

Swedish Muslims in Cooperation Network Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination- CERD

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Foreword

This report has been prepared by Swedish Muslims in Cooperation, a network of Muslim representatives engaged in contributing to the United Nations human rights monitoring processes. The network previously submitted shadow reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in connection with Sweden's reviews in 2013, 2018, and 2025.

Since those reviews, accumulated documentation indicates that the situation for Swedish Muslims has not improved. On the contrary, evidence points to a deepening of human rights violations, structural discrimination, and state inaction.

Shadow reports submitted by civil society play a critical role in enabling UN treaty bodies to assess the extent to which states comply with their obligations under international human rights conventions. Such reports provide independent analysis, document patterns of discrimination, and highlight lived experiences that are often absent from official state submissions.

In a society where Islamophobia passes key societal structures, the role of civil society becomes particularly important in bringing attention to rights violations that may otherwise risk becoming normalized.

This report is submitted to CERD in 2025 with the aim of supporting the Committee's review of Sweden and ensuring that the State fulfills its obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

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Executive Summary

This independent shadow report from a civil society perspective provides a comprehensive, evidence-based account of how Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism in Sweden function not only through societal prejudice but also through institutional practices, political discourse, policy design, and the adjudication of the existing legal framework. Drawing on open sources, official data, academic research, and first-hand testimonies from Muslim civil society leaders, the report shows that Sweden's Muslim communities face persistent and structural discrimination across multiple domains, including religious freedom, access to the labour market, education, social services, and civic participation.

Guided by the definition in Article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which prohibits any distinction or exclusion based on national or ethnic origin, this report positions Islamophobia as a racialised form of discrimination. In the Swedish context, religion is often used as a proxy for ethnic origin, meaning that acts of Islamophobia, whether directed at individuals, communities, or institutions, fall clearly within the scope of racial discrimination as outlined by ICERD. This perspective is further supported by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). It is reflected in multiple General Recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

The evidence used in this report shows an identifiable pattern of normalisation and institutionalisation of Islamophobia. For example, public and political discourse routinely stigmatises Muslims through terms like “Islamist” and “extremist,” used without legal clarity or evidentiary support. These narratives influence public institutions, which in turn subject Muslim civil society organisations, schools, and congregations to disproportionate scrutiny, funding cuts, and closure, often later overturned in court but with lasting harm. Hate crimes against Muslims have increased sharply, with over half of all religion-based hate crimes targeting Muslims (Brå 2023:16), yet prosecution rates remain exceptionally low. Islamophobic acts, such as Quran burnings and other similar manifestations of hatred, continue to receive state permits under expansive interpretations of freedom of expression, despite court rulings identifying them as hate speech.

Access to effective legal remedies remains deeply inadequate. Victims of hate crime and discrimination report widespread underreporting, mistrust of law enforcement, and a lack of follow-through by authorities. The Equality Ombudsman (DO) rarely initiates litigation, and institutions tasked with equality and oversight frequently fail to deliver justice. Islamophobia is not legally recognised as a specific category, undermining accountability

and limiting legal recourse. Meanwhile, public criticism by Muslim actors, whether related to racism, policy, or human rights, is frequently dismissed as “Islamist”, shrinking the space for dissent and democratic participation.

This report concludes that Sweden is not in compliance with key provisions of ICERD, particularly Articles 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. Despite a strong constitutional and legal framework, the practical enforcement and adjudication of anti-discrimination protections are weak and detrimental for Muslim minorities, especially as an engaged part of the wider Swedish civil society, and institutional logics continue to reproduce racialised suspicion toward Muslims. The result is a form of structural exclusion that both mirrors and reinforces broader systems of racism in Swedish society.

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Introduction

Sweden, as a State Party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), holds a binding obligation to combat and eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms. Muslim civil society organisations submit this shadow report to provide a focused, rights-based perspective on Sweden's compliance with its international commitments. It specifically addresses the persistent and institutionalised patterns of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism that continue to affect the lives of Muslims and those racialised as Muslim in Sweden.

This report, covering the period from 2020 to 2025, provides a partial yet critical assessment of the gap between Sweden's legal commitments and the lived experiences of its Muslim communities. It aims to support the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in determining the extent to which Sweden upholds the principles of equality and non-discrimination, particularly regarding the rights, protections, and equal treatment of Muslim individuals and communities in public life, policy, and practice.

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Approximately 35% of Sweden's population (of 10,5 million) is either foreign-born or has at least one parent born abroad. An estimated 1.1 million people have origins in countries where Islam is the majority religion (Groglopo et al., 2025). Due to legal restrictions on collecting data about religious affiliation, there are no official figures on the number of Muslims in Sweden. However, estimates suggest between 500,000 and 800,000 individuals have a Muslim family background, the majority of whom identify as secular (Thurfjell & Willander, 2023).

The population of Swedish Muslims is highly diverse, encompassing a broad range of ethnicities, national origins, languages, and socio-economic backgrounds. Since the 1980s, significant migration to Sweden has included individuals and families from countries such as Iraq, Iran, the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria, as well as Kurdish communities from Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. These groups are disproportionately represented in data reflecting economic marginalisation, residential segregation, and discrimination in the labour market (Groglopo et al., 2025; Arai et al., 2016; Bursell, 2014, 2021).

Individuals originating from Muslim-majority countries, regardless of their personal religious identification, are often depicted in political and media discourse as challenging

Swedish values, societal cohesion, or democratic norms (Johansson & Darvishpour, 2020). This ongoing framing contributes to the racialisation of Muslim identity, where religion, ethnicity, and cultural background are merged in ways that reinforce social exclusion and systemic inequality (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2012; Sandberg et al., 2023).

For this report, it is crucial to define the terms Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism (used interchangeably here). We understand Islamophobia not just as individual prejudice or negative media portrayals, but as the institutional, structural, and everyday processes through which Muslims, and those perceived to be Muslim, are racialised and systematically disadvantaged in various aspects of public life. This includes discrimination and exclusion in employment, education, housing, healthcare, and political participation, as well as in exercising fundamental freedoms such as religious practice and expression.

Islamophobia in Sweden extends beyond interpersonal hostility or biased media coverage. It encompasses state and institutional actions, legal, bureaucratic, financial, and discursive, that collectively hinder Muslims' ability to participate fully and equally in society. Examples include discriminatory school policies restricting religious dress, biased security practices and policing targeting visibly Muslim communities, unequal distribution of state grants for faith-based organisations, and policy debates portraying Muslims as culturally incompatible with Swedish norms. These practices reinforce exclusion and diminish Muslim civic participation, religious expression, and access to rights (see Sayyid, 2014; Wiklund, 2023; Groglopo et al., 2025; Forum för levande historia, 2025).

Building on the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group's definition of Islamophobia and its adaptation by Swedish civil society actors (e.g., INSAN), we use the term "Muslimness" to describe how visible or assumed markers of Muslim identity, such as clothing (e.g., hijab), dietary practices (e.g., halal food), names, skin colour, migration status, language, or affiliation with Muslim community institutions, are treated as signals of suspicion or "difference" in public discourse, policy, and policing. This process causes a dual harm; it symbolically excludes Muslims from the imagined Swedish national community and materially disadvantages them through discriminatory laws, policies, and practices.

In this way, Islamophobia in Sweden is not a vague or abstract issue. It is a systemic pattern of racialisation and exclusion embedded within institutions, public life, and even politics, which undermines the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and full citizenship.

The political context of these processes is crucial. Since the 2022 parliamentary election, Sweden has experienced a significant institutional shift characterised by formalised co-operation between the ruling government and the far-right political party, the Sweden Democrats, under the Tidö Agreement (see Article 2). This arrangement has not only normalised but also embedded securitised framing, surveillance logics, and overtly anti-Muslim rhetoric within state policy and practice. What was once primarily the language of far-right populism has now been translated into a recognisable aspect of governance of Muslim minorities, especially its civil society components.

Under the guise of defending "democracy" and safeguarding "Swedish values," Muslim civil society organisations, mosques, congregations, cultural and educational initiatives,

and individual activists have faced increased scrutiny, excessive regulation, and chronic underfunding. Disproportionate audits, public defamation campaigns, and even the forced closure of organisations have occurred, often based on vague, unsubstantiated, or politically charged accusations of “Islamism” or “extremism.” These actions are not isolated incidents but part of a wider, coordinated policy approach where suspicion of “Muslimness” is institutionalised.

Such policies and practices institutionalise Islamophobia not as a marginal prejudice but as a state-led initiative carried out through law, administration, and public discourse. They cause tangible harms, e.g., silencing critical voices, delegitimising Muslim civic participation, undermining religious freedom, and effectively excluding Muslims from equal citizenship. In this way, Sweden’s current path signifies a dangerous narrowing of democratic space, where the fight against “extremism» is used as a pretext for racialised surveillance, institutional discrimination, and the erosion of fundamental rights.

The range of open-source evidence in this report shows that Islamophobia in Sweden is not just an accidental or isolated issue; it can be seen as a systemic and institutionalised form of racial discrimination that affects many areas of public life. It mainly works through the interpretation of existing laws, but also through local and national policies, hostile bureaucratic procedures, and ideologically driven political discourse that collectively normalise the marginalisation of Muslims and those racialised as Muslim. Although Sweden officially adheres to international human rights obligations, including its commitments under ICERD, the everyday experiences of Muslim communities reveal a growing gap between legal rights and how policies are carried out in practice, which distorts, bends, and sometimes even bypasses these rights.

This gap has widened considerably since the 2022 election and the consolidation of power through the Tidö Agreement, which brought far-right ideologies into the government’s focus and shaped its relationship with Muslim minorities. The outcome has been the securitisation of Muslim communities under the pretext of defending democracy. Here, suspicion, surveillance, and punitive scrutiny have become common responses to Muslim communities’ legitimate religious, cultural, and civic expressions. As the report clearly states, Muslim civil society organisations have faced arbitrary audits, defamation, and government measures that defund them. Individual Muslims have been subjected to racial profiling, and institutions associated with Muslim identity have become targets of unprecedented state-sanctioned scrutiny. These developments reveal a pattern of state actions where Islamophobia is no longer merely tolerated; it is becoming institutionalised.

Simultaneously, the institutional and civil rights challenges faced by Muslims are mostly narrowed down to issues of culture, values, or social “integration.” However, as this report will clarify, there is a pattern of structural exclusion of Muslims from public spheres such as civil society participation, political involvement, semi-independent educational infrastructure, and so on. Substantial evidence from the analysis of Sweden’s compliance with the ICERD’s articles suggests that there is a racialisation of “Muslimness” in the wider Swedish public space. These processes of racialisation are most often (though not exclusively) expressed through groups’ and individuals’ appearance, language, religious practices, perceived organisational affiliations, which renders a Muslim segment of the Swedish

population suspect, regardless of their legal status (citizen or asylum seeker, or migrant), or civic contribution. In doing so, the Swedish government, through state institutions, not only breaches the principles of equality and non-discrimination but also actively undermines the foundations of inclusive democracy.

This shadow report urges the Committee to scrutinise Sweden's compliance with ICERD not only through legal principles, frameworks, and discourse, but also, more practically, in how these frameworks are contextualised, interpreted, and put into practice. The report calls on the Committee to recognise that Islamophobia, as it exists today in Sweden, is a form of multilayered racialising discrimination that is, at this point, systemic, politically driven, and significantly harmful to Swedish society as a whole. Without immediate, concrete, and comprehensive corrective actions, such as maintaining legal safeguards, establishing independent and representative oversight mechanisms, and engaging in meaningful dialogue with Muslim communities, Sweden risks entrenching a two-tiered system of citizenship where equal rights are guaranteed in law but not reflected in the lived realities of Swedish Muslims.

The report's methodology

Methodologically, the report draws on a range of sources: conversations and interactions with Muslim congregations and associations; recent public data from Swedish institutions (e.g. SIHR, SST, Brå); previous submissions to CERD; academic and policy research; and legal documents related to key administrative decisions affecting Muslim civil society. It is important to note that, due to Sweden's refusal to collect socio-economic statistics disaggregated by religion, we triangulate multiple types of evidence. This includes qualitative data and case documentation to trace discriminatory outcomes, while acknowledging the inherent data limitations. The report is structured around key provisions of ICERD and focuses on Articles 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. It demonstrates that:

Article 1: Anti-Muslim racism and the racialisation of “Muslimness” result in discriminatory treatment that meets ICERD’s definition of racial discrimination, including through state practices.

Article 2: Sweden’s policies, notably through “democracy conditions” and selective enforcement, fail to fulfil the obligation to eliminate racial discrimination, instead exacerbating it.

Article 3: In the labour market, Muslims face higher unemployment, over-qualification, religious expression constraints, and name-based discrimination, which are factors pointing to structural exclusion.

Article 4: Hate propaganda targeting Muslims has flourished in both extremist media ecosystems and mainstream political discourse. Explicitly racist and Islamophobic narratives appear regularly in digital platforms, alternative media, and social media ecosystems with limited legal or institutional accountability.

Article 5: Muslims are exposed to hate crime, threats, and violence at disproportionately high rates, while access to protection and remedy remains limited and underutilised.

Article 6: Despite strong constitutional and legislative frameworks prohibiting religious and ethnic discrimination, the enforcement of these protections is weak, and remedies for victims of Islamophobic violence and harassment remain largely ineffective or out of reach.

Article 7: Islamophobia has been institutionalised through political leadership and media, undermining Muslim civil society, stigmatising civic education initiatives, and shifting public norms.

As noted in the analysis within each section of the report, Sweden's current legal and institutional framework enables Islamophobia to influence relations, not just on the margins of society but at the very heart of public administration, civic regulation, and national discourse. This shadow report therefore highlights the disconnect between Sweden's formal commitments and the actual lived experiences. Its main aim is to assist CERD in issuing specific recommendations that target the structural and institutional roots of anti-Muslim racism in Sweden.

Article 1

Definition and Scope of Racial Discrimination

This report begins by elaborating on the definition of racial discrimination provided in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD): any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin that aims to or results in impairing the equal enjoyment of human rights. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has further clarified that racist hate speech and related conduct can target individuals based on intersecting grounds. Notably, religion is often used as a proxy for “national or ethnic origin,” a common and observable phenomenon in Europe that, however, remains difficult to substantiate under current legal frameworks.

Despite these evidentiary challenges, CERD and other bodies have consistently emphasised that such complex forms of racism must be tackled through effective and rights-aligned measures. In the European context, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has highlighted in its General Policy Recommendation No. 5 that “intolerance and discrimination against Muslims” often manifest through processes of racialisation. These processes label individuals as “different” or “suspect” based on names, clothing, language, religious practices, phenotypical features, or perceived migration status. ECRI has called on states to recognise and address anti-Muslim racism not as a marginal issue, but as a structural one, which must be tackled through law, policy, data collection, and institutional practices.

This legal and policy framework is essential for understanding Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism in Sweden today. It emphasises that discrimination against Muslims is not simply about religious intolerance but is rooted in racialised processes that create material inequalities and exclusion. Therefore, the Swedish state has a positive duty to address these intersecting forms of discrimination with strong, proactive, and human rights-compliant measures.

Formally, Sweden protects freedom of religion and equal treatment in the Constitution (Regeringsformen, Ch. 2) and bans discrimination based on religion or other beliefs through the Discrimination Act (2008:567) (Government Offices of Sweden, 2025). However, multiple sources show that these protections are not fully realised for Muslims in practice. The Swedish Institute for Human Rights’ (SIHR) interview-based study reports structural barriers that hinder equal access to rights, like challenges in securing premises and insurance, excessive or poorly fitting audits, and a perceived shift from rights-based to security-focused approaches by municipalities and law enforcement (SIHR, 2025). These conditions limit religious life and associative activities which are central concerns under Article 1 of ICERD.

Various sources document frequent threats, harassment, and vandalism targeting mosques and associations, along with low reporting rates and limited investigative outcomes. These patterns, with gaps between reported hate crimes and prosecutions and convictions, were already highlighted by CERD in its 2018 concluding observations on Sweden (CERD/C/SWE/CO/22-23). The same UN review expressed concern about attacks on mosques, the affordability of insurance for houses of worship, and the stereotyping of Muslims by politicians and media, and these concerns were echoed by Muslim civil society during SIHR's interviews.

While Sweden's anti-discrimination laws formally recognise "religion or other belief" as protected grounds, the real-world experience shows that Muslims are often treated not only as a non-national religious group but also as a racialised population. Discrimination frequently happens based on perceived national or ethnic origins, language, names, skin colour, and visible markers such as headscarves or traditional clothing, which are factors that extend beyond religious belief and indicate racialisation processes (Erlandsson et al., 2022; Hemrin et al., 2022; SIHR, 2025). These patterns mirror what the CERD has already acknowledged, namely that when religion is used as a stand-in for "national or ethnic origin," acts of discrimination clearly fall within the scope of the Convention (CERD/C/SWE/CO/22-23).

Muslim civil society, through this shadow report, affirms and strengthens this broader understanding of racial discrimination. It urges the Swedish state to recognise that anti-Muslim racism, although often framed as religious bias, remains deeply rooted in racialising and othering logics. These logics associate threat, deviance, or inferiority with perceived Muslim identity, regardless of actual religious practice or belief. Consequently, acts of discrimination against Muslims should be addressed not only as religious intolerance but also as racial discrimination under ICERD. Considering that the recent findings published by the Swedish Institute for Human Rights (SIHR, 2025) offer concrete, up-to-date evidence supporting this view. Their documentation of discriminatory patterns across public services, education, media, and law enforcement demonstrates how Muslim identity is constructed as racially "other," emphasising the need for urgent and targeted interventions grounded in anti-racism frameworks.

Another crucial reality in the lives of Muslim civil society organisations is the increasingly restricted civic space. Sources describe one-way, security-oriented "dialogues" with Muslim civil society representatives, risk-based scrutiny tied to funding regimes, and fear that new "democracy conditions" for public grants will diminish religious association and expression, as illustrated by the cases of Muslim organisations such as Ibn Rushd, the Muslim Youth Organisation in Sweden (SUM), and Muslim-profiled free schools. This holds true regardless of the formal neutrality claimed by the underlying rules. Another challenge faced by Muslim civil society is difficulties in securing premises or insurance, exposure to vandalism, and the removal of public signage to avoid targeting, all of which reflect a constraining environment incompatible with equal enjoyment of rights (Poljarević et al. 2022; Ardin & Irving 2025; SIHR 2025). For example, multiple sources have also highlighted under-reporting and low trust in authorities stemming from perceived security-first approaches (Brå, 2021:17; Civil Rights Defenders, 2022; SIHR, 2025). CERD

previously urged Sweden to address the gap from reporting to prosecution or conviction in hate-crime cases; these concerns remain relevant to Muslims in Sweden (CERD/C/SWE/CO/22-23).

In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that various overlapping forms of discrimination have worsened the harm faced by Muslim minorities in Sweden. For example, SIHR reports that Muslim women, particularly those wearing hijab and other markers of Muslim identity, are especially targeted. Additionally, Muslim children encounter restrictions and harassment in schools, and a racialised appearance, non-European backgrounds, increases the likelihood of victimisation. The national hate-crime data similarly shows Islamophobic targeting patterns, including against visibly Muslim women, and offers context for the heightened exposure of Muslim communities (Brå, 2021:17). The Equality Ombudsman's review (DO, 2022) also identifies religion-related discrimination, including in education and employment, emphasising the need for an intersectional analysis.

Furthermore, we have observed that several outlets and sources report an increase and mainstreaming of Islamophobic narratives in politics and media, which legitimise racist attitudes and lower social inhibitions against harassment (Svenska kommittén mot anti-muslimsk rasism, 2022; Aziz, 2023b; Yousuf & Tärnhuvud, 2023; Otterbeck & Bevelander, 2020). Public opinion monitoring shows that Islam is, by a wide margin, the least favourably viewed religion in Sweden, creating an attitudinal environment that can reinforce discriminatory outcomes unless actively challenged by state actors (Groglopo et al., 2023; Groglopo et al., 2025). This social and political climate engages Sweden's ICERD obligations under Articles 1 and 4, preventing the normalisation of racist stereotyping and ensuring that public authorities do not amplify it.

We emphasise that the absence of legal frameworks and institutional infrastructure for collecting equality data is a significant barrier to effectively tackling racial discrimination under Article 1 of ICERD. Sweden currently lacks the necessary safeguards, regulatory mechanisms, and administrative capacity to support the collection of data on religion or ethno-racial origin, despite no legal prohibition against doing so when based on self-identification and appropriate protections.

This lack of a structured system prevents assessing the extent of anti-Muslim racism or identifying differences in public policy impacts. The failure to establish these basic conditions reflects a long-standing political hesitation to confront structural racism. Without such frameworks, Sweden cannot effectively monitor, prevent, or address racial discrimination in a systematic and accountable manner.

Taken together, hate incidents and enforcement gaps, securitised administrative practices, discouraging civic conditions, hostile public discourse, and a persistent deficit in equality data, results in a pattern of treatment that hampers Muslims' equal enjoyment of rights protected by ICERD, including freedom of religion, association, education, physical security, and equal access to public services (see Brå, SIHR, DO). The threshold for "racial discrimination" under Article 1 is therefore met as Muslims are racialised and targeted based on perceived national or ethnic origins and related markers, even when discrimination is described as "religious."

Summary

This section examines how Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism in Sweden operates through racialisation processes, where religion acts as a stand-in for ethnic or national identity. Based on ICERD's definition of racial discrimination, it demonstrates how Muslims are often regarded not merely as a religious group but as a racialised community, distinguished by visible and perceived differences such as names, clothing, language, or origin.

Despite formal legal protections, Muslim communities in Sweden encounter systemic barriers, such as discrimination in housing, education, and public services, under-prosecution of hate crimes, and a diminishing civic space characterised by securitised state involvement. Muslim women, children, and visibly religious individuals face increased risks.

The section emphasises the lack of legal, institutional, and organisational infrastructure necessary to ethically and safely manage disaggregated equality data. This issue is a significant barrier to addressing and following up on structural racism. Without adequate data collection, organisational frameworks, and political commitment, Sweden cannot meet its obligations under ICERD. The analysis advocates for recognising Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism as forms of racial discrimination and calls for stronger and rights-based responses both in public and political discussions and in legal practice.

Article 1: Recommendations

- 1. Recognise and address Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism as racial discrimination.**

Formally recognise Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism as forms of racial discrimination under ICERD, especially when they operate through racialisation processes, such as names, clothing, language, perceived origin, or other visible markers. Align national policies with ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 5 to ensure that anti-Muslim discrimination is acknowledged and tackled as structural and racialised.

- 2. Embed intersectionality in anti-discrimination strategies.**

Ensure that national frameworks and public authorities explicitly address the intersection of religion with ethnicity, race, gender, and migration background. Anti-Muslim discrimination must be understood as falling within ICERD's scope, even when not framed as religious intolerance.

- 3. Develop, ethically and safely, a strong equality-data system with independent oversight.**

Establish a human-rights-compliant equality data framework based on self-identification, informed consent, and privacy-by-design. Importantly, this must be supported by the creation of a Council of Minorities' Affairs, an independent advisory and oversight body that works alongside Sweden's Ethical Re-

view Authority to evaluate and authorise the use of equality data. This council should ensure that data collection promotes anti-discrimination goals, upholds ethical standards, and involves affected communities in both design and oversight. Sweden must also invest in the necessary legal, institutional, and technical infrastructure to enable effective, transparent, and accountable governance of equality data.

4. Improve hate crime enforcement and accountability.

Bridge the gap between reported Islamophobic hate crimes and convictions by strengthening investigative procedures, ensuring victim support, and publishing annual performance indicators that track the entire enforcement process, from report to investigation, charges, and outcome.

5. Introduce safeguards on securitised terminology.

Clearly define and regulate the use of terms such as “extremism,” “radicalisation,” and “Islamism” across public policy, funding decisions, and oversight processes. These terms must be evidence-based and narrowly applied to prevent arbitrary, discriminatory practices that stigmatise Muslim civil society organisations and delegitimise their work.

6. Guarantee equal access to public services and civic space.

Ensure that Muslim congregations and organisations have equal access to premises, insurance, and financial services, on the same basis as all other civil society actors. Monitor refusals and premium disparities as potential indicators of indirect discrimination.

7. Create trust-based channels with Muslim civil society.

Establish dedicated, rights-based mechanisms for dialogue with Muslim communities that move beyond security-driven engagement. These channels ensure meaningful participation in policymaking and build trust in public institutions.

8. Expand anti-racism training for public-sector professionals.

Provide mandatory training for police, prosecutors, teachers, social workers, and other frontline officials on anti-Muslim racism, racialisation processes, and ICERD obligations. This will enhance institutional capacity to identify and tackle discrimination in daily practice.

9. Counter Islamophobic rhetoric and media stereotyping.

Introduce binding standards for public officials to refrain from Islamophobic language and take proactive measures to challenge stereotypes. Support independent media accountability mechanisms to address discriminatory portrayals of Muslims and promote fair, balanced coverage.

10. Demonstrate leadership in shifting public attitudes.

Respond to persistently negative public perceptions of Muslims, as documented in recent national studies, through high-level political messaging and public education. Public authorities must take a leading role in preventing the normalisation of Islamophobia and promoting a climate of inclusion and respect.

Article 2

State Obligations to Condemn and Eliminate Discrimination

Under Article 2 of ICERD, the government is obliged to pursue, by all suitable means, a policy of eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms and fostering understanding among all races, including ethnic and religious groups. This involves avoiding acts or practices of racial and other types of discrimination, ensuring that all public authorities and institutions adhere to this obligation, and implementing effective measures to review and amend policies that foster or maintain racial discrimination. It is noteworthy that between 2019 and 2025, Sweden adopted two national action plans to combat racism and hate crime. However, this period was characterised by political instability, with different governments in power, resulting in inconsistent policy implementation and limited institutional continuity (Swedish Parliament, 2023).

Since 2022, Sweden has been governed under the Tidö Agreement, a coalition involving the Moderate Party, Christian Democrats, and the Liberal Party, with parliamentary support from the Sweden Democrats, a political party with documented roots in far-right, white supremacist, and neo-Nazi movements. In short, the Tidö Agreement gives the Sweden Democrats significant influence over national policy in exchange for their support (Sverigedemokraterna et al., 2022).

A central element of the Agreement is its explicit focus on so-called “separatist interests,” directing scrutiny and defunding efforts towards organisations with ethnic or perceived “Islamist” ties. Notably, this includes a planned SEK 18.9 million reduction in grants to ethnically based associations in 2023 (Government Offices of Sweden, 2023), justified under the guise of fighting “ethnic segregation” and encouraging integration. These measures disproportionately impact Muslim civil society (judicially, Muslim minorities, or parts of them, which are not part of the five recognised national minorities in Sweden), much of which is organised along ethnic, linguistic, or cultural lines, reflecting community needs rather than separationist ideologies.

The securitised framing of Muslim civil society is especially alarming. Under the Tidö Agreement, Muslim organisations face increased surveillance and audits, justified by vague references to extremism or “threats to democracy.” This narrative portrays Muslims as inherently suspicious and rationalises disproportionate scrutiny of their groups, places of worship, and educational institutions.

While the previous Social Democratic government (2018–2022) committed to yearly consultations on Islamophobia as part of its 2019–2024 national action plan, only one such consultation has taken place since 2022 (The Swedish Government, 2023). Civil society organisations report a lack of meaningful follow-up or outcomes (Swedish Committee

Against Anti-Muslim Racism, 2023). After the 2022 transfer of power, all government websites hosting content related to racism and hate crime were taken down, a symbolic erasure of prior commitments (Olofsson, 2022). These materials were only restored following public criticism.

The 2024 action plan made limited progress (Expo, 2023). It avoids implementing specific measures to gather data on structural discrimination and instead shifts responsibility to public attitude surveys through the Forum for Living History. Furthermore, antisemitism is depicted as a phenomenon “imported” by individuals with Middle Eastern backgrounds, based on a controversial report, thus externalising European antisemitism and weakening collective, inclusive anti-racism efforts (INSAN, 2024).

Muslim civil society has also voiced serious concern over the introduction of “democracy conditions” linked to public grants, effective from 2025 (MUCE, 2024). These conditions are widely viewed as vague, inconsistently enforced, and susceptible to political misuse. Muslim organisations report disproportionate audits, retroactive application of new criteria, and unclear avenues for appeal, further limiting their civic space. While officially presented as neutral, these measures effectively target Muslim and ethnically based associations, often penalising them for perceived political or religious affiliations rather than clear legal violations.

The case of Sveriges Unga Muslimer (SUM), Sweden’s largest Muslim youth organisation, illustrates the high stakes of such policy shifts. SUM lost its state grants in 2016 and, despite winning early legal challenges, ultimately lost on appeal in 2019. The ruling applied retroactive standards not in force at the time and used frameworks designed for religious communities, despite SUM’s legal status as a youth organisation. This legal manoeuvring led to the organisations’ bankruptcy and erasure from public life (Courts of Sweden, 2019; LSU, 2019). Similarly, the Muslim educational association Ibn Rushd has faced repeated public suspicion and scrutiny despite multiple reviews affirming compliance with funding requirements (Graner, 2020). In 2024, the Swedish National Council of Adult Education revoked its funding, citing performance issues, despite no new evidence of wrongdoing and a history of politically motivated pressure (Ibn Rushd, 2024; Amnå et al. 2019).

These developments must be considered alongside the ongoing threats faced by Muslim congregations. Arson, vandalism, and hate-motivated harassment remain alarmingly frequent. In 2018, 59% of Muslim congregations experienced direct attacks, and 90% reported feeling generally threatened (Gardell, 2018). High-profile mosques are more likely to be targeted, and many struggle to secure insurance coverage due to their elevated risk profiles.

Younger Muslims are especially vulnerable. For instance, a 2023 report by Save the Children’s Youth Association found that over 70% of Muslim youth reported experiencing Islamophobia, particularly in school settings. Over a quarter said they felt unable to practise their religion freely. Staff members were frequently identified as perpetrators of discrimination, echoing concerns raised by the Ombudsman for Children in 2021 about the normalisation of racism in education (Barnombudsmannen, 2021).

Taken together, these developments reveal a serious gap between Sweden's legal commitments under ICERD and the real experiences of Muslim communities. While official policy statements may condemn Islamophobia, structural and institutional practices, from defunding to differential enforcement, generate and reinforce unequal treatment

Summary

This section explores how recent political shifts and policy developments in Sweden have led to the systemic marginalisation of Muslim communities. Although two national action plans against racism and hate crime were introduced between 2019 and 2025, the lack of policy continuity, caused by frequent changes in government, has resulted in fragmented implementation and diminished institutional accountability.

Under the current Tidö Agreement, which incorporates influence from the far-right Sweden Democrats, the government has adopted a securitised and exclusionary approach towards Muslim civil society. Measures such as the introduction of vague “democracy conditions” for state grants, the targeting of “separatist interests,” and significant cuts to ethnic-based association grants disproportionately impact Muslim-led organisations. These actions indicate a shift from inclusive integration to conditional participation, where Muslim organisations are scrutinised for perceived political or cultural deviation.

The state’s failure to ensure equal treatment is clear in inconsistent auditing practices, politically motivated defunding, and the lack of strong appeal mechanisms. High-profile cases like those of Sveriges Unga Muslimer and Ibn Rushd show how retroactive rule changes and vague criteria can be used to dismantle important Muslim institutions. Meanwhile, hate crimes against mosques and widespread Islamophobia, mainly affecting youth in schools, highlight the ongoing presence of both structural and interpersonal discrimination.

Despite Sweden’s formal commitments under ICERD, these developments expose a troubling disconnect between legal obligations and actual experiences. The current system fails to sufficiently safeguard Muslims’ rights to religious practice, association, and equal participation in public life. Instead, Muslim communities face an environment of suspicion, racialisation, and diminishing civic space.

Article 2: Recommendations

- 1. Strengthen the national response to hate crimes targeting Muslim communities.**

Sweden must urgently address the ongoing and disproportionate exposure of Muslim congregations and institutions to hate crimes, including arson, vandalism, and threats. This involves dedicated funding for protective measures, better access to insurance for at-risk religious communities, and clear protocols for law enforcement. Specialised hate crime units should be expanded, and police training must include modules on anti-Muslim violence and its structural aspects. Prosecution rates should be monitored and reported to evaluate the effectiveness of state protection mechanisms.

- 2. Address systemic Islamophobia in the education system.**

Ensure that national frameworks and public authorities explicitly address the intersection of religion with ethnicity, race, gender, and migration background.

Anti-Muslim discrimination must be understood as falling within ICERD's scope, even when not framed as religious intolerance.

3. Prevent the political instrumentalisation of antisemitism and racism.

National anti-racism strategies must avoid narratives that attribute racism or antisemitism to specific migrant or religious groups. Framing antisemitism as "imported" by individuals with Middle Eastern backgrounds undermines the collective fight against racism and risks dividing communities. Anti-racism efforts must reflect a comprehensive understanding of Sweden's historical and structural context and must not be used to legitimise the targeting of Muslim communities.

4. Ensure that civic participation is not conditioned on political alignment or assimilation.

The state should ensure that civil society organisations, especially those representing ethnic or religious minorities, are not penalised for dissenting views or non-majoritarian cultural practices. The use of "democracy conditions" must not be employed to silence, defund, or delegitimise organisations that promote minority rights. Legal protections must be introduced to guarantee that participation in public life is recognised as a right, not granted as a reward for compliance.

5. Establish proportionality and due process in state funding decisions.

In accordance with Sweden's obligations under Article 2 of ICERD, all decisions regarding the defunding or exclusion of civil society organisations must be grounded in clear, proportionate, and legally valid criteria. The retrospective application of new rules, selective enforcement, or reliance on broad labels such as "extremism" without evidence breaches principles of due process and damages trust. A review mechanism should be established to evaluate the consistency and fairness of past funding decisions, with the authority to provide redress where procedural rights have been infringed.

Article 3

On apartheid and racial segregation: Focus on the Labour Market

This section examines the structural inequalities faced by Muslim minority populations in the Swedish labour market. It highlights an under-explored but crucial aspect of racial and religious discrimination, especially since Sweden currently lacks comprehensive datasets that track discrimination based on religious or faith backgrounds. The lack of such data poses a significant challenge in assessing the scope and patterns of discrimination against Muslims and other religious minorities. It also reveals broader gaps in the Swedish state's commitment to equality monitoring.

Labour law plays a crucial role in promoting inclusive workplaces and ensuring equal treatment. Generally, Swedish legislation forbids discrimination in recruitment and employment based on gender, race, religion, disability, and other protected grounds. Employers are legally required to prevent group-based disadvantages and provide equal opportunity at all employment stages, including recruitment. However, despite these formal protections, labour market outcomes for foreign-born individuals, particularly those perceived as Muslim, remain consistently worse than for native-born Swedes (DO, 2023:5).

Over the past fifty years, Sweden has become one of the European countries with the highest proportions of foreign-born residents. However, integration policies have not effectively translated into fair access to employment. Many refugees and their families face long delays in entering the workforce, despite extensive integration efforts (SCB, 2023a). Consequently, foreign-born individuals experience higher unemployment and lower employment rates compared to their native-born counterparts. Notably, because of lower overall labour force participation among foreign-born populations, the unemployment gap is smaller than the employment gap, indicating that access barriers, rather than just job loss, contribute to these inequalities (Engdahl & Liljeberg, 2022).

A particularly persistent problem is educational mismatch, especially over-qualification. This affects not only first-generation migrants but also their Swedish-born children. Second-generation individuals, particularly those from non-Western backgrounds, are more likely to be employed in roles below their qualifications, which is linked to slower wage growth and higher unemployment risk (Kim, 2024). These findings align with broader labour force surveys (e.g., SCB, 2023b), highlighting discrimination and under-utilisation among people from Muslim-majority immigrant backgrounds. However, the full extent of these disparities remains unquantified due to the need for more detailed data collection by Statistics Sweden (SCB) or other authorities. For example, in 2023, the unemployment rate among foreign-born individuals aged 15–74 in Sweden was 15.1%, compared to 5.1% for those born in Sweden (SCB, 2023b). This gap is larger than other European countries,

where Eurostat reports 9.3% unemployment among foreign-born individuals and 5.0% among native-born individuals with native-born parents in 2023 (Eurostat, 2024).

Swedish-born individuals with one or two parents from Africa or Asia (commonly referred to as second-generation immigrants) also encounter labour market disadvantages, especially when they have lower levels of formal education. However, even at comparable education levels, disparities persist, showing that race, ethnicity, language, and perceived religion continue to influence opportunities (Katz & Österberg, 2020). These disparities persist not because of skill or motivation gaps, but due to deeply rooted structures of racialisation and religious othering.

Sweden continues to show one of the largest employment gaps between native-born and foreign-born workers in Europe. Over-qualification is particularly common among workers from Africa and Asia, including the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, while migrants from Nordic and Western countries perform much better (SCB, 2023a). A recent study (SCB, 2025) reveal that only 39% of foreign-born individuals aged 20–64 were employed in jobs that match their qualifications, compared to 58% of native-born people. These figures highlight that many foreign-born residents are either underemployed or excluded from professional fields, wasting both their skills and potential. Although these disparities cannot always be directly linked to institutional Islamophobia, they overlap with other forms of structural exclusion.

While some view these inequalities as temporary hurdles on the path to integration, there is a common belief, particularly in European countries with high immigration, that the first generation's struggles will be resolved by future generations who will enjoy the full benefits of citizenship. However, this is a narrow way of perceiving a problem that stem from various factors; including status-based stereotypes that disadvantage foreign-born individuals, the non-recognition of foreign diploma, and heightened employer discrimination in labour market segments characterized by limited resources or protection from competition (Bursell & Bygren 2011; 2023). A meta-analysis by Quillian et al. (2019) confirms that Sweden ranks among the worst countries in Europe for labour market discrimination against non-white applicants, especially those from the MENA region, second only to France in the scale of discrimination observed.

These challenges also considerably affect Swedish-born descendants of migrants, especially those from Muslim-majority backgrounds. Educational mismatch and over-qualification are frequent and result in limited social mobility, slower wage increases, and a greater risk of unemployment (SCB, 2023a, 2025; Kim, 2024). Since these individuals are less impacted by issues of credential recognition or language barriers, their exclusion is more directly linked to racial and religious stratification, including housing segregation and discrimination in education and employment systems.

Although research specifically exploring Islamophobia in the Swedish labour market is limited, some studies use names as proxies for ethnic or religious background. While name-based correspondence testing has methodological limitations, it still offers valuable insights. Classic studies by Carlsson & Rooth (2007) and Agerström et al. (2012) show that applicants with Arabic- or African-sounding names consistently receive fewer pos-

itive responses than those with Swedish-sounding names. More recently, Adermon and Hensvik (2022) examined how gig-economy experience affects employability and found that applicants with Swedish-sounding names were nearly twice as likely to get call-backs as equally qualified applicants with Arabic-sounding names (19% versus 10%). Notably, neither gig-based nor traditional work experience closed this gap. These findings echo earlier research on housing discrimination, highlighting a broader pattern of name- and origin-based exclusion across Swedish society (Ahmed & Hammarstedt, 2008; Ahmed et al., 2010).

In response to these systemic biases, some individuals adopt Swedish-sounding or neutral surnames to enhance their job prospects. Studies by Bursell (2011) and Khosravi (2012) document how this practice, known as “covering” or “passing,” acts as a coping mechanism to combat discrimination, though it often leads to identity erasure. The effects of Islamophobia also become clear through increased scrutiny of visible Muslim identities, especially among women. Reports from Brå (2021:3) and LSU (2022) highlight that Muslim workers often face discriminatory treatment related to clothing or perceived religious identity. This is particularly evident in sectors with frequent public interaction. Pharmacy staff has reported that they are facing racist slurs from customers, prompting some to restrict their work to certain neighbourhoods or contemplate leaving the profession (Mokhtari, 2018). Another example is Muslim women working in healthcare that receives objections to wearing the headscarf from both colleagues and patients (Bengtsson, 2023). Brå (2021:3) confirmed that Muslims, especially those perceived as such, are regularly targeted with harassment in workplace settings, notably in high-contact professions.

Discrimination also extends to workplace policies that restrict religious expression. In 2022, two Swedish municipalities, Skurup and Staffanstorp, attempted to ban headscarves for children and staff in schools. Both the administrative and appeal courts, as well as the Supreme Administrative Court, found the bans unlawful (HFD 2022 ref. 51 I & II). In Bro-mölla, a municipal council governed by the Sweden Democrats party implemented a ban on prayer during work hours. Although presented as religion-neutral, the policy clearly affected Muslims and was only partially lifted after a Christian social worker deliberately reported herself for praying during a break (Esping, 2019). That same year, MTR Nordic, the operator of Stockholm’s commuter trains, sent an internal email banning prayer during work hours and unpaid breaks, citing “unnecessary irritation.” The policy was later withdrawn following internal backlash (Jemal, 2019). These incidents demonstrate how seemingly neutral rules are often used in ways that disproportionately target Muslims, restricting religious practice both subtly and overtly.

Apart from interpersonal discrimination and policy-based exclusion, workplace culture itself can present health and safety risks for racialised and Muslim workers. The Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise reports that individuals from African and Middle Eastern backgrounds face higher levels of bullying, negative treatment, and insufficient support from managers and unions (Myndigheten för arbetsmiljökunskap, 2024:7). Many feel unable to report discrimination due to fear of retaliation or believing that nothing will change. The report also notes that non-Christian religious minorities are disproportionately affected by these dynamics. Intersectional vulnerabilities are especially visible among low-educated women in these groups, who face both excessive workloads and low

institutional support.

In sectors such as healthcare, education, and public services, harassment from clients and patients also poses an occupational risk. General practitioners with foreign backgrounds report more threats and a higher intention to quit than their majority peers (Eneroth et al., 2017). These stressors align with the concept of “minority stress,” which describes the ongoing burden faced by stigmatised groups in hostile environments (Meyer, 2003). The emotional and psychological toll of such stress contributes to mental health issues, reduced productivity, and workplace disengagement (Forum för levande historia, n.d.). It also involves wider economic and public health costs.

Taken together, these findings reveal a deeply unequal labour market landscape. Although discrimination is officially banned, enforcement remains weak, data are limited, and institutional responses are slow or ineffective. These patterns sustain a system of de facto segregation, where Muslim and racialised workers are routinely excluded, marginalised, or pressured to hide aspects of their identity.

Summary

This section underscores the systemic exclusion and discrimination faced by Muslim and racialised communities in the Swedish labour market. Despite legal protections against discrimination in employment, individuals perceived as Muslim, particularly those with African, Asian, and Middle Eastern backgrounds, consistently encounter higher unemployment rates, over-qualification, and barriers to career progression. This applies not only to first-generation migrants but also to Swedish-born individuals with immigrant backgrounds. These disparities endure even when education and qualifications are equal, indicating that ethnic, racial, and religious biases, rather than skill deficiencies, drive labour market inequalities.

Sweden does not systematically collect labour market statistics by religion or perceived religion, making it difficult to assess the extent of Islamophobia in employment. Researchers therefore rely on proxy methods, such as correspondence testing using names, which consistently reveal significant penalties for applicants with Arabic- or African-sounding names. Discrimination persists in both hiring processes and workplace treatment, especially against visibly Muslim women, and is often exacerbated by silence, underreporting, and inadequate redress mechanisms.

Institutional tolerance of discriminatory practices is also evident in local and workplace policies that restrict prayer or religious attire, disproportionately impacting Muslim workers. While courts have struck down several of these measures, their adoption reflects a growing normalisation of Islamophobic attitudes in employment contexts. Reports of bullying, exclusion, and harassment from both colleagues and the public further demonstrate that racism and Islamophobia are not only present but structurally ingrained in specific sectors.

In this context, formal equality alone is insufficient. Sweden's failure to provide specific data collection and condemn racism against minorities, enforce anti-discrimination law, or ensure equal workplace protections for Muslims undermines its obligations under Article 3 of ICERD. Without targeted intervention, these patterns will continue to produce structural segregation, limit equal participation, and impose economic, social, and psychological burdens on racialised and Muslim communities.

Article 3: Recommendations

1. Institutionalise discrimination testing in recruitment.

Regular state-supported correspondence testing in both public and private sectors should be implemented to identify and prevent hiring discrimination, with results informing enforcement actions.

- 2. Guarantee legal protection for religious expression in employment.**
The right to wear religious clothing or practise one's faith, such as prayer during breaks, must be clearly protected in workplace legislation. Employers and local authorities must carry out religious impact assessments before imposing any such restrictions.
- 3. Recognise Islamophobia as a workplace safety and health issue.**
The state must require employers to treat racial and religious harassment as an occupational risk. Anonymous reporting channels, anti-racism training, and effective remedies must be established, especially in high-contact professions.
- 4. Target inclusion programs in areas with the highest underemployment.**
Develop specialised programmes for sectors with high attrition or exclusion of Muslims, such as healthcare, education, and public services. These should involve credential recognition, equitable placement practices, and support for religious inclusion.
- 5. Invest in intersectional research on Islamophobia in employment.**
The state should support long-term research into how Islamophobia impacts women, youth, and other vulnerable groups in the workplace, and utilise the findings to guide future policies.

Article 4

Condemnation of All Propaganda and Hate Organisations Promoting Racial Hatred

Sweden's obligations under Article 4 of ICERD include condemning and criminalising all forms of propaganda and organisations that promote or incite racial hatred and discrimination. However, evidence presented in previous sections shows that anti-Muslim propaganda and hate narratives not only persist in Sweden but are also gaining political and institutional legitimacy. These developments indicate a growing failure to uphold Article 4 in law, policy, and enforcement.

Hate propaganda targeting Muslims has thrived in both extremist media environments and mainstream political discussions. Explicitly racist and Islamophobic narratives regularly appear on digital platforms, alternative media, and social media ecosystems with little legal or institutional accountability. Far-right outlets such as RIKS, Exakt24, Samtiden, Insikt24, and FrihetNytt, along with white-supremacist platforms like Nordfront, have been documented spreading anti-Muslim content that dehumanises Muslims and links them to violence, misogyny, and criminality (Expo, 2022a; 2022b; Glaad & Leman, 2023).

These messages are not limited to fringe actors. Public funding for independent media has sometimes indirectly supported platforms spreading Islamophobic propaganda (Svenska kommittén mot antimuslimsk rasism, 2022). Politicians affiliated with the Sweden Democrats, such as Richard Jomshof, chair of the Swedish Parliamentary Justice Committee, have used their positions to amplify hate narratives, including equating Islam with violence and describing Muslims as inherently anti-democratic (Jomshof, 2023; Klittmar & Birgander, 2024). While such statements have prompted complaints under Sweden's hate speech legislation, legal responses have been inconsistent and largely ineffective. The Prosecution Authority's closure of the case against Jomshof, despite expert opinion affirming that his posts met the legal threshold for incitement, highlights the growing impunity for hate speech from political figures (Schultz, 2024; Carlsson Tenitskaja, 2024; Näthatsgranskaren, 2024).

The digital sphere has become a major amplifier of hate propaganda, where dehumanising language, conspiracy theories such as "Islamization" and "population replacement", and false news narratives spread widely. Näthatsgranskaren, a watchdog organisation, has documented how anti-Muslim caricatures, false stories, and incitement are often dismissed as legitimate criticism of religion and protected speech, even when they clearly target individuals or communities based on race or religion (Näthatsgranskaren, 2024). Public authorities have failed to adopt effective monitoring or enforcement measures in response to these threats and Recommendations from UN treaty bodies urging Sweden to intensify its efforts to address hate speech and propaganda have, for the most part, not been acted

upon (Civil Rights Defenders, 2020; 2019).

Quran burnings, more than 100 gatherings between 2020 and 2024, according to the Swedish Police Authority (2024), have become state-endorsed spectacles of anti-Muslim provocation. These acts often involve desecrating the Quran near mosques or during religious holidays, sometimes accompanied by bacon or references to white-supremacist terrorism. While initially protected under Sweden's broad interpretation of freedom of expression, the courts ruled that some Quran burnings amounted to hate speech (Linköpings tingsrätt, 2023-10-12; Göta hovrätt, 2024-03-27). Nevertheless, permits for such events have continued to be issued, revealing a disconnect between judicial findings and administrative practice. The Swedish Security Service later reclassified Quran burnings not as hate crimes but as national security threats, largely overlooking their Islamophobic content and impact on minority communities (Säkerhetspolisen, 2023/24; SOU 2024:52).

Offline mobilisation driven by online propaganda has also increased. Anti-Muslim demonstrations in Stockholm and other cities during 2024 featured slogans such as "We don't want Muslims in our country," echoing far-right riots in the UK (Lindahl et al., 2024; RIKS, 2024). Protesters invoked narratives common in online hate communities, strengthening the feedback loop between digital propaganda and public mobilisation. At the same time, authorities have shown a tendency to criminalise counter-protests, especially when organised by Muslim civil society or racialised activists. Demonstrations against Quran burnings, school closures, and hijab bans have at times been described as "Islamist" or "radical," delegitimising dissent while failing to explicitly condemn racist mobilisations (Åberg, 2022; Eidenskog & Brusman, 2023).

This uneven reaction to hate and anti-racism shows a failure to tell apart criticism from incitement, dissent from extremism. Such inconsistencies weaken Article 4's requirement not only to criminalise hate propaganda but also to actively dismantle the platforms, ideologies, and organisations that spread it.

Sweden also lacks a comprehensive national strategy for identifying and dismantling hate organisations, despite growing evidence of coordinated hate campaigns. Actors like anonymous Sweden Democrats-linked accounts have been reported for mass-producing disinformation, targeting politicians, and spreading racist content (Hellerud & Andersson, 2024). Yet there is no legal mechanism, such as a register of hate groups or public reporting obligations, to identify, sanction, or deplatform such actors. Instead, the burden falls on civil society to monitor and expose hate propaganda, with little institutional backing.

Finally, the misuse of security discourse, especially vague terms like "Islamism" and "extremism," has fostered an environment where anti-Muslim propaganda is justified under the pretext of counterterrorism. Muslim organisations involved in advocacy, education, or civic participation are at risk of losing funding or being shut down based on associations with discredited narratives or unverifiable allegations (see Articles 5 and 7 in this report). By merging anti-racism with radicalism, such measures deepen suspicion and hostility against Muslim civil society.

Under Article 4 of ICERD, Sweden has an obligation to not only condemn hate speech and

propaganda but also to prohibit and dismantle the structures that produce and legitimise racial hatred. The government's failure to act decisively against Islamophobic propaganda, especially when promoted by influential political figures (such as government members) or subsidised media, constitutes a serious breach of this obligation. It is therefore crucial that the government recognise that freedom of expression is being exploited to foster racial and religious hatred (similar to developments elsewhere in Europe), and that inaction has allowed the normalisation of Islamophobia in both public and institutional spaces.

Summary

Islamophobic propaganda and hate groups in Sweden have grown beyond fringe extremism into an ecosystem that includes social media, alternative news outlets, and mainstream politics. Platforms such as Nordfront, RIKS, Exakt24, and Samtiden regularly spread racist narratives that dehumanise Muslims (Expo 2022a; 2022b; Glaad & Leman, 2023). Public funding has, at times, indirectly supported such outlets (Svenska kommittén mot anti-muslimsk rasism 2022:3). Politicians such as Richard Jomshof (Sweden Democrats) have used their platforms to promote conspiracy theories of “Islamisation” (Jomshof, 2023). Legal complaints and expert opinions on these statements have not led to prosecutions, indicating a pattern of impunity for hate speech by political leaders (Schultz 2024; Carlsson Tenitskaja, 2024).

Digital platforms now serve as catalysts for anti-Muslim propaganda. False stories, caricatures, and hate memes circulate widely under the pretext of “criticism of religion”, fueling offline protests where demonstrators chant openly racist slogans (Näthatsgranskaren 2024; Lindahl et al., 2024; Riks 2024). Quran burnings, over 100 events between 2020 and 2024, have become state-approved spectacles of Islamophobic provocation, often staged near mosques during major religious holidays and associated with white-supremacist imagery. Authorities continue issuing permits despite rulings recognising some burnings as hate speech, instead framing them as “national security” concerns while ignoring their Islamophobic impact (Säkerhetspolisen 2023/24; SOU 2024:52).

This uneven approach, criminalising counter-protests while excusing overtly racist mobilisations, reflects a serious breach of Article 4 obligations. Sweden lacks a comprehensive framework to identify and dismantle hate organisations, relying instead on under-resourced civil society watchdogs. By tolerating Islamophobic propaganda in political discourse, subsidising media platforms that amplify it, and using vague security terms like “Islamism” to stigmatise legitimate Muslim organisations, the state has facilitated the institutionalisation of anti-Muslim racism and undermined the protections Article 4 aims to guarantee.

Article 4: Recommendations

- 1. Adopt a national strategy to identify and dismantle hate organisations.**
Sweden should create clear legal frameworks to identify and penalise groups and networks, including online platforms, that consistently spread anti-Muslim propaganda. This approach should include a public register, reporting requirements, and procedures for deplatforming hate speakers.
- 2. Enforce existing hate speech laws against political leaders and media figures.**
Prosecution authorities must apply Sweden’s hate speech laws consistently, including to high-ranking politicians and publicly funded platforms. Independent oversight should review cases where prosecutors refuse to act despite expert opinions indicating incitement.

3. **End indirect public funding of outlets that spread Islamophobic propaganda.**
Audit state and municipal grants to prevent the use of public funds for media, organisations, or influencers spreading racist or Islamophobic content. Redirect resources to independent monitoring bodies, such as NätHälsögranskaren, to enhance enforcement.
4. **Strengthen the response to digital hate and online-to-offline mobilisation.**
Develop regulatory and cooperative measures with platforms to combat viral Islamophobic narratives. Monitor extremist content and ensure that counter-speech and civil society actors are not penalised for exposing hate.
5. **Reframe freedom of expression to protect, not erode, minority rights.**
Establish guidelines for police and administrative bodies to consider the discriminatory and inciting effects of events like Quran burnings when granting permits. Freedom of expression should not be weaponised to endorse racial hatred.
6. **Protect the legitimacy of Muslim civil society and protest.**
Ensure that demonstrations, advocacy campaigns, and civic education initiatives led by Muslims are not stigmatised as “Islamist activism.” Establish safeguards against ideological policing and provide legal remedies for organisations that have been wrongly defunded by discredited sources.
7. **Publicly reaffirm Sweden’s Article 4 obligations.**
Government leaders should clearly condemn anti-Muslim propaganda, reject conspiracy theories like “Islamisation” and “population replacement,” and signal that Sweden’s democracy relies on the equal participation and protection of all communities.

Article 5

Prohibit and eliminate all forms of racial discrimination and ensure equality before the law

During the period 2018–2025, Islamophobic hate crimes, offences motivated by hostility towards Muslims or symbols associated with Islam, have become an increasing concern in Sweden (Brå 2021:3; SIHR 2025; Groglopo et al., 2025). The data suggest these are not isolated incidents but rather a normalisation of Islamophobia across political and social spheres. Muslims are now the most negatively perceived religious group in Sweden, with public opinion towards Islam becoming significantly more hostile since the early 2000s (Demker, 2024). This shift is not merely rhetorical, it fuels discrimination, harassment, and hate crime. For instance, the Swedish Police Authority recorded over 100 Quran-burn-ing assemblies between 2020 and 2024 (The Swedish Police Authority, 2024), events that have often occurred alongside prayers and religious holidays for Muslims, and have been accompanied by racist slogans, insults, or provocations (Islamiska förbundet, 2024).

The Discrimination Ombudsman and other organisations have documented the increasing politicisation of Muslim identity (DO 2013). Proposals from parties such as the Sweden Democrats and Christian Democrats have included bans on hijab, call to prayer, and other Muslim practices (Demker, 2024; DO 2013; Riksdagen, 2024). These measures extend beyond individual prejudice as they embed negative stereotypes of Islam into policy proposals, signalling state-level tolerance of Islamophobic narratives. The effects are evident in hate crime statistics. Since 2011, reported Islamophobic hate crimes have risen significantly (Brå, 2019:13). In 2022, they made up 8 % of all hate crimes and more than half (52 %) of all religion-based hate crimes, which is twice the rate of antisemitic hate crimes and far above anti-Christian incidents (Brå, 2023:16). These figures are almost certainly underestimations of the problem, as underreporting remains widespread.

Digital environments have become a crucial arena for this escalation. In 2020, 21% of Islamophobic hate crimes occurred online, and by late 2023 this proportion had doubled to 40% (Brå, 2021:17; Brå, 2024). The sharpest increase happened immediately after 7 October 2023, showing how international events, such as Israel's war in Gaza, can be exploited to incite anti-Muslim hostility in Sweden (Brå, 2024). Research indicates that radical nationalist platforms normalise and dehumanise Muslims, legitimising hatred and violence (Kaati et al., 2019). This online-to-offline mobilisation has led to demonstrations, riots, and even attacks on mosques. It is essential to recognize that horrific terrorist attacks in recent years, such as those in Christchurch and Bærum in 2019, have profoundly impacted the perceived safety of mosques in Sweden (Islamiska förbundet, 2023). These dynamics weaken public safety and the civic space of Muslim communities.

Violence against mosques serves as a clear indicator. Threatening letters, vandalism, swas-

tika graffiti, pig parts thrown into prayer spaces, stone-throwing, and arson have all been documented (Lapenkova, 2020; Larsson, 2023; Borg, 2024; Ahmed, 2024; Dalsbro, 2018). A survey in 2018 found that 59% of congregations had experienced physical attacks, 18% reported arson or attempted arson, and 18% had pig parts left at or inside mosques (Gardell, 2018). Quran burnings near mosques during Eid or Friday prayers, once accompanied by music associated with the Christchurch massacre, have further undermined safety and dignity (Linköpings tingsrätt, 2023-10-12). Despite the increase in violent incidents, the Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities (SST) notes a reluctance to report attacks due to fear of reprisals and a perception that reporting has little effect (Dalsbro, 2018).

Children and teenagers are especially affected by the rise of hate crimes. The Ombudsman for Children reports that racist expressions have become part of everyday life of children, especially in schools and online (Barnombudsmannen, 2021). Save the Children's Youth Association highlights increased vulnerability among Muslim children in their report (2021), and the Equality Ombudsman finds that Muslim students face discrimination from both peers and teachers (DO, 2022). Many are unsure how to assert their rights or seek redress (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022). Brå confirms both widespread underreporting and low legal follow-through. In 2020, 94 % of reported hate crimes were dismissed and only 6 % resulted in a suspect being identified and prosecuted (Brå, 2023:16). This gap between reporting and justice weakens legal certainty and damages trust in authorities.

Political discourse intensifies the problem. Islamophobic rhetoric has shifted from subtle insinuation to explicit demographic fear-mongering, claims of "Islamisation" or "population replacement" are prominent in far-right campaigns (Expo, 2022c; Vergara, 2024). Debates over hijab demonstrate how gendered racism portrays Muslim women as victims of their own culture, while depicting Swedish society as fundamentally egalitarian (SOU 2006:73). Minister Paulina Brandberg's statement that the headscarf "sexualises children" exemplifies this normalisation (Wickström, 2024). Such narratives encourage public demonstrations, for example protesters in 2024 openly chanted "We don't want Muslims in our country" (RIKS, 2024), and influence policies like closing schools with a Muslim profile.

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate have repeatedly used an assessment from the Swedish Security Service to revoke school licences on the ground that the students faces risk of being radicalised (Skolinspektionen, 2022; 2023). It has raised concerns about Islamophobic stereotypes influencing state actions (Vergara, 2022). In two cases, Cordoba International School and Mångårdens preschool, the Administrative court of Stokholm overturned the closures and decided that the evidence presented by the Swedish Security Service was vague and unsubstantiated, lacking any concrete details or supporting evidence to how the children faced a risk of radicalisation (Förvaltningsrätten i Stockholm 2024-04-22; 2024-07-11). These cases were later overturned by the Administrative Court of Appeal in Stockholm (Kammarrätten i Stockholm, 2024).

These developments highlight a significant gap between Sweden's formal commitments under Article 5 of ICERD, to prohibit and eliminate all forms of racial discrimination and ensure equality before the law, and the lived realities of Muslims. Hate crimes are increas-

ing and often go unpunished, digital platforms amplify conspiracy theories and incitement, children face discrimination without redress, and state institutions sometimes perpetuate Islamophobic tropes in their decisions. This combination of online hatred, street harassment, and administrative actions against Muslim institutions indicates not isolated failures but a structural weakening of equal protection for Muslims in Sweden.

Summary

Islamophobia in Sweden has become increasingly normalised across political, social, and digital spheres from 2018 to 2025. Muslims face the highest rate of religion-based hate crimes, often underreported, and a significant portion of these offences now occur online, where radical nationalist ideologies thrive. Attacks on mosques, Quran burnings, and public demonstrations show a growing emboldening of anti-Muslim hostility in public life.

Children and young people are particularly vulnerable. Muslim pupils, especially girls wearing the headscarf, experience discrimination from peers, teachers, and institutional policies, with little knowledge of how to seek redress. Hate crime investigations seldom lead to prosecution, eroding trust in the justice system and undermining Sweden's compliance with Article 5.

State and media actors have sometimes reinforced these patterns. Islamophobic tropes have influenced debates on hijab bans and school closures, and public funds have occasionally supported platforms spreading anti-Muslim content. Although courts have occasionally pushed back, Sweden's protections remain reactive, inconsistent, and fragmented. Taken together, these trends reveal a significant gap between Sweden's formal legal obligations under ICERD and the everyday experiences of Muslim communities. Without decisive action to reduce hate crimes, improve reporting and enforcement, and challenge Islamophobic narratives, the principle of equality before the law risks becoming meaningless.

Article 5: Recommendations

- 1. Enhance the enforcement of hate crimes and provide support for victims.**
Ensure adequate resources are allocated to investigate reported Islamophobic hate crimes swiftly, prosecute effectively, and offer victims protection and legal aid. Monitor and publish clearance rates to promote accountability.
- 2. Develop accessible, trust-based reporting mechanisms.**
Create culturally appropriate and child-friendly channels for reporting Islamophobic incidents, both offline and online, to address underreporting and enhance legal clarity.
- 3. Counter digital Islamophobia and online-to-offline mobilisation.**
Enforce stricter oversight of publicly funded or state-supported media and support independent monitoring of platforms that spread anti-Muslim hate and conspiracies. Collaborate with civil society to disrupt online radicalisation targeting Muslims.
- 4. Protect children and young people in education.**
Require anti-Islamophobia training for teachers and school staff, provide clear

guidance on religious freedom in schools, and ensure remedies for pupils facing discrimination or harassment.

5. Ensure state neutrality and base decisions on evidence.

Require that security assessments, school closures, and policy actions affecting Muslim institutions depend on transparent, verifiable evidence and are scrutinised by independent bodies to prevent Islamophobic bias.

6. Reframe public discourse to promote equality under the law.

Government leaders and public officials must explicitly condemn Islamophobic rhetoric, reject gendered racism in debates on Muslim women's dress, and reaffirm Sweden's commitment to Article 5's guarantee of equal protection for all.

Article 6

The Right to Effective Legal Remedies

Under Article 6 of ICERD, Sweden is required to ensure that all individuals experiencing racial discrimination have access to proper protection and remedies through competent tribunals and state institutions. This includes not only formal legal channels but also the tangible, practical ability to pursue justice, seek redress, and hold rights violators accountable. However, in the Swedish context, there remains a significant and ongoing gap between legal protections in theory and real access to justice for victims of Islamophobic discrimination, harassment, and violence. While constitutional and legislative frameworks ban discrimination based on religion and ethnicity, such as the Discrimination Act (2008:567), the Instrument of Government, and criminal law provisions on hate crime, enforcement remains weak, and outcomes for victims are often minimal or inaccessible.

The enforcement gap is especially clear in the realm of hate crime. Despite the significant increase in reported Islamophobic hate crimes, which made up over half of all religion-based hate crimes in 2022 (Brå 2023:16), most of these cases are never prosecuted. The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention's (Brå) own statistics show that in 2020, 94% of all reported hate crimes were dismissed without leading to charges, with only 6% resulting in a suspect being identified and prosecuted (Brå 2023:16). This issue is worsened by severe underreporting, as numerous studies have shown that many Muslims do not report hate crimes due to fear of retaliation, lack of trust in law enforcement, and the belief that reporting will not bring about meaningful outcomes (Gardell, 2018; Dalsbro, 2018; SIHR, 2025). International comparisons highlight this failure, and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights has observed that Sweden, despite having one of the most advanced legal frameworks, fails to deliver justice for victims of hate crimes, especially in cases involving religion and racialisation.

The issue goes beyond criminal justice into civil law, especially labour law. The Equality Ombudsman (DO), the main body responsible for enforcing anti-discrimination laws, has often been criticised for not engaging in strategic litigation and for being difficult to access for those most vulnerable to discrimination. Although they receive thousands of complaints each year, DO only initiated one full court case in 2021 (DO, 2021). Civil society groups, including Amnesty International Sweden, have shown how the Ombudsman's cautious and limited legal approach allows widespread impunity for discriminatory practices, particularly against Muslim women and visibly religious individuals in the workforce (Johansson et al., 2024; Svenska kommittén mot antimuslimsk racism, 2022). Structural employment discrimination is well documented in experimental research (Carlsson & Rooth, 2007; Adermon & Hensvik, 2022), but very few cases go to the Labour Court, and almost none succeed. Even when individuals have proof of discriminatory treatment, legal routes are often too slow, expensive, and complicated to pursue without institutional backing.

The lack of explicit legal recognition of Islamophobia in Sweden's anti-discrimination legislation further impairs victims' ability to seek justice. Islamophobia is not identified as a specific ground of discrimination in either civil or criminal law, which means that even explicit anti-Muslim attacks are often categorised under broader and more vague labels such as xenophobia or general hate crime. This leads to the underrecognition of the particular harms faced by Muslims and a shortage of targeted remedies. A rare exception was the 2023 Quran-burning case in Linköping, where the court determined that desecrating a Quran by burning it with bacon while playing music associated with the mosque attack in Christchurch amounted to hate speech (Linköpings tingsrätt 2023-10-12). Nonetheless, such rulings remain uncommon.

In most cases, events that clearly serve as anti-Muslim provocation are regarded as protected under freedom of expression. The continued issuing of permits for Quran-burning assemblies after the court verdict highlights the lack of systemic response to judicial decisions. Moreover, the Swedish Security Service (Säpo) has reclassified such acts not as hate crimes against Muslims, but as national security threats, effectively removing their discriminatory context and disregarding their psychological and social impact on Muslim communities (Säpo, 2023/24).

The broader failure to guarantee access to justice also shows in how state agencies target Muslim organisations and individuals. School closures, funding cuts, and administrative sanctions increasingly rely on vague accusations of "Islamism" or extremism, often without proper process or solid evidence. The closures of schools like Framstegsskolan and Cordoba International School, and the defunding of Ibn Rushd, a Muslim education association that was reaching thousands of Muslims since 2001, show how administrative law has been used to impose harsh penalties on Muslim civil society actors based on disputed security assessments and damage to reputation rather than legally proven misconduct (Skolinspektionen 2022; Förvaltningsrätten i Stockholm 2024-04-22; Amnå et al., 2019; Svenska kommittén mot antimuslimsk rasism 2024). In several cases, the administrative courts later ruled in favour of the targeted organisations, finding that authorities had relied on weak or unproven evidence. But by then, the harm such as closures, layoffs, and damage to reputation, had already happened, with little chance for compensation. And some cases have later been overruled by the administrative court of appeal (Kammarrätten i Stockholm, 2022; 2024).

This pattern shows that the legal framework, even when theoretically accessible, is not fully or adequately available, or rather, effective in shielding Muslim communities from institutional discrimination. When state actors employ administrative processes to punish or delegitimise Muslim individuals, and legal safeguards only intervene after harm has occurred, or not at all, the right to redress becomes an illusion. Moreover, legal recourse is weakened by the absence of protective mechanisms against chilling effects. Organisations challenging discriminatory treatment are often further vilified as "Islamist," and their criticisms dismissed as threats to national cohesion (Haglund, 2018; Svenska kommittén mot antimuslimsk rasism 2022). This not only silences democratic participation but also fosters the perception that Muslims in Sweden are subject to a different standard of legal protection, where the presumption of innocence and procedural fairness depend on racialised and religious identities.

In light of these developments, Sweden's failure to secure effective remedies for victims of racial and religious discrimination constitutes a serious breach of Article 6. Although the legal framework formally exists, it is neither properly implemented nor sufficiently resourced to meet the standard of "effective protection." Without tangible reforms to reduce barriers to justice, enhance institutional accountability, and guarantee that state actions are proportionate, evidence-based, and free from bias, access to remedies will remain markedly unequal, and the rights of Muslims and other racialised communities will continue to be undermined.

Summary

Muslims in Sweden encounter substantial barriers when seeking justice for discrimination, hate crimes, and institutional bias. Although Islamophobic hate crimes constitute the majority of religiously motivated hate crimes (Brå 2023:16), most cases are closed without prosecution. Underreporting remains high due to fears of retaliation and distrust of authorities, further exacerbated by the perception that reporting seldom leads to results (Gardell, 2018; SIHR, 2025).

Civil legal remedies are also ineffective. The Equality Ombudsman rarely pursues court cases despite receiving thousands of complaints each year (Johansson et al., 2024). Victims of religious discrimination, particularly Muslim women, face an uphill battle in accessing labour justice or redress, and Islamophobia is not formally recognised in law, which weakens enforcement and leads to misclassification of cases.

Muslim organisations have been subjected to funding cuts, school closures, and reputational attacks based on vague or unproven allegations of radicalisation and “Islamism.” Without institutional reform, targeted legal recognition of Islamophobia, and stronger enforcement mechanisms, Sweden cannot be considered to provide effective remedies as required under Article 6 of ICERD.

Article 6: Recommendations

- 1. Improve hate crime enforcement and follow-through.**
Allocate resources to guarantee that Islamophobic hate crimes are thoroughly investigated, prosecuted, and monitored at every stage of the legal process—from report to conviction—using clear performance indicators.
- 2. Strengthen the role and mandate of the Equality Ombudsman (DO).**
Expand DO’s capacity and legal mandate to initiate strategic litigation, especially in cases of systemic and intersectional discrimination, including Islamophobia.
- 3. Legally recognise Islamophobia as a distinct form of racism.**
Amend relevant anti-discrimination and hate crime laws to explicitly name and define Islamophobia, ensuring accurate classification, reporting, and enforcement.
- 4. Ensure fairness and due process in administrative decisions.**
Require that school closures, defunding decisions, and other sanctions against Muslim organisations are founded on transparent evidence, undergo independent review, and include prompt remedies.
- 5. Establish accessible and confidential reporting and support mechanisms.**
Develop culturally sensitive, child- and victim-friendly channels for reporting

discrimination and hate crimes and broaden access to legal aid and psychological support for victims.

- 6. Engage affected communities in the design and oversight of remedies.**
Consult Muslim civil society in developing justice, redress, and oversight mechanisms to rebuild trust and ensure remedies are responsive to community needs.

Article 7

Political leadership: Institutionalisation of Islamophobia

The normalisation of racism and Islamophobia in Sweden is increasingly embedded in political discourse, policy agendas, administrative practices, and public debate. Survey data show that Islam remains the most negatively perceived religion in Sweden, and negative attitudes have grown over time (Demker, 2024). This attitudinal shift coincides with, and is reinforced by, the growing institutionalisation of Islamophobia at the highest levels of government, particularly since the 2022 general election.

The most significant political development has been Sweden Democrats (SD, Sverigedemokraterna), a party rooted in far-right and white supremacist ideologies, becoming the second-largest parliamentary party and supporting the current government under the Tidö Agreement. This partnership expands SD's influence over national policy despite its exclusion from ministerial roles. Civil Rights Defenders (2022) has warned that provisions within the Tidö Agreement risk undermining human rights, including those of religious and racialised minorities. A government review has found that the current strategies to combat racism and Islamophobia lack concrete implementation plans and do not fully embed equality work into the daily operations of public agencies (Statskontoret, 2023:12).

In this political climate, public dialogue about Muslims has become a means of mainstreaming racism. Terms like “Islamist” and “extremist” are increasingly used with imprecise meaning to describe Muslim individuals, organisations, or even cultural expressions, regardless of whether there is any clear link to extremism (Yousuf & Tärnhuvud, 2023; Groglopo et al., 2020). This linguistic inflation shrinks the civic space for Muslims, stigmatises political engagement, and allows state and media actors to delegitimise Muslim voices as inherently suspicious. The Swedish Committee Against Anti-Muslim Racism warns that such “extremisation” discourses silence opposition and criminalise civic participation among Muslims (Svenska kommittén mot antimuslimsk racism, 2022). An examination of Muslim civil society in Europe indicates that the broadness and vagueness of the term “Islamism” enable governments to stigmatise actors who merely oppose dominant narratives (Hafez, 2019).

Examples of this pattern are numerous and well-documented. The party leader of the SD, Jimmie Åkesson, has publicly argued that fully practising Muslims “cannot be Swedish” and that Sweden is under threat of “Islamisation” due to imported values that is claimed to be “in conflict” with Swedish identity (Yousuf & Tärnhuvud, 2023). Åkesson has called for banning “Islamist mosques” and removing architectural features such as minarets and crescents, symbolic elements widely associated with mainstream Islamic practice (Sveriges Radio, 2023; Gelin, 2023; Nilsson, 2023; Aagård, 2023). Framing such features as “Islamist monuments” broadens the target from radical elements to Muslims at large (Poljarević et

al., 2022; Islamiska förbundet, 2023).

SD's member of parliament, Richard Jomshof, chair of the Swedish Parliament's Committee on Justice, has used his platform several times to disseminate Islamophobic rhetoric. In July 2023, he published a social media post describing Islam as a "misogynistic, violent ideology" founded by a "mass murderer" (Jomshof, 2023). He has repeatedly posted caricatures targeting Muslims, including images that frame "Pakistani Muslims" as inherently violent (Klittmar & Birgander, 2024; Nätthatsgranskaren, 2024). Despite widespread criticism, including from Cabinet ministers, and legal experts suggesting the posts constituted hate speech (Schultz, 2024; Carlsson Tenitskaja, 2024), the Chief Prosecutor declined to press charges (Svensson, 2024). This case highlights Sweden's chronic under-enforcement of existing hate speech laws (Civil Rights Defenders, 2019; 2020), and the emboldening of political figures who continue to equate Islam with violence under the guise of free speech.

The institutionalisation of this rhetoric extends beyond SD. Deputy Prime Minister Ebba Busch from the Christian Democrats (Kristdemokraterna) called the 2022 Easter protesters "Islamists and criminals" and suggested that police should have used firearms against them, reducing a diverse crowd to a security threat (Torehammar, 2022; Poljarević et al., 2022). SD strategist Mattias Karlsson leaked a manifesto describing Sweden's "Islamisation" as part of a broader "great replacement" conspiracy (Glaad, 2023; Kalla Fakta, 2023). Although Karlsson later distanced himself from the language, he maintained the core claims as "largely correct" (Hellerud, 2023), thereby lending legitimacy to racialised fear narratives.

Beyond explicit statements, recent policy proposals reflect assimilationist logics that implicitly target Muslims. A 2024 proposal by the Moderate Party (Moderaterna) and its youth wing would introduce a "Sweden Contract," obliging immigrants and citizens to affirm Swedish values, including unwritten social norms like how to behave at bus stops. This policy would also impose mandatory civic instruction and "no-excuses" schooling in so-called "vulnerable areas," echoing efforts to enforce cultural conformity under the guise of integration (Svensson, 2025). Though Islam is not named, Muslims are implicitly positioned as the problematic "other," especially in policies that focus on cultural discipline rather than structural discrimination.

Such framing pathologises cultural difference, depicting Muslim populations as abnormal or deficient rather than as individuals experiencing systemic exclusion. When these policies apply to second-generation youth, the message is clear: even those born and raised in Sweden must continually prove their loyalty. Integration is thus depicted not as a mutual process, but as a test of obedience and moral purity, with Muslims implicitly coded as ongoing outsiders.

The misuse of Islamophobic tropes is not limited to the far-right. Politicians from across the political spectrum, including the Social Democrats (Socialdemokraterna) and Greens (Miljöpartiet), have proposed measures targeting so-called "family planning" in disadvantaged areas, using fertility rates as a proxy for racialised and religious anxieties (Aziz, 2023a). Member of parliament Amineh Kakabaveh has equated religious symbols like the hijab with honour-based oppression and has called for bans on such expressions (Sund-

berg, 2016; Kakabaveh, 2021), thereby reinforcing orientalist portrayals of Muslim women.

In recent years, several Swedish state institutions, particularly those linked to national security and social control, have helped shape the perception of Swedish Muslims as potential security threats (Groglopo et al., 2025). Agencies such as the Psychological Defence Agency, the Swedish Centre for Preventing Violent Extremism, and the National Centre against Honour-Based Violence and Oppression have focused on the activities, organisations, and mobilisation of Muslim communities. Although not officially exclusive to Muslims, the thematic focus and operational framing of these agencies often disproportionately target Muslim populations.

Academic and policy institutions such as the Swedish Defence University and the Segerstedt Institute at the University of Gothenburg have also become significant actors in this security-oriented knowledge production. Through risk-oriented discourses and research, these institutions contribute to framing Muslims as culturally incompatible and potentially subversive, implicitly linking religious identity and civic engagement to radicalisation or extremism.

This securitised framing has been politically enabled and amplified by actors on the right of the political spectrum, most notably the Sweden Democrats, but also by governing coalition parties such as the Christian Democrats, the Moderate Party, and the Liberal Party. Through repeated public statements and policy proposals, these parties reinforce the notion that Muslims and Muslim organisations constitute a distinct problem for national security and democratic values. The resulting discourse is often echoed in the media, generating recurring associations between Islam and violence, extremism, gender oppression, and civilisational threat (DO, 2013; 2022).

The convergence of these political narratives and institutional frameworks fosters a broader climate of suspicion towards Muslims and Islamic expressions in the public sphere. It normalises the notion that Islamic belief and practice are inherently suspicious and legitimises intrusive scrutiny of Muslim civil society. This has extensive consequences, affecting not only policymaking but also public attitudes, which become influenced by the idea that Islam and Muslims threaten Swedish norms, cohesion, and security.

Academics and media figures have also played a role in this ecosystem. Self-identified “terrorism experts” such as Magnus Ranstorp, Magnus Norell, and Aje Carlbom have influenced public debates, often linking Muslim identity with extremism. Ranstorp has dismissed the idea of Islamophobia, depicting it as an “Islamist invention” used to silence critics (Ranstorp, 2021), despite its recognition in academic and human rights literature (Otterbeck & Bevelander, 2020; Aziz, 2023a). Their framing has affected policy, including the discredited 2017 report from the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap) alleging connections between civil society organisations and the Muslim Brotherhood (Norell et al., 2017; Ackfeldt et al., 2017).

One of the most affected by this climate has been Ibn Rushd, a Muslim educational association repeatedly accused of harbouring “Islamist” links despite multiple investigations

finding no substantiated wrongdoing (Amnå et al., 2019; Johansson et al., 2024). Municipalities and funders have withdrawn support, and in 2024, the National Council of Adult Education withdrew state funding, citing reputational damage from persistent media scrutiny (Folkbildningsrådet, 2024). Although Ibn Rushd met all formal requirements, the defunding was justified on subjective assessments of “credibility,” effectively punishing the organisation for public suspicion rather than misconduct (Waara, 2024; Ibn Rushd, 2024). Human rights organisations, including Amnesty International, have criticised the decision for perpetuating dangerous stereotypes (Svenska kommittén mot antimuslimsk rasism, 2024).

The delegitimisation of critique from Muslims and anti-racists has become a recurring pattern. The 2022 “LVU Campaign”, for instance, was dismissed as foreign disinformation, despite longstanding evidence of racial and religious bias in social services (Ranstorp & Ahlerup, 2023; Socialstyrelsen, 2024; Dutt et al., 2021; Eliassi, 2017; Lundström & Wendt Höjer, 2021). Similarly, protests against Quran burnings or hijab bans are frequently branded as extremist or Islamist (Åberg, 2022; Eidenskog & Brusman, 2023), suppressing legitimate civil rights activism.

In this context, terms like “Islamism” and “extremism” serve as flexible, racialised categories. They are used not to describe real threats but to portray Muslims as perpetually suspicious, regardless of their actions or compliance with the law. This discursive shift allows administrative actions, from defunding and school closures to permit refusals, to be based not on evidence but on ideological policing.

The state’s failure to protect Muslim civil society from these dynamics undermines Sweden’s commitments under Article 7 of ICERD. When political leaders and institutions foster suspicion, enforce conformity, and penalise cultural visibility, they indicate that Muslim civic participation is conditional, and potentially punishable. The conflation of Islam with extremism has become a tool to weaken civil society spaces, discourage dissent, and marginalise Muslims as political subjects. Without safeguards to distinguish legitimate public criticism from incitement, and without protections for minority participation in public life, Sweden risks entrenching a system of racialised conditional belonging behind the veneer of liberal democracy.

Summary

This section shows that Islamophobia in Sweden is not just a social attitude but is becoming increasingly a political and institutional issue. The rise of the Sweden Democrats (SD) to a position of influence under the Tidö Agreement has coincided with the normalisation of racialised and Islamophobic narratives in public debate. Senior politicians, including SD leaders and government ministers, have used their platforms to equate Islam with violence, backwardness, and anti-Swedish values. These narratives are supported by policy proposals that subtly target Muslims through the language of “integration,” “extremism,” and “Swedish values.”

The misuse of terms like “Islamist” has allowed public institutions and media to suspect Muslim civil society without proper legal process. Organisations such as Ibn Rushd have had their fundings cut despite meeting official standards, due to reputational damage from politically driven accusations. Protests and campaigns led by Muslims, whether against unfair school closures, Quran burnings, or hijab bans, are often dismissed as “extremist,” weakening their legitimacy and suppressing democratic engagement.

Academics, media commentators, and “security experts” have further shaped the narrative, often denying the existence of Islamophobia altogether. In doing so, they contribute to a political environment where the expression of Muslim identity or civic participation is increasingly treated as a threat. Administrative decisions, including school closures based on unsubstantiated security assessments, illustrate how vague associations with “Islamism” are used to justify far-reaching sanctions against Muslim institutions.

These developments collectively reflect a failure to uphold Article 7 of the ICERD. Instead of fighting prejudice, Sweden’s political leadership and public institutions have actively contributed to the deepening of Islamophobia. By allowing ideological policing of Muslim communities, the state weakens the principles of equality, civic participation, and pluralistic democracy.

Article 7: Recommendations

- 1. Condemn and prevent Islamophobic rhetoric in political leadership.**
Swedish authorities must establish and enforce binding ethical guidelines for public officials that prohibit hate speech, discriminatory generalisations, and the misuse of terms such as “Islamist” to stigmatise Muslim individuals or organisations.
- 2. Strengthen safeguards against discriminatory administrative action.**
Administrative decisions—such as school closures or defunding of civil society organisations—must be subject to transparent evidentiary standards and independent oversight to prevent misuse of security assessments and ideological labelling.

- 3. Reaffirm the legitimacy of Muslim civil society.**
The state must publicly affirm the right of Muslim organisations to engage in civic life without fear of defunding, delegitimisation, or surveillance. This includes safeguarding organisations such as Ibn Rushd and SUM from reputational attacks based on discredited or politicised sources.
- 4. Review and revise integration policies for neutrality and proportionality.**
Policies like the “Sweden Contract” and civic testing must be assessed to ensure they do not promote cultural assimilation or unfairly target Muslims. Integration frameworks should focus on structural inclusion rather than behavioural policing.
- 5. Protect the right to protest and dissent.**
Muslim-led protests, against Quran burnings, hijab bans, or institutional discrimination, should be recognised as legitimate forms of democratic expression. Law enforcement and public discourse must not confuse such dissent with extremism.
- 6. Develop public education on Islamophobia and anti-racism.**
Political leaders and civil servants should receive training on Islamophobia, anti-Muslim racism, and the effects of racialised language in policymaking. Public information campaigns should counter disinformation and promote religious literacy.
- 7. Ensure freedom of religion and association is upheld in law and practice.**
The government must protect against the instrumentalisation of security policy to limit religious freedom or dismantle Muslim educational institutions. Legal and procedural safeguards must ensure that freedom of religion and association stay strong for all groups.

Final Conclusions

This shadow report illustrates that Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism in Sweden operate not only through social prejudice but also via institutional structures, public administration, and legal-interpretative strategies. Drawing on first-hand accounts from Muslim civil society, official statistics, and academic research, the report demonstrates that Muslims face persistent and growing discrimination across sectors such as religious freedom, civic participation, the labour market, education, and security. These patterns are not isolated but interconnected and increasingly ingrained in state practices and political discourse.

At the conceptual level, ICERD's Article 1 broadly defines racial discrimination as any distinction, exclusion, or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin. In the Swedish context, religion is often used as a proxy for national or ethnic origin. This means Islamophobia cannot be reduced to religious intolerance alone. It must be understood as a racialised form of discrimination, a point emphasised by both CERD and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). Sweden has not yet incorporated this understanding into its legal and policy frameworks. Islamophobia remains largely invisible in law, while its effects are visible and measurable across all social sectors.

The processes of normalising Islamophobia in Sweden have taken on institutional and structural forms. Muslim congregations, associations, and civil society organisations report increased scrutiny, disproportionate audits, funding withdrawals, and policy exclusions, often based on vague allegations of "Islamism" or "extremism" that lack legal clarity or evidence. Key institutions, including the National Council of Adult Education, law enforcement agencies, and municipal authorities, have adopted decision-making approaches that reproduce anti-Muslim stereotypes, limiting the space for civic engagement and undermining trust in public institutions. Civil society actors involved in education, youth work, and religious life describe a climate where public visibility as Muslims increasingly prompts suspicion rather than support. Initiatives aimed at challenging Islamophobia are also viewed as suspicious, further silencing dissent and restricting opportunities for equal participation. This cycle creates a feedback loop where state and public narratives reinforce each other, intensifying exclusion while formally denying discriminatory intent.

Labour market discrimination against Muslims, especially women wearing the hijab and individuals with Arabic or African names, is well documented by experimental studies (Carlsson & Rooth, 2007; Adermon & Hensvik, 2022; Kim, 2024). These patterns persist across generations, with Swedish-born descendants of immigrants facing overqualification, slower wage growth, and a higher risk of unemployment (SCB 2023a; 2023b; 2025). However, Sweden lacks disaggregated data on discrimination based on religion or perceived religion, making it difficult to fully assess the extent of structural Islamophobia. The absence of evidence-based equality data weakens both accountability and the development of effective solutions.

Meanwhile, hate crime enforcement and remedies remain seriously inadequate. Islamophobic hate crimes make up more than half of all religion-based hate crimes, yet most reported cases are dismissed (Brå, 2023:16). In 2020, 94% of all reported hate crimes in Sweden were closed without prosecution (Brå, 2023:16). Legal protections are inconsistently applied. One example being the hundreds of Quran burnings, which have become state-approved displays of anti-Muslim provocation, that continue to receive police permits even after courts have ruled some incidents to be hate speech. This inconsistency between court rulings and administrative practices undermines the rule of law and deepens the sense of impunity. Simultaneously, protests and advocacy by Muslims are dismissed as “Islamist activism,” reinforcing a double standard where hate propagandists enjoy freedom of expression, while hate victims are stigmatised for speaking out (Svenska kommittén mot antimuslimsk rasism, 2022).

These patterns expose a growing gap between Sweden’s official legal commitments and the real experiences of its Muslim communities. Constitutional and international human rights obligations remain strong on paper, but institutional Islamophobia has become normalised, embedded, and used politically. Bridging this gap requires more than just policy changes. It calls for a fundamental reflection on how racialised discrimination is deeply rooted in Swedish state practices and public discourse. It also necessitates an end to the “chilling effect,” where Muslim organisations are defunded or shut down without proper processes, and Muslim criticisms are dismissed as “Islamist” or “extremist.” Without such a change, Sweden risks undermining the core principles of equality and non-discrimination enshrined in ICERD.

Final and Key Recommendations

- 1. The Swedish Government ought to formally recognise Islamophobia as a racialised form of discrimination.**
Include Islamophobia in Swedish anti-discrimination and hate crime laws, consistent with ICERD Article 1, recognising that religion often acts as a proxy for race, ethnicity, or origin.
- 2. Strengthen enforcement of hate crime and hate speech laws.**
Ensure consistent enforcement of hate speech laws, including for elected officials and media figures. Enhance investigation, prosecution, and sentencing for Islamophobic hate crimes through specialised training, additional resources, and independent oversight.
- 3. Introduce structural safeguards in the legislative process.**
Mandate racial and religious impact assessments (consequence analyses) for all legislative proposals passed in the Riksdag. Establish mechanisms to evaluate how proposed laws and policies affect racialised groups, including Swedish Muslims, before they are implemented.
- 4. Ensure accountability and transparency in parliamentary conduct.**
Introduce ethical and legal standards that require Members of Parliament and party officials to avoid discriminatory rhetoric. Set up monitoring systems and accountability measures for elected officials who incite or legitimise racism or Islamophobia.
- 5. End the discriminatory treatment of Swedish Muslim civil society.**
Establish an independent review body to evaluate de-funding policies, school closures, and audits targeting Muslim organisations. Decisions must be transparent, based on verifiable evidence, and subject to timely appeals.
- 6. Strengthen legal remedies and access to justice.**
Expand the mandate and resources of the Equality Ombudsman (DO) to pursue strategic litigation on Islamophobia and racial discrimination. Ensure victims have access to free or affordable legal aid, and strengthen support for complaints throughout the justice system.
- 7. Mandate protections for religious expression and cultural visibility**
Legally safeguard religious attire, prayer practices, and religious education from arbitrary restrictions for Muslim minorities, just as they are protected for other religious minorities. Prohibit blanket bans targeting Swedish Muslims' religious life unless they are clearly justified and narrowly implemented.

- 8. Elevate the role of the Swedish Institute for Human Rights (SIHR)**
Enhance institutional independence and funding for SIHR. Broaden its mandate to oversee Islamophobia-related policy developments and bolster its ability to monitor civil liberties for racialised and religious minorities.
- 9. Develop a strong equality data infrastructure.**
Introduce disaggregated equality data collection systems that include race, ethnicity, and perceived religion based on self-identification and human rights safeguards. Establish an independent and influential Council of Minorities' Affairs to guide and oversee equality data use and reporting, in cooperation with the Swedish Ethical Review Authority.
- 10. Ensure access to basic services without discriminatory profiling.**
Examine how counter-terrorism laws affect banking access for Swedish Muslim organisations and individuals. Stop bank accounts from being closed due to profiling or unclear "risk" evaluations without legal options.
- 11. Guarantee insurance access for mosques and religious institutions.**
Address discriminatory obstacles in the insurance market. Monitor premium differences and insurance refusals as possible forms of indirect discrimination, and implement support measures for religious institutions facing heightened security risks.
- 12. Protect the right to protest and civic participation.**
Ensure that protests organised by Swedish Muslims are treated equally to other democratic expressions. Prevent security and counter-radicalisation frameworks from being used to stigmatise civic activism.
- 13. Promote inclusive public discourse and political representation.**
Promote the use of inclusive language in public and policy documents, such as "Swedish Muslims" instead of "Muslims," to reinforce a sense of belonging and citizenship. Actively encourage the participation of Swedish Muslims in policy-making, integration initiatives, and anti-racism efforts.
- 14. Address institutional Islamophobia through training and education.**
Implement compulsory anti-discrimination and anti-Islamophobia training for public servants, educators, law enforcement, and judicial personnel. Encourage religious literacy and racial justice across public agencies.
- 15. Counter online hate and digital disinformation.**
Regulate and monitor platforms that disseminate anti-Muslim propaganda. Cease public funding for media outlets that publish Islamophobic content and support independent monitoring initiatives such as Nätbataljonen.

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