

Islam

This factsheet provides an overview of Islam and is taken from our [Religion and belief in the workplace resource](#). You will learn about key dates and celebrations in the Islamic calendar, ethics and Islamophobia. This information has been drawn from our own research, BBC website and guides produced by the Higher Education Academy.

PLEASE NOTE: We are aware that religious beliefs and practices vary over time and from place to place, so these factsheets may not accurately reflect the practices of all staff. It's important to consider that people of the same faith may practice their faith in different ways and may hold different beliefs. It's also important to consider that an individual's faith may change over time. We would be delighted to receive feedback where the content would benefit from revision.

Key insights

- The word Islam means 'submission to the will of God'.
- Islam is the second largest religion in the world with over 1 billion followers.
- Followers of Islam are called Muslims.
- Muslims believe that Islam was revealed over 1400 years ago in Mecca, Arabia.
- Muslims believe that there is only One God and the Arabic word for God is Allah.
- According to Muslims, God sent a number of prophets to mankind to teach them how to live according to his law. Jesus, Moses and Abraham are respected as prophets of God. They believe that the final Prophet was Muhammad.

- Muslims believe that Islam has always existed, but for practical purposes, date their religion from the time of the migration of Muhammad.
- Muslims base their laws on their holy book the Qur'an, the Sunnah and in some countries subsequent Hadith's from Islamic scholars.
- Muslims believe the Sunnah is the practical example of Prophet Muhammad and that there are five Pillars of Islam which must be adhered to. These are the declaration of one's faith, praying five times a day, fasting during Ramadan, giving reasonable earnings to charity (also known as 'Zakat') and if viable a pilgrimage to Mecca in a Muslim's lifetime.

Things to consider

Try to be flexible with your colleague's working patterns if they would like to fit prayers in throughout their working day. The number of times an individual may wish to pray each day can be unique to them. If staff are entitled to an hour's lunch break, consider letting the individual choose to break this into 20 minute or half an hour breaks instead.

Ensure there is a room that can be used for prayer within your organisation. Best practice is to have a multi-purpose room which can be used by staff to pray, meditate or reflect. This will need to be located close to washing facilities so colleagues can practise Wudu – washing before prayer.

Also try to accommodate requests for leave for pilgrimage where possible, as this may be a once in a lifetime opportunity for them.

Key dates in the Muslim calendar

There are two major festivals in Islam that all Muslims celebrate, Eid ul-Adha and Eid ul-Fitr. However, there are several others that are celebrated only by certain Muslim groups.

Eid ul-Adha (Eid al-Adha)

Eid-ul-Adha (the Festival of Sacrifice) is celebrated throughout the Muslim world as a commemoration of Prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail to God. It is celebrated on the 10th day of the month of Dhu al Hijja (12th month of the Muslim Lunar calendar). It celebrates the ending of the pilgrimage to Mecca, during which each pilgrim – or indeed any

Muslim as is now commonly practiced – sacrifices (or has sacrificed on their behalf) a sheep, goat, cow or camel. This practice is often referred to as ‘Qurbani’.

During Eid ul-Adha, communities decorate both their homes and streets. They also attend the formal Eid Prayer at Mosques, exchange gifts and participate in a celebratory meal. It is common practice for Muslim staff to ask for two to three days to celebrate this festival.

Eid ul-Fitr (Eid al-Fitr)

Eid ul-Fitr marks the breaking of the fast on the first day after the month of Ramadan and continues for three days in a similar manner to Eid al-Adha. Many Muslim members of staff are likely to request the last few days of Ramadan as time off, to spend time in reflection with their families and prepare for the Eid celebrations.

You may hear these colloquially referred to as big Eid (Eid ul-Adha) and little Eid (Eid ul-Fitr).

Ramadan

Ramadan is the name of the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Muslims believe it is the month during which the Qur’an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad over 1400 years ago. Ramadan is the holiest month of the year for Muslims, and it is considered that the reward of good deeds during this month are multiplied several-fold.

During Ramadan, from dawn until sunset, Muslims are obliged to abstain from all forms of food, drink (including water), smoking, immoral behaviours and thoughts and sex. Most Muslims will wake before dawn for a meal before the start of their fast and break their fast with dates and water at sunset. This is followed by a meal, often celebrated with extended family.

As a matter of simple courtesy non-Muslims may consider refraining from eating, drinking or smoking openly in the presence of Muslims who are fasting during the day in Ramadan. Where Ramadan falls during the winter months and the breaking of the fast is before the end of the working day, it is normal for Muslims who are fasting to wish to be able to break the fast and pray the sunset prayer at the appropriate time, and allowances should be made for this where possible.

Muslims who are fasting may have reduced energy and concentration may be impaired as the day progresses. For some, this could become more pronounced as the month goes on. This will be due to fasting and disrupted sleep patterns, as people tend to stay up late at night to socialise and wake up early for a predawn meal. It is good practice to take this into account and factor in flexibility

where possible. However, the fasting period reduces in length slightly each day because of the lunar calendar.

You may wish to consider circulating guidance to line managers and staff on how to support their fasting colleagues during this time.

You can learn more about Ramadan in our [Ramadan guidance](#).

Lailatul-mi'raj

Lailatul-mi'raj celebrates the night of the ascent, when the Prophet ascended to heaven. This festival occurs on the 27th day in the month of Rajab, the 7th month of the Islamic lunar calendar.

Muharram

The festival of Muharram celebrates the Islamic New Year's Day and is named after the first month of the Islamic calendar. This festival lasts for ten days. The first eight days are counted from New Year's Day. The last two days are celebrated through fasting to celebrate the day Prophet Moses saved the people of Israel from the Pharaoh.

Al-Mawlid-an-Nabawi

Al-Mawlid-an-Nabawi celebrates the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. He was born on the morning of the 12th day in the month of Rabi' alAwwal, the 3rd month of the Islamic year. According to the Gregorian calendar, this would be August 20th, 570 AD. The Prophet died 63 years later, on the same day. This day may be celebrated with parties and other gatherings.

Ethics

Modesty and sex

Islam forbids absolutely any sexual activity before marriage. In addition to that, Islam also has a strong view of 'indecent' behaviours, for example any activity that would that involve close contact between men and women. This idea may extend to views around modesty and avoiding clothes that are revealing.

Language

Obscene language and swearing may be offensive to Muslim staff.

Alcohol

Muslims are not permitted to consume alcohol or other intoxicants that interfere with the clear functioning of the mind. Some Muslims will prefer to avoid gatherings that involve the consumption of alcohol. It is good practice for workplaces to provide appropriate beverages at gatherings where Muslim staff may be in attendance. You may also wish to consider the location of these events e.g. can you choose a restaurant over a bar?

Sexual orientation

Many Islamic scholars agree that the religion forbids same sex relationships. Consequently, many Muslims feel strongly on this issue. It's important to consider intersectionality here too, as some colleagues may be reflecting on their own identity being both LGBTQ+ and Muslim.

Food

Many Muslims follow a strict dietary law, which means that pork is prohibited in any form or food that has come in to contact with pork products. Products containing blood are also prohibited.

Halal meat must be slaughtered in a certain way and the blood removed. For employers accommodating this, an Arabic symbol can be found on most Halal products in the UK and most of Europe.

Most seafood and all vegetables are permissible.

Dress code

Islam does not recommend a particular style of dress for men and women. Therefore, Islamic dress should not be confused with traditional clothing according to an individual's ethnic background or personal taste.

From a modesty perspective, men should cover their body from the navel to the knees and they are not allowed to wear pure silk or gold items.

Many Muslim women choose to wear a headscarf, often referred to as the Hijab. The majority of Muslim scholars of both genders believe that according to the Islamic sources, women are to cover their whole body with clothes, except their face, hands and feet, when outside the immediate family circle. They do not need to be covered when they are in exclusively female company, nor in the company of male family members within the degrees of relationship that prohibit marriage (i.e. father, grandfather, brother, son and uncle). Some Muslim women choose to cover their face with the niqab, a veil that covers the face except for the eyes. It is important to note that there are also

many Muslim women who choose not to wear the Hijab in the UK, as it is often also culturally significant for some ethnicities.

Islamophobia

What is Islamophobia?

Broadly speaking 'Islamophobia' is discrimination, prejudice or hostility against Muslims. The term began to enter public consciousness in the UK in the late 1980s as a way of signalling a rejection of the growing Muslim population. However, in 1997, a report by the Runnymede Trust and another by the Commission on British Muslims, were pivotal in raising new social and political awareness of prejudice against Islam and Muslims in Britain.

Both reports broadly defined Islamophobia as 'unfounded hostility towards Islam' resulting in discriminatory attitudes and behaviours towards Muslims. Since 1997, debates and research have tried to tease out the distinction between 'Islamophobia', (which suggests there is only one interpretation of 'Islam' and implies a 'fear' of the religion), and a broader based prejudice towards Muslim communities.

The common usage of the term 'Islamophobia' means it is now often used as shorthand for any form of anti-Muslim feeling, hatred or discrimination. Using the term in this way means that perpetrators of this behaviour will sometimes defend their views by asserting their right to have negative views of Islam. This can create further tensions and sensitivities around the use of the term, which it is advisable to use only in the relevant context.

The components of 'Islamophobia'

The Runnymede Trust Report identified some common threads that underpin narratives around 'Islamophobia', these include views of Islam as:

- Monolithic and static, therefore unresponsive to progress.
- Separate and other, sharing no common values with other cultures.
- Inferior, irrational, primitive and sexist.
- Violent, aggressive, supportive of terrorism and engaged in a clash of civilisations.
- A manipulative political ideology that is used for political or military advantage.
- Offering unjustified criticisms of the West that do not merit debate.

- A source of justified discrimination and exclusion of Muslim people.
- As being a natural/normal target of criticism.

Prevalence

The rise of 'Islamophobia' has been strongly interconnected with geopolitical events such as 9/11, the 2005 London bombings, the 2013 Woolwich incident and the ongoing conflict in Syria. Research shows that experiences of racism and 'Islamophobia' increase shortly after these events before declining gradually.

In addition, the tone of reporting of these events in the mainstream media has been shown to contribute to the negative stereotyping of Muslims.

Tell MAMA (Measuring anti-Muslim Attacks), a reporting service for individuals experiencing anti-Muslim hate incidents, reported 1,128 incidents during 2015. A significant proportion of these incidents occurred both in-person and on-line. 61% of these incidents involved Muslim women, 75% of which were visibly Muslim. For Muslim men, reported visible markers which increased the likelihood of experiencing 'Islamophobia' included having a beard, brown skin or wearing the traditional dress 'Shalwar Kameez'.

Manifestations

'Islamophobic' incidents include verbal abuse, physical assault and threatening behaviour.

Physically aggressive forms of Islamophobia include outright extreme violence, through to incidents such as head scarfs being pulled off by fellow passengers on public transport. Verbal abuse includes name-calling, taunting or individuals being made the subject of jokes and racially based 'banter' in public.

Subtle forms of 'Islamophobia' include forms of avoidance and exclusion, such as being stared at, not having someone sit next to you on the bus or experiencing a general sense of social distance.

Online 'Islamophobia' is prevalent on social media sites.

Incidents are not restricted to specific places. They can occur in schools, colleges, workplaces, Mosques, neighbourhoods, public spaces and at airports.

It is not only Muslims who are targeted by 'Islamophobia'. A diverse range of people from different ethnic and religious minorities also encounter it daily, mostly as a result of people assuming they

are Muslim. Sikhs, Hindus, other South Asians, those with African heritages and even some central and eastern European migrants be targeted.

Alongside this, there is good evidence to show that Muslims are subject to greater surveillance and profiling by the security services than members of other world religions, making contemporary Britain a more challenging place to live as a Muslim.

In the workplace

The Social Mobility Commission research, 2017, found that despite a strong work ethic and high resilience amongst Muslims leading to impressive results in education, only 6% of Muslims found employment in professional occupations, compared with 10% of the overall population in England and Wales.

The study found 19.8% of Muslims aged 16-to-74 were in full-time employment, compared with 34.9% of the overall population. From a social mobility perspective this is particularly concerning given that 50% of Muslim households are in poverty, compared with less than 20% in the overall population. The research also highlighted routine examples of Muslim men and women failing to secure jobs that were commensurate with their skills and qualifications.