By gathering 39 local scholars, experts, and civil society activists specialized in racism and human rights, the fourth edition of the European Islamophobia Report addresses a still timely and politically important issue. All 34 country reports included in this book follow a unique structure that is convenient, first, for comparing country reports and, second, for selected readings on a particular topic such as politics, employment, or education with regards to Islamophobia across Europe.

The present report investigates in detail the underlying dynamics that directly or indirectly support the rise of anti-Muslim racism in Europe. This extends from Islamophobic statements spread in national media to laws and policies that restrain the fundamental rights of European Muslim citizens. As a result, the European Islamophobia Report 2018 discusses the impact of anti-Muslim discourse on human rights, multiculturalism, and the state of law in Europe.

This fourth edition of our report highlights how European societies are challenged by the rise of violent far-right groups that do not only preach hatred of Muslims but also participate in the organization of bloody terror attacks. The rise of far-right terrorist groups such as AFO (Action of Operational Forces) in France or the network Hannibal in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland confirms EUROPOL's alarming surveys on the growing danger of right-wing terrorism.

This year, SETA worked in cooperation with the Leopold Weiss Institute, an Austrian NGO based in Vienna dedicated to the research of Muslims in Europe. In addition, the European Union has funded the European Islamophobia Report 2018 through the program "Civil Society Dialogue Between EU and Turkey (CSD-V)".

About SETA
Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) is a non-profit research institute based in Turkey dedicated to innovative studies on national, regional and international issues. SETA is the leading think tank in Turkey and has offices in Ankara, Istanbul, Washington D.C. and Cairo. The objective of SETA is to produce up-to-date and accurate knowledge and analyses in the fields of politics, economy, and society, and inform policy makers and the public on changing political, economic, social, and cultural conditions. Through research reports, publications, brainstorming sessions, conferences and policy recommendations, SETA seeks to guide leaders in government, civil society, and business, and contributes to informed decision making mechanisms.
EUROPEAN ISLAMOPHOBIA REPORT
2018

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ISLAMOPHOBIA IN MALTA
NATIONAL REPORT 2018

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Disclaimer: Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the European Islamophobia Report are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union and Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Directorate for EU Affairs.

Executive Summary

In 2018, Malta did not experience blatant Islamophobia. Nonetheless, Malta remained on the route of the global circulation of Islamophobic statements and images. Such materials were often translated from foreign sources and adapted to the local context by ‘patriots’ — or, more correctly, far-right parties.

The ongoing establishment of far-right parties espousing Islamophobic and xenophobic views is on the rise especially during the period of preparation for the European Parliament elections, where there are candidates from two different parties contesting. The compilation of this report is based on information primarily from the Internet, which includes websites of Islamophobic groups, the media, and also social media. Together with this, studies and reports conducted by European organizations and agencies were also taken into consideration. Some of the publications quoted here are from 2018 and others predated this year.

The author also took into account personal encounters with Muslims in Malta, both Maltese Muslims and foreign Muslims and their experiences and recommendations.

In brief, the most prominent points discussed in this report include the recent rise of the new far-right party Ghaqda patrijotti Maltin, which is contesting the European Parliament elections in May 2019. Another point is the rise of Islamophobic and hateful comments and memes on the Internet, especially on social media. Publications and reports in Malta which show statistical data are very sparse. There is little research by Maltese institutions on Islamophobia. There is an evident need for additional research and policies in Malta, especially by government entities. The Muslim community complains in closed groups unemployment as a result of the headscarf and other discrimination that the community encounters. On a national level, other than the publications and initiatives carried out by NGOs, the efforts made by the European Commission Coordinator David Friggieri are perhaps the most documented.
ISLAMOPHOBIA IN MALTA

Sommarju Ėżekuttiv


L-awtur qies ukoll laqgħat personali ma ‘Musulmani f’Malta, kemm Musulmani Maltin kif ukoll Musulmani barranin u l-esperjenzi u r-rakkomandazzjonijiet tagħhom.

Country Profile

Country: Malta
Type of Regime: Parliamentary Republic
Form of Government: Parliamentary System
Ruling Parties: Labour Party and Nationalist Party
Last Elections: Labour Party won by a majority of 54.83% (39 seats), Nationalist party has 30 seats.
Total Population: 460,297 (2017) (Eurostat)
Major Languages: Maltese and English
Official Religion: Catholicism
Statistics on Islamophobia: No data available
Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: 71% of Maltese respondents thought that discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin was widespread. (ENAR Shadow Report 2013-2017)
Muslim Population (% of Population): 0.3% of the overall Maltese population (MaltaToday Survey)
Main Muslim Community Organizations: World Islamic Call Society and Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Malta
Far-Right Parties: Imperium Europa
Far-Right Movements: Moviment Patrijotti Maltin
Limitations to Islamic practices
- Hijab Ban: No
- Halal Slaughter Ban: No
- Minaret Ban: No
- Circumcision Ban: No
- Burka Ban: No
- Prayer Ban: No
Introduction

According to a research published in 2018, as shown in Figure 1, a significant number of Maltese people interact with immigrants on a daily basis. Yet, the perception of immigrants remains negative, especially for immigrants coming from non-EU countries. Around 0.3% of the overall Maltese population identify as practicing Islam.1 Further to this, there are other Muslims in the country who are foreigners; however, overall under 3% of the population in Malta identify as Muslims.2

Much of the documented evidence on racism and Islamophobia in Malta and literature that also informs this study, tended to focus on the experiences of sub-Saharan African asylum refugees/undocumented migrants rather than a broader approach that explores the experiences of ethnic and religious minorities in Malta or the broader migrant community.3

Figure 1: Interaction with immigrants.

This is a product of the fact that the Muslim community in Malta is generally homogenised. Terms such as ‘Arab’, ‘North African’ ‘illegal immigrant’ are taken to mean the same thing and to refer to a category of persons that are both ‘foreign’ and ‘Muslim’.4

4 Ibid.
This indirectly influences the perception of Muslims in Malta, whereby Maltese Muslims are not identified as Maltese but rather as foreigners and this is also reflected in the research carried out by governmental entities and agencies in Malta. Figures 2 and 3, show that in March and in November 2018, there was a surge in the fairly negative outlook on immigrants in Malta, notwithstanding the lack of any incident.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Employment

Women wearing the hijab in Malta have remarked many times that it is a struggle to find employment. From the data found on the website of the Department for Industrial and Employment Relations, as of the academic year 2013-2014, there were 273 primary and secondary schools in Malta, out of which only 12 were for Muslim students. However, at the end of the year, Mariam Al Batool published in 2018 which tells the story of a Maltese woman who allegedly converted to Islam at 24, however, however, there is no record of any reported racism or discrimination in Malta, 20% of immigrant respondents declared having experienced discrimination in the workplace. Another 15% declared having experienced discrimination in the workplace.

Relying on data of racism and discrimination, research found that 33% of Muslims in Malta have remarked many times that it is a struggle to find employment. From the data found on the website of the Department for Industrial and Employment Relations, as of the academic year 2013-2014, there were 273 primary and secondary schools in Malta, out of which only 12 were for Muslim students. However, at the end of the year, Mariam Al Batool published in 2018 which tells the story of a Maltese woman who allegedly converted to Islam at 24. In March and in November 2018, there was a surge in the fairly negative outlook on immigrants in Malta, notwithstanding the lack of any incident. Furthermore, there is a lack of interest in converted Muslims in Malta have remarked many times that it is a struggle to find employment. From the data found on the website of the Department for Industrial and Employment Relations, as of the academic year 2013-2014, there were 273 primary and secondary schools in Malta, out of which only 12 were for Muslim students. However, at the end of the year, Mariam Al Batool published in 2018 which tells the story of a Maltese woman who allegedly converted to Islam at 24, however, there is no record of any reported racism or discrimination in Malta, 20% of immigrant respondents declared having experienced discrimination in the workplace. Another 15% declared having experienced discrimination in the workplace.

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trial and Employment Relations in Malta, there is no record of any reported racism or discrimination on the basis of alleged discriminatory treatment when employed or seeking employment for the year 2018. However, an article published in 2018 which tells the story of a Maltese woman who converted to Islam reveals that women wearing the hijab find it difficult to find employment. Furthermore, there is a lack of statistical data which documents the official numbers of the Muslims in Malta.

Relying on data of racism and discrimination, research found that 33% of sub-Saharan African immigrants feel discriminated on the basis of their skin colour. When it comes to employment in Malta, 20% of immigrant respondents declared having experienced discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or background when looking for work in the 12 months preceding the survey. Another 15% declared having experienced discrimination in the workplace.

Education

As of the September 2018 academic year, Mariam Al Batool School, which offered primary and secondary education for Muslim students, closed its doors for secondary education because of financial difficulties. Imam Mohammed El Sadi, the most known imam and a leader in the Muslim community in Malta, requested that Islam religion lessons be provided in government schools in the absence of an Islamic school in Malta. To this day, most Muslim students sit for Ethics lessons at secondary school level instead of Catholism lessons. However, students in primary school do not have an alternative to the lesson on Catholicism. This also follows a controversy in 2017 regarding Islam religion lessons in public schools.

There has been no curriculum material reported as Islamophobic in content. Inclusion has been encouraged by educators in the last few years. However, there is a need for educators to be informed about Islam and Muslims, as such information is not provided to them and they struggle to deal with pupils in their classes who practice Islam.

Politics

The last general election in Malta was held in 2017. The far-right movement Ghaqda Patrijotti Maltin (Maltese Patriots) participated in the election with a candidate in

each district. Although, the party claims to be simply patriotic it has issued a number of controversial statements some of which can be categorised as Islamophobic, xenophobic, and racist. Fortunately, none of the candidates were elected to parliament. Most of their slogans oppose integration and foreigners in Malta. They usually highlight their opposition to Islam, while they have been organising a number of protests and gaining support in the last years. One of the recent protests opposed Muslims praying in public places: they held an event where they served pork sandwiches at the same spot where Muslims had organised prayer gatherings.

Figure 4: One of the electoral proposals by the Maltese Patriot Party for the European Parliament elections against integration.

Figure 5: Prominent member of the MPM (Maltese Patriots movement, far-right) claiming that by accepting migrants/asylum-seekers/foreigners Malta risks the invasion of ISIS members.


Albeit this party is not represented in parliament, there are a number of members of parliament of the Nationalist Party and the Labour Party who have expressed xenophobic sentiments and also linked terrorism with the burqa. These views are usually expressed on their social media pages, while it should be made clear that they are not members of Ghaqda Patrijotti Maltin. In a study carried out in 2015, Malta featured as one of the countries where residents are the least comfortable with someone from a different religion; 46% of respondents expressed such a sentiment. Thirty-nine percent of respondents claimed to feel ‘totally uncomfortable,’ ranking Malta second in this category. Furthermore, in view of the 2019 European Parliament elections, certain candidates have also expressed Islamophobic and racist sentiments, especially in light of immigration.

Media

For the country level analysis, when comparing the average estimate given by respondents to the actual share of non-EU born persons residing in each EU Member State in 2017, on average in the EU, nearly three in ten (29%) respondents are not able to estimate the proportion of their country’s population that consists of immigrants. This proportion varies significantly across countries and an alarming 50% of the Maltese population miscalculates this number.

Figure 6: Interaction with immigrants. Source: Eurobarometer 2018, Integration of immigrants in the EU 2018.

The media has been a contributing factor to distorting the figures of immigrants in Malta. As formerly discussed most Maltese do not distinguish between an asylum-seeker/immigrant/refugee and a Muslim. Although, there are no particular media outlets which promote Islamophobic content, many of the outlets try to promote a discussion on Islam and taking into account that most of the media personnel are not knowledgeable on the topic, some statements have led to an unbalanced discussion. Additionally, many statements are difficult to understand and cause misunderstandings. Lovin Malta, Malta Today, and Time of Malta are amongst the media outlets which encourage inclusion and integration of Muslims in Malta. As a newspaper, Time of Malta, has blocked the comments section when reporting on sensitive matters such as immigration and Muslims to avoid racist and Islamophobic comments. Furthermore, Lovin Malta creates content which challenges the Maltese people’s perception about Muslims in a positive way.

Justice System
Hate speech continues to be one of the concerning priorities that need to be addressed adequately on both a legal and cultural level. Consequently, the justice system is now being faced with a number of reports of hate speech. One would hope that these decisions would then encourage new legislation to better deal with such occurrences.

In 2016, two people were fined 3,000 Euro each for inciting racial hatred through racist comments posted on a public Facebook page. Furthermore, the first judgement dealing with Islamophobic comments on Facebook was issued in 2018 and has since then been appealed. A report was filed online to the Cyber Crime Unit. The comments included ones against the hijab and swear words against a Maltese Muslim woman, with incitement that she is “sent her back to her country”. The magistrate in this case decided that the comments did not amount to hate speech and that whilst they were insulting, simply warned the computer user to be more cautious with online behaviour. As a reaction to this, several NGOs issued a joint statement to reject the decision.

Internet
The Internet is the most prevalent space for Islamophobic comments (Fig. 5). Social media pages such as that of the Ghaqda Patrijotti Maltin are flooded with Islam-

17. “Submissions to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Malta: During its 31st Session 2018”, The Platform of Human Rights Organisations in Malta (PHROM) on Human Rights in Malta, 5-16 November 2018, p. 3.
ophobic comments and posters. Online comments and fake news are not monitored by any institution. Hate speech is codified under the Maltese Criminal Law Article 82A (1)\footnote{Criminal Code, Chapter 9 of the Laws of Malta, Article 82A (1)} which includes “written or printed material” and on the basis of religion, amongst others. However, case law is sparse on this subject - although hate speech is always on the rise. One of the most important campaigns has been the Council of Europe’s “No Hate Speech” Movement. On the campaign’s website the reporting procedures of the respective party countries are included to facilitate reporting. However, Malta is missing. Several other organisations in Malta, such as the People for Change Foundation, have sought to create their own reporting mechanisms; however, they are not very popular with victims of hate speech.\footnote{“People for Change Foundation”, http://www.pfcemalta.org/report-racism-malta.html, (Access date: 2 September 2019).} The above reporting mechanism has been relaunched in 2018, with the aim of encouraging reporting.

![Figure 7: A post by the Maltese Patriots on their Facebook group page which states that one is a Maltese Muslim is like saying that a cat is a lion.](image)

### Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

As outlined in the section on politics, the primary foundation of the Islamophobia network is the Ghaqda Patrijotti Maltin movement. Another group is Imperium Europa, which shares the same far-right ideologies and supports fascism and nationalism. However, in the last three to four years, Ghaqda Patrijotti Maltin took the lead with its Facebook page and presence on social media. Although, this might not seem like an extensive network, the geographical size of Malta should also be taken into consideration together with its population. This group has organised protests all across the country. Alex Pisani and Henry Battistino, the moderators and leaders of this movement, are responsible for the organisation of such events and the sharing of material, which is then further circulated and shared.
Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

The most prominent and active groups in Malta which create initiatives and events to combat discrimination, racism, and Islamophobia are the following: People for Change Foundation (PfC), Integra, NCPE, aditus foundation, and the Jesuit refugee services. The NCPE is the governmental agency for equality; however, it focuses more on gender equality than on religious inclusion. NGOs in Malta focus primarily on racism and discrimination faced by foreigners (immigrants & refugees) rather than with the inclusion of Maltese Muslims. Some of the events which dealt indirectly with addressing Islamophobia are discussed below. Among them, one of the most prominent was “Youth Not Status”, organised by the aditus foundation. On December 14, 2018, the Maltese Ministry for European Affairs and Equality launched the Local Integration Charter at the first Annual Integration Conference. The charter addresses tensions related to social cohesion and presents community dialogue as a tool in addressing these tensions. The charter will be implemented by the Integration Unit of the Human Rights and Integration Directorate (HRID), the Local Councils Association, and participating local councils.22

On December 14, 2018, the Ministry for European Affairs and Equality (which includes the Human Rights and Integration Directorate) hosted the first Annual Integration Conference in Malta.23 The Karta tal-Integrazjoni fuq Livell Lokali (Local Integration Charter) was launched during the conference. The Intraministerial Migrant Integration Action Plan and the first Annual Report of Integration Unit of the Ministry were presented at this event. Furthermore, on October 29, 2018, the People for Change Foundation (PfC) hosted a roundtable event on racism in Malta, with a focus on reporting. The roundtable provided an opportunity to relaunch the platform Report Racism Malta, a PfC initiative,24 which has recently been revised to be more user-friendly. The platform allows users to complete a short questionnaire detailing their experience of racism with the option to do so anonymously. Users will then receive tailored advice and guidance about where to seek help and where to go for further support.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

As evident from the above research, which includes informal interviews with Muslims, newspaper research and statistics, Malta is very underdeveloped on this

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matter and requires research and policies to counter Islamophobia. Muslims in Malta feel the lacuna left by the failure of politicians and equality bodies to address this situation. In the current global anti-Muslim climate, the development of mechanisms to counter hate are crucial. Moreover, adequate screening of social media pages and a safe and user-friendly reporting system are also very important. Creating space for dialogue is essential to countering Islamophobia together with awareness and education about Islam to help civil society identify what is real and what is fake and to overcome the barriers Muslims face on a daily basis. Moreover, it would also help overcome prejudice and encourage viewing Muslims beyond stereotypes, as individuals.

There is a need to distinguish Islamophobia from other discriminatory ideologies and to map out its seriousness. This will also require an observatory authority that can monitor and record Islamophobic incidents – at the moment, it is very difficult to establish clear figures. A clear policy framework is also important for educators and schools to ensure that there is uniformity and an inclusive environment for students. This can also be extended to all areas - awareness and knowledge of Islam is pivotal for everyone, including journalists, politicians, and civil servants. Further recommendations include:

- Setting up alternative mechanisms to encourage victims to report hate crime and hate speech incidents, such as third-party reporting systems or dedicated telephone lines.
- A mechanism for collecting disaggregated data on hate crime incidents, including hate speech, on the ground of religion.
- Authorities need to press ahead with and intensify training for police, prosecutors, and judges in order to ensure a more effective fight against Islamophobia.
- The adoption of a strategy for the integration of all Muslims in the community as soon as possible, along with a clear message to the public that integration is a two-way process for both Muslims and the majority population.
- Authorities must organise a campaign to raise awareness among the public about Islam and Muslims.
- Policy documents and formal statistics about the Muslim population in Malta, both foreign and Maltese, are necessary.

Chronology

• **January 2018:** First judgement delivered by a court dealing with Islamophobic comments online.