An analytical overview

CURRENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Figure 2 below shows the most followed religions in Birmingham according to the 2021 Census. Islam was the second most followed religion in Birmingham, followed by 29.9% of the population.

Figure 2: Most followed religions in Birmingham: 2021

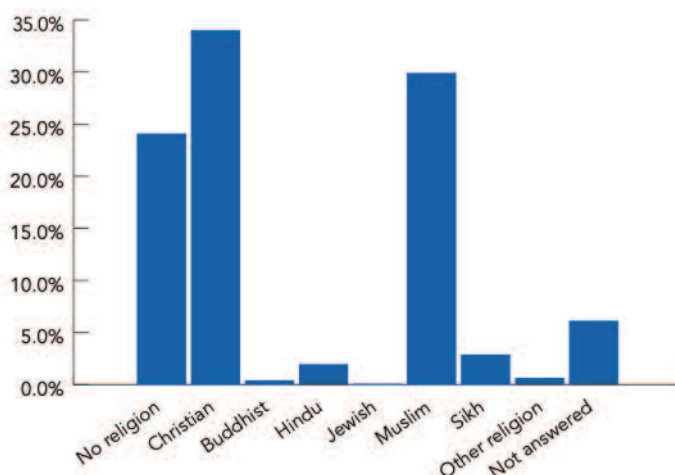
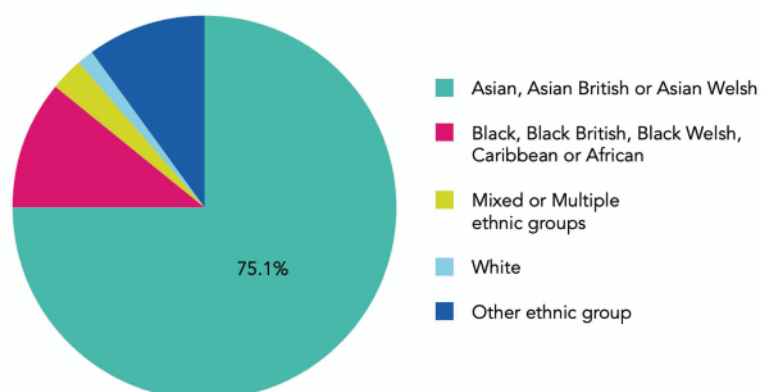


Figure 3 shows the ethnicity of Muslims living in Birmingham, according to the 2021 Census. The highest percentage ethnic group was Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh (75.1%), followed by Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African (10.8%), 'Other' ethnic group (9.8%), Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups (2.7%), and White (1.5%)

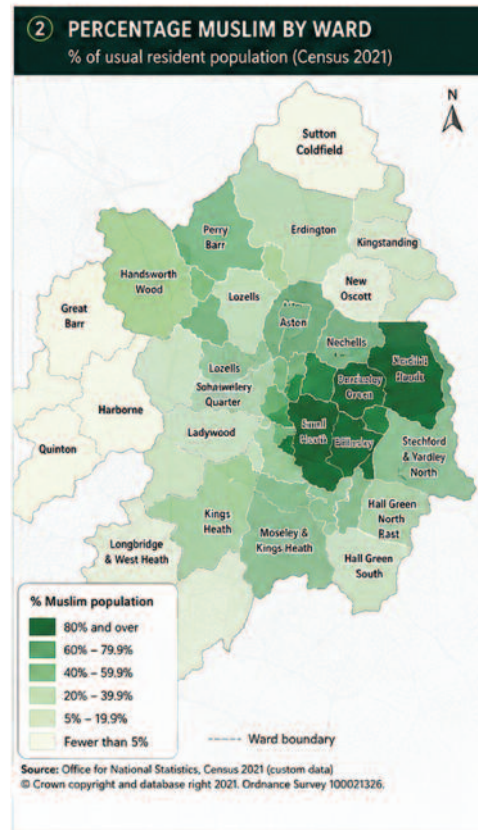
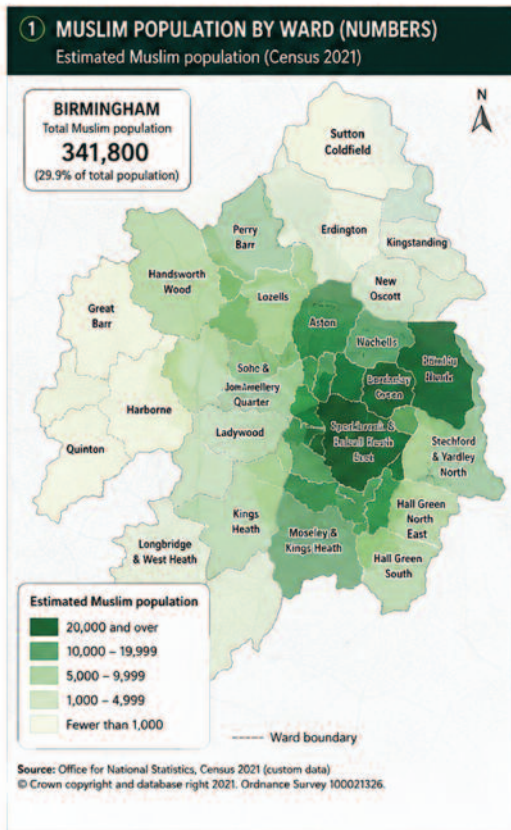
Figure 3: Ethnicity of Muslims in Birmingham: 2021



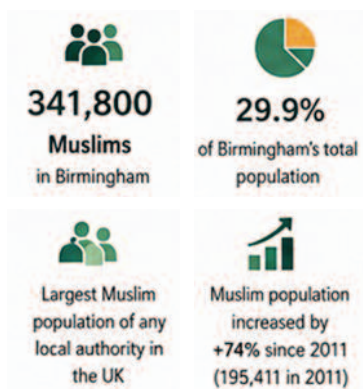
Map of Birmingham and Muslim populations

Ref: Islamic healthy faith settings toolkit, Birmingham City Council

Ref: AI generated



KEY FACTS (CENSUS 2021)



ABOUT THESE MAPS

These maps use data from the 2021 Census. Religious affiliation in England and Wales is self-defined. "Muslim" includes all usual residents aged 3+ who identified as Muslim.

“ Census 2021 recorded approximately 341,800 Muslims in Birmingham, representing 29.9% of the city's usual resident population – the highest of any local authority in the United Kingdom. ”

SOURCE

Office for National Statistics, Census 2021 (custom data request)
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Ordnance Survey 100021326.

Maps produced for research and illustrative purposes.

Appendix 3

Muslim Diversity across the West Midlands

Birmingham is best understood within the wider West Midlands metropolitan area, where neighbouring authorities including Dudley, Wolverhampton, Solihull and Coventry form an increasingly interconnected economic, social and cultural region. The establishment of the West Midlands Combined Authority and the directly elected Mayor has further strengthened regional collaboration and governance. Participants in this research consistently described Birmingham as the principal cultural, educational and faith-based hub for many Muslim communities across the wider West Midlands, reflecting the concentration of mosques, community organisations, educational institutions and civic initiatives within the city.

At the same time, the Census ethnicity categories provide only a partial picture of Birmingham's Muslim population. Broad classifications often combine culturally, ethnically and racially diverse communities without reflecting their internal diversity. For example, Somali communities may be recorded under categories such as Black African, African or Somali, while religious affiliation is collected separately. Likewise, the Arab category encompasses people from a wide range of national, linguistic, cultural and faith backgrounds. Similar limitations exist across the wider ethnicity classifications. Consequently, no single Census dataset can fully capture the composition of Birmingham's Muslim population. A more accurate understanding requires bringing together data from multiple sources alongside informed demographic estimates to better reflect the city's diversity.

Throughout this report, therefore, Census statistics should be understood as an important starting point rather than a complete representation of Birmingham's Muslim communities.

Ref: Birmingham City Council

Total Population & Share:

Birmingham's Muslim population stands at 341,811 residents, making up 29.9% of the city's total population and reflecting a 45.8% growth rate since the 2011 Census.

Youth Demographics:

The community has a remarkably young profile, with 33% of Birmingham Muslims under the age of 16, significantly higher than the city-wide average of 22%.

Adult Age Distribution:

The vast majority of the community falls into the working-age bracket (ages 16–64) at 63%, while elderly residents aged 65 and over account for just 4% of the population.

National Identity & Passports:

Identity metrics show strong domestic alignment, with 76% of Birmingham Muslims identifying their national identity as "British or English only" and 78% holding a UK passport.

Birthplace & Language:

A majority of the community (57%) was born within the UK—while 26% were born in South-eastern Asia—and 71% speak English as their main language, followed by Urdu at 7%.

Ref: Office for National Statistics

Top 10 Birmingham Wards by Muslim Population %

The highest density of Muslim residents is found in the following specific wards:

- **Small Heath:** 85.9%
- **Alum Rock:** 83.7%
- **Bordesley Green:** 80.2%
- **Sparkhill:** 79.2%
- **Sparkbrook & Balsall Heath East:** 77.4%
- **Heartlands:** 75%
- **Ward End:** 73%
- **Aston:** 70%
- **Lozells:** 68%
- **Newtown:** 65%

Ref: Birmingham City Observatory

Census 2021 Ethnicity Briefing — gives Birmingham ethnic breakdown, including:

- Pakistani/British Pakistani: **17.0%**
- Bangladeshi/British Bangladeshi: **4.2%**
- Indian/British Indian: **5.8%**
- Black African: **5.8%**
- Arab: **1.7%**
- Mixed: **4.8%**

Ref: Office for National Statistics

Somali Population

The 2021 Census recorded 16,964 people identifying as Somali in Birmingham, while 10,812 people in Birmingham noted Somalia as their country of birth, reflecting both an established refugee community and a growing UK-born second and third generation. Birmingham is home to one of the largest Somali communities outside London. This represents approximately 1.5% of Birmingham's population.

Arab Population

The 2021 Census recorded 19,196 residents identifying as Arab approximately **1.7% of Birmingham's population**. Birmingham's Arab community has grown significantly over recent decades and includes people with family origins across the Middle East and North Africa, including Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and other Arab countries.

Ref: Birmingham City Council

African Population

The 2021 Census recorded 66,854 Black African residents in Birmingham (5.8% of the city's population). Birmingham's African Muslim communities are highly diverse and include Somali, Sudanese, Nigerian, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Ghanaian, Kenyan and other African heritage populations. Although the Census does not record religion by detailed African ethnicity at local authority level, community estimates suggest that around 30,000–40,000 African Muslims live in Birmingham, making African Muslims one of the city's fastest-growing and most diverse Muslim constituencies.

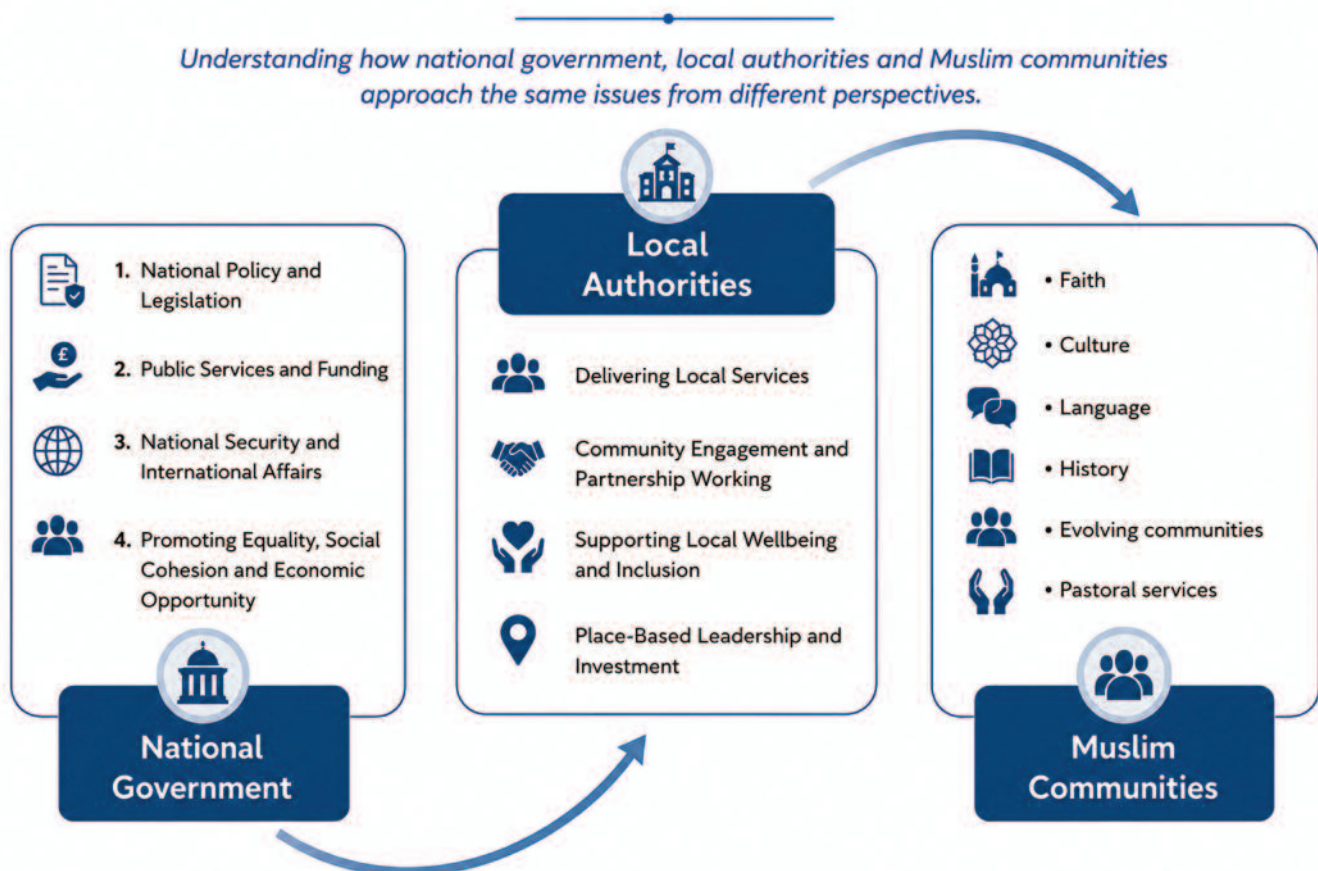
Converts

Although no official statistics exist because the Census does not record religious conversion, community organisations and practitioners consistently identify Birmingham as having one of the largest Muslim convert populations outside London. Based on national estimates and Birmingham's share of the UK's Muslim population, it is reasonable to estimate that the city is home to approximately 5,000–8,000 Muslim converts, although this figure should be regarded as indicative rather than definitive.

Appendix 4

National Government-Local Authority-Community

Effective engagement requires an understanding that each sector operates within a different context. National government is primarily concerned with legislation, policy and national priorities and local authorities focus on place-based service delivery and civic leadership. Muslims, like all other cultural and faith-based communities, shape their community activities by what is important to them. This includes faith, culture, language and other supportive ventures - these initiatives speak to an internal agenda. Recognising these different starting points can help create more constructive conversations and stronger collaborative relationships.



Appendix 5

Emerging Trends

One of the clearest findings of this research was the emergence of a diverse range of independent community initiatives operating outside both statutory structures and traditional Muslim organisational frameworks. Rather than replacing existing institutions, these initiatives are filling important gaps through women-led support, youth development, mentoring, arts and culture, entrepreneurship, pastoral care and self-organised community networks. Together they represent an important source of social innovation and community resilience, illustrating how Birmingham's Muslim communities are developing new forms of leadership, belonging and civic contribution.

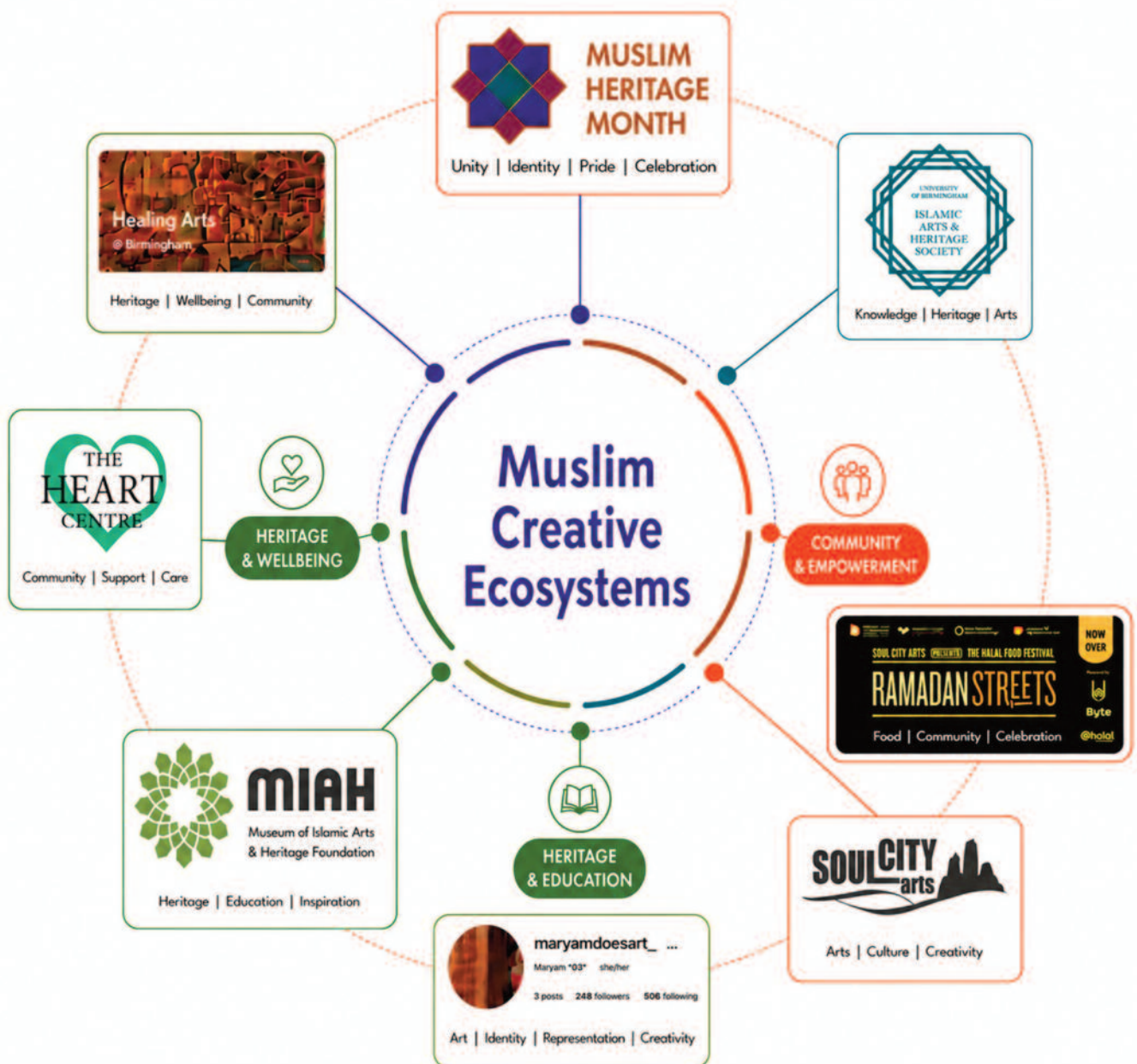


Appendix 6

Examples of Birmingham Based Initiatives

Creative Initiatives

Some examples of Birmingham's emerging Muslim creative ecosystem. The examples shown are not exhaustive but demonstrate the diversity of organisations, individuals and initiatives contributing to the city's cultural life.



Philanthropy & Community

Alongside Birmingham's established Muslim institutions, a growing network of community-led initiatives is responding creatively to local social needs. These organisations work across areas including youth development, family support, women's leadership, mentoring, food poverty, entrepreneurship, community wellbeing and social innovation.



Muslim Diverse Cultural Cuisines

Birmingham's Muslim culinary landscape highlights restaurants and food enterprises that reflect the city's rich cultural heritage. Beyond providing food, these businesses create spaces for cultural exchange, entrepreneurship, community gathering and public engagement, making an important contribution to Birmingham's social and economic life.



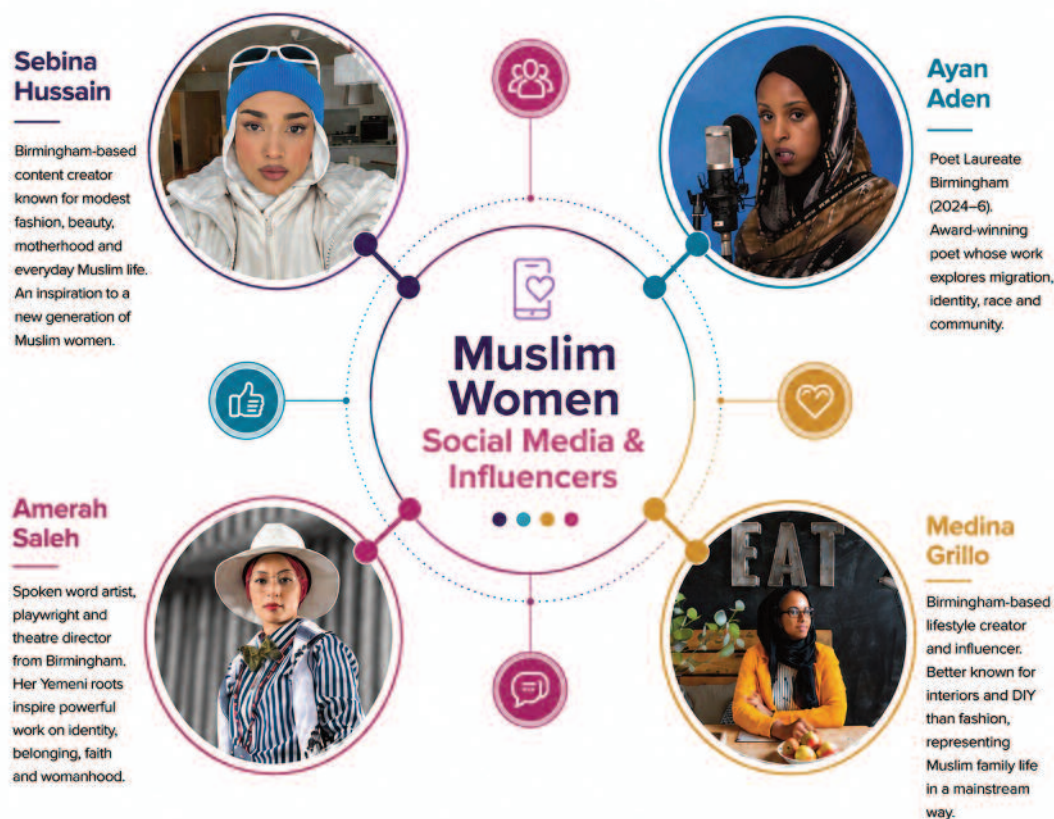
Social Media & Influencers

Like communities across the UK and globally, Birmingham's Muslims now operate within an increasingly decentralised digital environment, where social media platforms, podcasts, YouTube channels and online influencers shape religious learning, identity and public debate. As a result, religious and social authority is no longer concentrated solely within local institutions but is increasingly shared with, and sometimes challenged by, a diverse online ecosystem.

Positively, there has been a significant increase in accessible, evidence-based discussions around mental and physical health, with Muslim doctors, psychologists and other professionals using digital platforms to improve health literacy and reduce stigma within Muslim communities.

But there is also a concerning influence of online subcultures such as the emergence of the so-called Muslim “manosphere”, which promotes narrow and often adversarial understandings of masculinity, gender relations and Muslim identity, particularly among young men.

At the same time, social media has contributed to the rise of entrepreneurial “halal hustle” content, alongside Muslim creators focusing on fashion, food, wellbeing and personal development. Muslim women are increasingly shaping Birmingham's digital landscape through online platforms that combine faith, creativity, entrepreneurship, education and community engagement. These influencers are creating new spaces for storytelling, lifestyle content, modest fashion, parenting, wellbeing, business and civic participation, while reaching audiences far beyond the city.



Appendix 7

FURTHER READING

- **The “Trojan Horse” Plot and the Fear of Muslim Power in British State Schools**
To cite this article: Tahir Abbas (2017) The “Trojan Horse” Plot and the Fear of Muslim Power in British State Schools, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*
To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2017.1313974>
- **An Analysis of Race Equality Policy and Practice in the City of Birmingham, UK**
Tahir Abbas & Muhammad Anwar (2005) An Analysis of Race Equality Policy and Practice in the City of Birmingham, UK, *Local Government Studies*
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0300393042000332855>
- **Beyond the Racialised Islamophobic Narrative: Muslim Identity as a Protective Factor Against Radicalisation**
Tahir Abbas, Aston University, UK Accepted for publication in *Critical Sociology*
To cite: Abbas, T. (2025) Accepted for publication in *Critical Sociology*
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Background Paper for COMPAS, University of Oxford
By Dr Tahir Abbas
Abbas, T. (2006, Jan 1). Muslims in Birmingham, UK: Background paper for the University of Oxford, Centre on Migration Policy and Society.
- **The Suspect Citizen: Institutional Islamophobia, Prevent, and the British Muslim Experience**
Judith Bruchhaus and Tahir Abbas
<https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481251385368>
- **Missing Muslims Report: Identifying The Priorities for Birmingham**
Dr Chris Allen, Özlem Ögtem-Young
University of Birmingham, College of Social Sciences, 2017
<https://wallscometumblingdown.wordpress.com/2017/10/26/briefing-missing-muslims-report-identifying-the-priorities-for-birmingham-birminghams-muslims-project/>
- **Young Brummie and Muslim in the Problematised City: Investigating Identity and Belonging Among Muslim Youth in Birmingham, England**
Chris Allen, *University of Leicester, UK*
***Journal of Social Inclusion*, 12(1), 2021**
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- **Robert Jenrick complained of ‘not seeing another white face’ in Birmingham neighbourhood**
Guardian 7 October 2025
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- **Birmingham Isn’t Broken — Hard-Right Britain Is**
Posted by Hasan Patel Oct 23, 2025
<https://eaworldview.com/2025/10/birmingham-isnt-broken-hard-right-britain-is/>

- **Branding Birmingham: The Audacity of the Demographic Dividend**
Tahir Abbas Published 26 March 2026
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Birmingham - Communities Profiles

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<https://wallscometumblingdown.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/paper-3-birmingham-muslims-and-islam-socio-economic-context-june-2017-chrisallen1.pdf>
- **Muslim Community Health Profile – Birmingham City Council 2020**
https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50305/community_health_profiles/2775/muslim_community_health_profile
- **Somali Community Health Profile – Birmingham City Council 2020**
https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50305/community_health_profiles/2780/somali_community_health_profile
- **A community in the shadows: experiences of a Somali community in Birmingham**
Suad Duale, Clinician, Community activist 21 Feb 2024
<https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/blogs/experiences-somali-community-birmingham>
- **Arab Community Health Profile – Birmingham City Council 2020**
https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/download/6353/community_health_profiles_-_arab
- **Muslim Communities and Covid 19: A report on the impacts of Covid 19 on Muslim communities in Birmingham 2022**
https://www.open-access.bcu.ac.uk/16215/1/CSU_2022_451_ESRC_report_v7_-25-1-23.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- **Health inequalities initiative working with Muslim community groups.**
www.birmingham.gov.uk/community-funding
- **Islamic healthy faith settings toolkit**
https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/23660/islamic_healthy_faith_settings_toolkit
- **F. Kokab (2025) "Silence is Gratitude" – University of Birmingham**
Qualitative research on Muslim women navigating work, faith, and modesty.
www.theses.bham.ac.uk (forthcoming)
- **Equality in Employment Monitoring Report – Birmingham City Council (2022–23)**
Workforce equality; representation of minority and Muslim staff in local government
www.birmingham.gov.uk/equality
- **Muslim Women's Network UK – Annual & Thematic Reports (2022–2024)**
Casework and data on Muslim women's experiences in the West Midlands (violence, employment, discrimination).
<https://www.mwnuk.co.uk/reports>
- **West Midlands Police Diversity Report (2023–24)**
Representation of Muslim/Asian women in policing and public service roles.
www.west-midlands.police.uk

Community – General

- **British Muslims in Numbers: Census Summary Report 2025**
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Andy Turner and Aisha Khan
<https://www.gold.ac.uk/faithsunit/current-projects/muslim-youth-futures/>
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Ella Dunthorne
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<https://amhp.org.uk/mmc-survey-muslim-mh-schools/>
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- **Mosques in Britain: A landmark study of faith infrastructure**
Ayaan Institute: Jahangir Mohammed, Beatrice Bianchi and Umar Hussain
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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309616357_A_minority_within_a_minority_A_report_on_converters_to_Islam_in_the_United_Kingdom

Equalities

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- **British Muslims: Striving For Fairness (Muslim Council of Britain, 2024)**
<https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/MCB-Striving-For-Fairness-Summary.pdf>
- **Anti-Muslim Hate & Safety Reports – MWNUK & National Press (2024–25)**
Data and case studies of Islamophobia and its gendered impacts in Birmingham.
<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2025/feb/19/uk-islamophobic-assaults-surged-by-73-in-2024-anti-hate-charity-reports>
- **'We see misogyny every day': how Andrew Tate's twisted ideology infiltrated British schools**
The Guardian Sally Weale Thu 2 Feb 2023
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/feb/02/andrew-tate-twisted-ideology-infiltrated-british-schools>
- **How long do people live with domestic abuse? SafeLives**
<https://safelives.org.uk/about-domestic-abuse/what-is-domestic-abuse/facts-and-figures/length-of-abuse/>
- **British Muslim Women Between Community, Country and God: A Case Study of Successful Identification**
Dr Saleema Burney
<https://soas-repository.worktribe.com/output/382573/british-muslim-women-between-community-country-and-god-a-case-study-of-successful-identification>



Creating the future begins with understanding the past and acting in the present. Our history shapes who we are, but it should not imprison us. By learning from those who came before us, remaining fully engaged in the present, and taking purposeful action today, we lay the foundations for a better future—for ourselves, our communities and the generations to come.

