

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BEYOND REPORTING: EVIDENCE ON THE FEASIBILITY OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN ISLAMOPHOBIC CASES


BY




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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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Islamophobia is a discriminatory and hateful phenomenon targeting Muslim individuals, manifesting in forms ranging from overt racism to more subtle prejudices. In Spain, Muslim communities encounter several barriers, particularly in accessing basic resources such as employment, housing, education, and healthcare. This form of racism is part of a broader, escalating trend across Europe. Specifically, hostility towards Muslims has intensified over time, particularly following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which erroneously connected Islam to terrorism. This stigma continues to be perpetuated through xenophobic and hateful discourse, exerting a direct and negative impact on the lives of Muslim individuals.

In Spain, Islamophobic rhetoric has become increasingly normalised, particularly within the media and political spheres, driven by the growing influence of far-right parties that perpetuate negative stereotypes. Such narratives reinforce public perceptions that portray Muslim individuals as a threat to security, cultural identity, and traditional values. As a result, this vision fosters an atmosphere in which Islamophobia is expressed more openly within society, paradoxically under the guise of freedom of expression.

In the workplace, for instance, Muslim individuals face a dual challenge: on the one hand, structural racism that excludes them from access to well-paid employment, and on the other, Islamophobia, manifesting as prejudices regarding their abilities or trustworthiness. Muslim women who wear the hijab encounter additional barriers, particularly in accessing housing, where they are often rejected in the rental market due to their appearance, names, or accents. This phenomenon of discrimination is not confined to the aforementioned spheres; it also permeates public institutions, where individuals are often subjected to disrespectful or distrustful treatment.

In this context, and in line with our previous research, the aim of the present study, entitled “Beyond Reporting: Evidence on the Feasibility of Restorative Justice in Islamophobic Cases”, is to understand the reasons why Islamophobic discrimination is underreported in Spain, as well as to explore the potential of restorative justice as a reparative mechanism.

According to the data gathered in our research throughout 2024, only 6% of Muslims who experience daily Islamophobic discrimination have filed a formal complaint. This statistic not only highlights a profound lack of trust in the institutions responsible for protecting rights, but also points to the dehumanisation and normalisation of discriminatory treatment within these institutions. We argue that such a low rate of reporting effectively renders Islamophobic incidents invisible, leaving thousands of individuals without the resources needed to assert and defend their rights.

Our research underscores the detrimental effects of underreporting and proposes an innovative solution: the implementation of restorative justice. This approach contrasts with the traditional punitive model by focusing on repairing harm through dialogue and the restoration of relationships between victims and offenders. Through this process, victims are afforded a platform to be heard and seek reparation, while offenders are given the opportunity to take responsibility and actively engage in resolving the conflict. We argue that restorative justice could prove to be a pivotal tool in combating Islamophobic discrimination and fostering a more inclusive society.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

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Our report adopts a mixed-methods approach, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of Islamophobia in Spain. This research included a survey, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups, allowing us to capture a wide range of experiences from Muslim individuals across various social contexts.

Firstly, 584 questionnaires were distributed among members of Muslim communities across Spain's 17 regions, known as Autonomous Communities. Between 30 and 34 questionnaires were collected in each region. The questionnaire focused on identifying participants' experiences of discrimination, their awareness of available legal resources, and their willingness to report such incidents. The data gathered provided a clear picture of the barriers faced by victims when attempting to access justice and resources.

Secondly, 19 semi-structured interviews were conducted with professionals from the legal, social, and educational sectors. These experts provided a critical perspective on the dynamics of Islamophobia and underreporting, as well as potential solutions that could be implemented at both the institutional and community levels. The interviews were crucial in understanding the limitations of the justice system and how restorative justice could contribute to improving the current situation.

Finally, thirdly, 10 focus groups were organised with Muslim individuals from diverse backgrounds, including women who wear the hijab, both young people and adults, as well as individuals with varying levels of social integration. These focus groups provided an opportunity to delve into the personal experiences of the participants and explore how different forms of discrimination impact their daily lives. Additionally, the focus groups offered a platform for collective discussions on the most viable solutions to combat Islamophobia.

The integration of these methods facilitated the collection of both empirical and qualitative data, offering a thorough understanding of the phenomenon and laying a robust foundation for the report's recommendations.

# 3. KEY FINDINGS

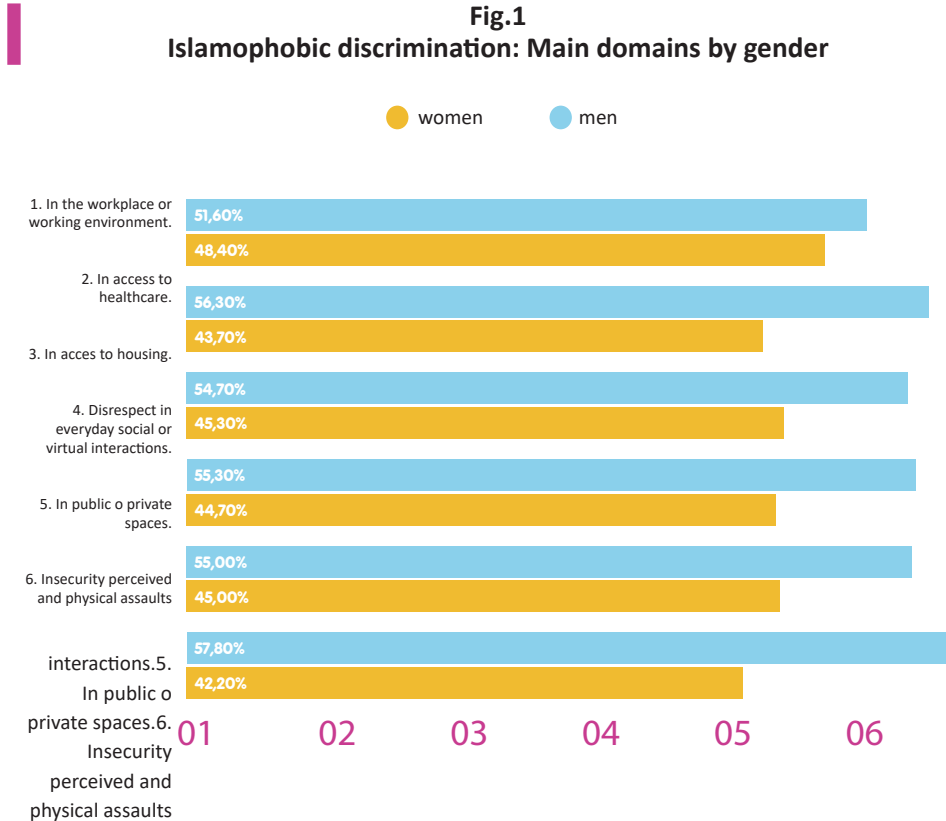
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### 3.1 Characterisation of islamophobic discrimination

Islamophobic discrimination manifests in multiple manners, affecting Muslim individuals in various aspects of their lives. The following are the most prominent areas identified in our research:



Note: average percentage of domains in which discrimination was experienced. this figure considers each of the indicators or potential response options selected by participants. n=583 individuals responded to this question. prepared by the authors.

**1. Housing:** 68% of participants reported experiencing discrimination when attempting to access housing. Many Muslims encounter difficulties in securing rental accommodation due to their appearance, names, or the wearing of the hijab. This form of discrimination contributes to social segregation and spatial exclusion, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and further stigmatizing Muslim individuals.

**2. Public and private spaces:** 62% of participants have encountered disrespectful behaviour in everyday interactions, both in public and private spaces. Muslim women who wear the hijab are particularly targeted, illustrating the intersection of racism and Islamophobia with gender, and how they are dispro-

portionately affected by these prejudices.

**3. Employment:** 59% of participants reported experiencing discrimination in accessing employment or within the workplace due to their religious identity. Common barriers include stereotypes about loyalty, radicalism, and the perceived incompatibility of their beliefs with the values of Spanish society. Moreover, those who do manage to secure employment often face lower wages than their non-Muslim colleagues, despite performing the same duties.

**4. Healthcare:** 47% of participants acknowledged discrimination in accessing healthcare services, with Muslim women particularly reporting higher levels of bias. These women noted receiving critical remarks from medical staff regarding their religious practices, as well as encountering obstacles when seeking medical care, even when it was urgently needed.

**5. Education:** Muslim students, particularly those who openly practice their faith, are frequent targets of bullying. These individuals face discrimination not only from their peers but also from teachers and other educational staff. Such attitudes cast doubt on their abilities and potential, as well as on their aspirations to pursue higher education, which negatively impacts their academic performance. The absence of inclusive educational policies, coupled with widespread prejudice against Muslims in educational settings, further exacerbates this issue.

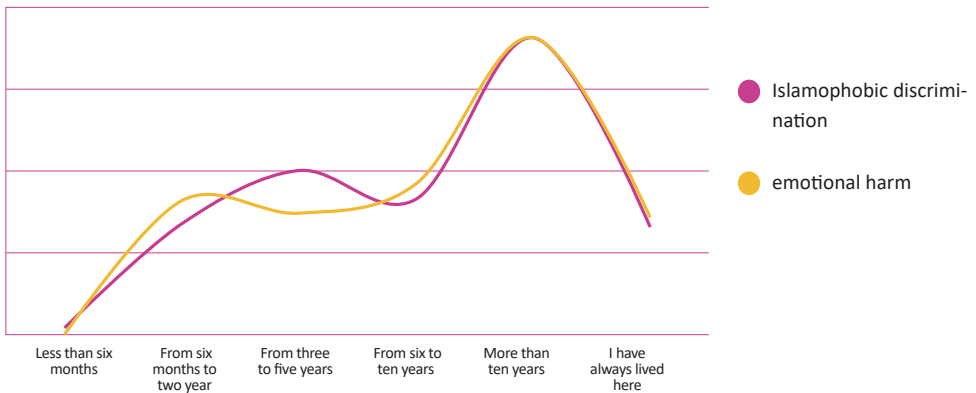
### 3.2. Intersectionality: Women, Muslims, and Minorities

Muslim women in Spain face a triple form of discrimination, which intersects gender, race-ethnicity, and religion, placing them in a uniquely vulnerable position. This discrimination is evident across various aspects of their daily lives, from access to employment and education to public services. According to our research, 70% of women report having been rejected for job opportunities or housing due to their wearing of the hijab, a visible symbol of their religious identity. This stigma not only restricts their professional prospects but also relegates them to informal or precarious sectors, perpetuating a stereotypical division of roles that confines them to domestic and caregiving duties, while men are more readily positioned in the public sphere.

Within the educational context, many Muslim women face additional obstacles in exercising their right to religious freedom. The wearing of the hijab remains a cause of exclusion and stigmatisation in educational settings, adversely affecting their self-esteem and academic performance. This exclusion not only limits their educational development, but also reinforces the perception that their professional aspirations should be restricted. The report highlights that, in many cases, these women are directed towards low-prestige career paths, internalising the biases embedded within both the educational system and the labour market. As a result, they experience elevated levels of anxiety, social marginalisation, and an increasing distrust of institutions, which often fail to offer effective solutions to protect their rights and ensure their full inclusion.

### 3.3 Islamophobic discrimination and emotional impact

**Fig. 2**  
Islamophobic discrimination, emotional harm, and length of residence in Spain



The impact of Islamophobia on the emotional well-being of Muslim individuals is profound. Our report reveals that 70% of Islamophobia victims reported experiencing stress, anxiety, or frustration as a direct result of discrimination. Regular exposure to hostile attitudes and social exclusion has significant effects on self-esteem and the sense of belonging. Many Muslims feel they are not accepted within Spanish society, perceiving themselves as trapped in a cycle of discrimination from which they cannot escape.

This emotional burden not only affects victims on an individual level but also creates tensions within communities, promoting a pervasive sense of insecurity and mistrust. Additionally, our findings indicate a growing correlation between Islamophobic discrimination and emotional harm relative to the length of residence in Spain. In other words, the longer individuals reside in the country, the more instances of discrimination they experience, and the greater the emotional harm they endure.

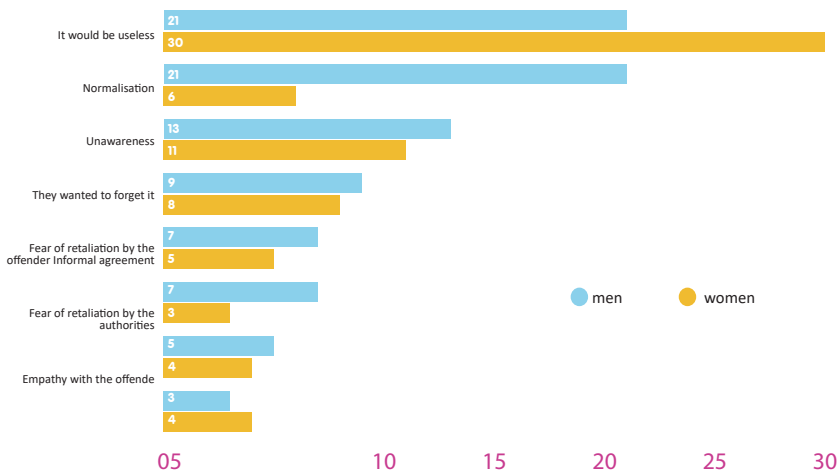
### 3.4 Causes of underreporting

Despite clear evidence of high levels of Islamophobic discrimination, underreporting remains one of the most concerning aspects of this phenomenon. Below, we outline some of the primary causes of underreporting identified in the report:

- **Normalisation of discrimination:** For many Muslims, discrimination is viewed as an ordinary part of daily life. Consequently, they often fail to recognise certain acts as worthy of reporting, considering them a regular feature of their lived experience. This normalisation contributes to the invisibility of Islamophobia and impedes the adoption of measures to address and eliminate it.
- **Distrust in institutions:** Distrust in authorities is another key factor. Many Muslims feel that institutions fail to protect them adequately or that their complaints will not be taken seriously. This is particularly true for individuals in vulnerable situations, such as those without legal residency or those who do not speak the local language.
- **Unawareness of rights and available resources:** Around 40% of survey respondents reported being unaware of the legal resources available to address acts of discrimination. This lack of knowledge about their legal rights and the mechanisms for filing complaints significantly hinders individuals from seeking assistance when confronted with abuse or discrimination.

Victims of Islamophobia face not only daily discrimination but also institutional neglect. Many choose not to report incidents due to fears of being dismissed or encountering retaliation. The inadequate response from authorities exacerbates the cycle of discrimination, leaving victims vulnerable and unprotected.

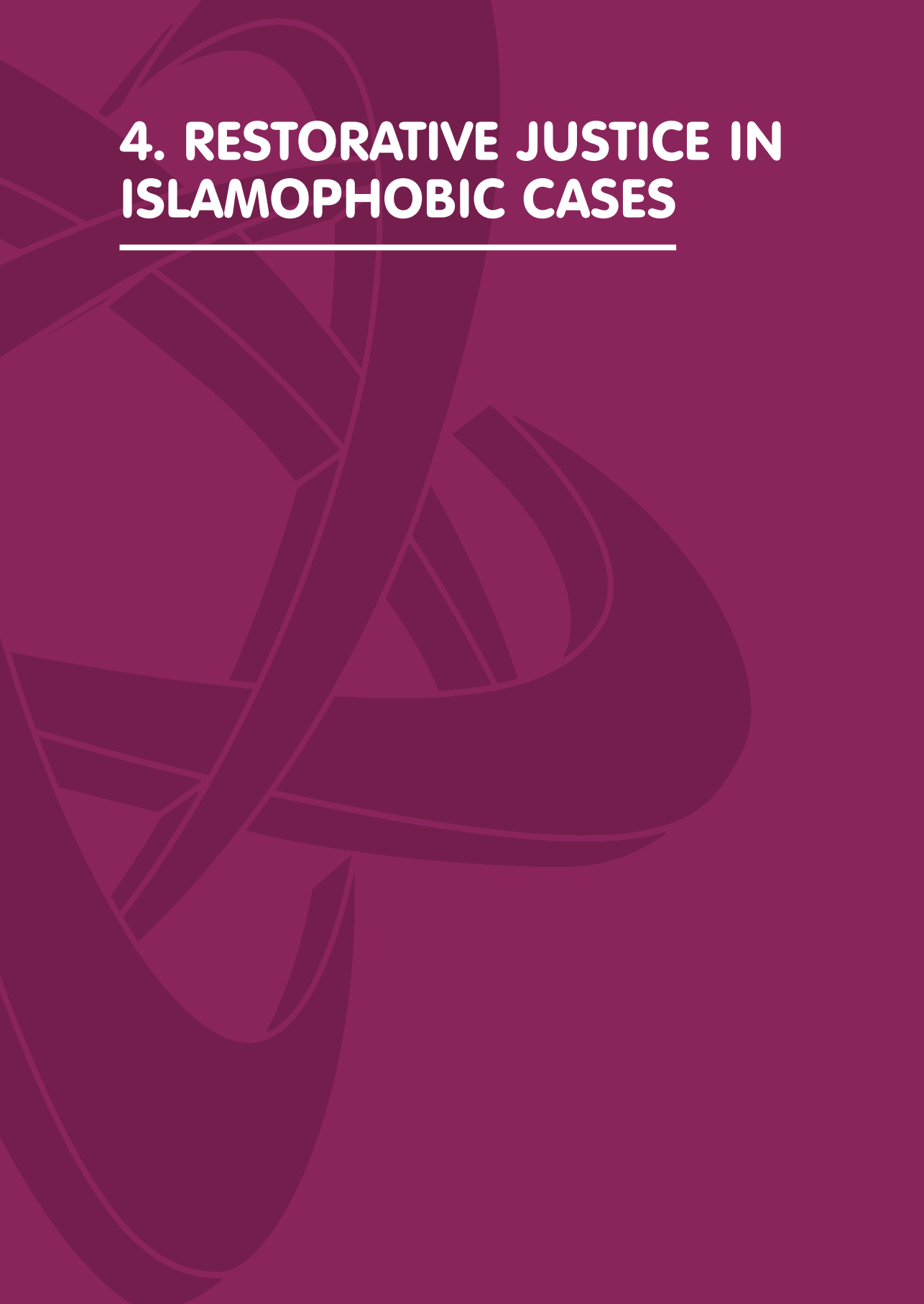
**Fig. 3**  
Main reasons for not reporting by gender, data in absolute values



Note: other less frequent reasons include: “god will make them pay”, “they were a minor”, “there was no aggression”, or “despair”.

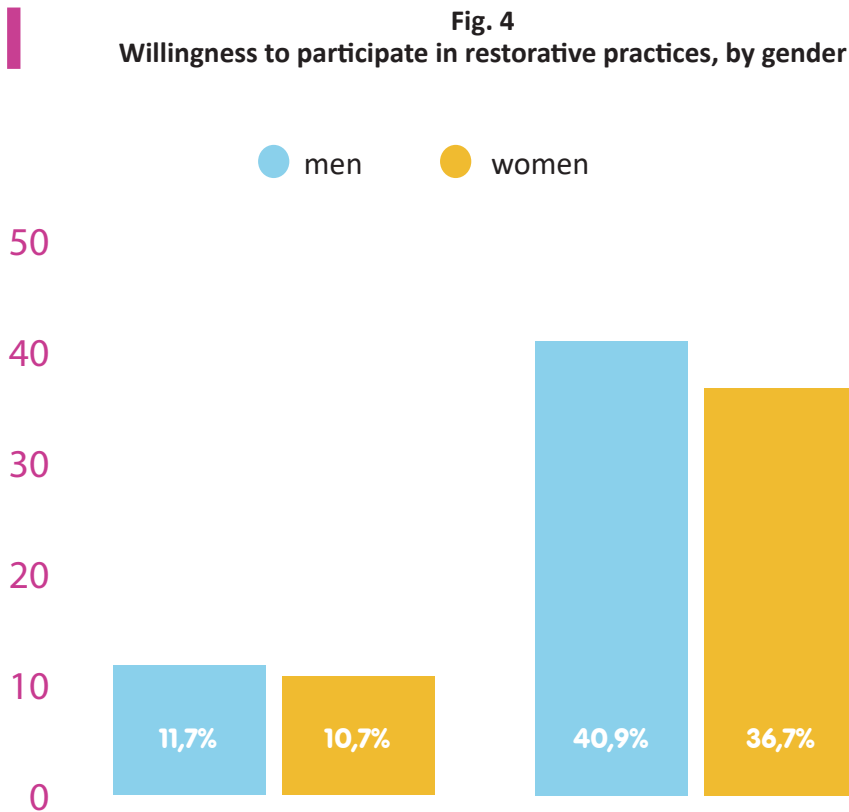
# 4. RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN ISLAMOPHOBIC CASES

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Our research identifies restorative justice as a highly promising mechanism for addressing underreporting in islamophobic cases. By prioritising harm repair and facilitating dialogue between victims and perpetrators, this approach has the potential to boost trust in the judicial system while mitigating fears of retaliation.

Research participants regard restorative processes as effective means of rebuilding community relationships and alleviating stigmatisation. However, they also raise concerns about the risk of re-victimisation and the potential lack of cultural awareness among mediators



The professionals interviewed stress that the effective implementation of restorative justice requires comprehensive training for mediators, particularly in cultural and religious sensitivity. They also underline the need for clear protocols to ensure that victims' participation is both voluntary and safe. Restorative justice in islamophobic cases could provide victims with the opportunity to articulate the harm they have endured, while enabling perpetrators to recognise the impact of their actions. It is recommended that restorative justice programs be introduced as a complementary form of justice, operating along with traditional judicial systems.

# 5. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

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Islamophobia remains a significant issue in Spain, with profound negative effects on the lives of Muslim individuals. Underreporting is one of the main obstacles to effectively addressing this issue, as it prevents Islamophobic incidents from being properly recognised and addressed.

Our report underscores the urgent need to create more accessible and effective reporting mechanisms, as well as the importance of raising societal awareness about the reality of Islamophobia. Restorative justice emerges as a key tool for providing more inclusive solutions, allowing victims to be heard and to receive reparation.

Research of this nature, supported by robust evidence, has the potential to eliminate the daily discrimination and exclusion faced by Muslims. Moreover, the objective of such studies extends beyond simple reporting; it seeks to establish the groundwork for creating an intercultural society that acknowledges and celebrates the inherent diversity and pluralism of all individuals residing in Spain.

# 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

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The data from this research provide valuable insights that allow us to identify several key actions to combat Islamophobia and enhance greater reporting of discrimination cases:

- **Awareness and training:** It is essential to implement educational programmes that promote inclusion and respect for Muslim communities. These programmes should target both the general public and the Muslim community itself, empowering individuals with knowledge of their rights and how to effectively report incidents of discrimination. In this regard, the creation of public awareness campaigns is recommended to highlight the impact of Islamophobia and the need for a cultural shift towards a more inclusive, diverse, and pluralistic society.
- **Strengthening reporting mechanisms:** There is a need to improve the accessibility of reporting mechanisms, ensuring that they are equipped with appropriate protocols that are user-friendly, anonymous, and secure, along with ethical guidelines to properly handle such complaints. Victims must feel supported by the institutions responsible for safeguarding their rights. Furthermore, we propose the creation or enhancement of a monitoring system to ensure that complaints are processed in a timely, fair, and just manner.
- **Implementation of restorative justice:** As an alternative to the traditional punitive approach, restorative justice offers a model in which victims are given a platform to be heard, and offenders are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions. This approach has demonstrated effectiveness in other contexts, such as juvenile justice. We recommend the introduction of pilot restorative justice programmes for Islamophobic cases, to assess their potential and effectiveness in repairing harm and fostering reconciliation.

Since its establishment, the Moroccan Association for the Integration of Immigrants [Asociación Marroquí para la Integración de los Inmigrantes] has remained steadfast in its social commitment and unwavering in its dedication to serving the public good. As an independent organisation, free from affiliation with political, ideological, or trade union entities, our mission is to build a more equitable, diverse, and plural society in which all individuals, regardless of their origin, beliefs, or gender, have equal access to opportunities and can fully exercise their fundamental rights. We are committed to eradicating all forms of social exclusion and injustice related to migration. Through our efforts, we have played a significant role in promoting the social inclusion of individuals from diverse backgrounds, while fostering greater understanding and coexistence within Spanish society concerning the various migratory realities.







BY:



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