# Addressing racial and religious inequity in the built environment
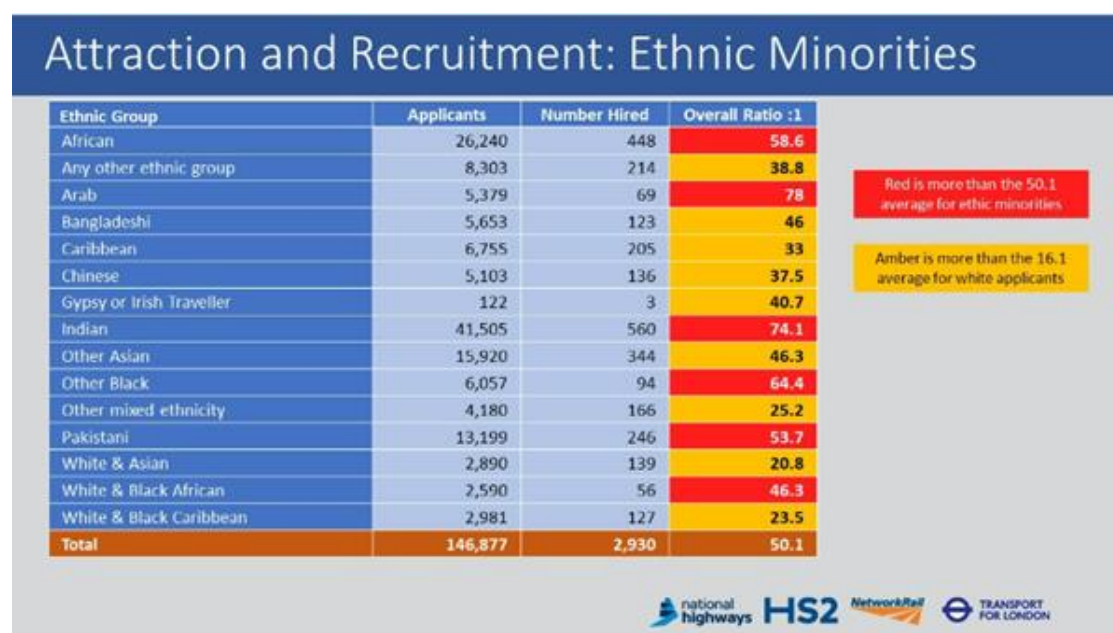
By Yusuf Javaid

In September I attended the RICS Advancing Racial Equity in the Built Environment event with the Association of Muslim Surveyors (AMS) Initiative by Surveyor Store Ltd. The event provided more transparency of the built environment in regard to employability and career progression and enabled us to understand this wider diversity issue using quantifiable data.

The data provided by Action Sustainability (Sustainability Tool) has a much larger pool of information than that held by the Office of National Statistics (ONS). The statistics dispel the myth that Black and ethnic minority groups are not attracted to the built environment sector. It is difficult to evaluate the true picture of racial inequality, economic inactivity, and employment issues due to the limitations of the data. If we are to provide greater support to this disadvantaged community, there must be more reliable data on which to base governmental policies and corporate procedures.

A good place to start would be for the government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission to raise more awareness of what constitutes unlawful discrimination and how to challenge this. An easy win could be to require name-blind recruitment from all employers; this would eliminate any entry bias barriers that many Muslims face. This is illustrated by the fact it takes 78 Arabic to achieve just 1 hire in comparison to the 16 to 1 success rate for white candidates.

## Attraction and Recruitment: Ethnic Minorities

| Ethnic Group | Applicants | Number Hired | Overall Ratio :1 |
|---|---|---|---|
| African | 26,240 | 448 | 58.6 |
| Any other ethnic group | 8,303 | 214 | 38.8 |
| Arab | 5,379 | 69 | 78 |
| Bangladeshi | 5,653 | 123 | 46 |
| Caribbean | 6,755 | 205 | 33 |
| Chinese | 5,103 | 136 | 37.5 |
| Gypsy or Irish Traveller | 122 | 3 | 40.7 |
| Indian | 41,505 | 560 | 74.1 |
| Other Asian | 15,920 | 344 | 46.3 |
| Other Black | 6,057 | 94 | 64.4 |
| Other mixed ethnicity | 4,180 | 166 | 25.2 |
| Pakistani | 13,199 | 246 | 53.7 |
| White & Asian | 2,890 | 139 | 20.8 |
| White & Black African | 2,590 | 56 | 46.3 |
| White & Black Caribbean | 2,981 | 127 | 23.5 |
| Total | 146,877 | 2,930 | 50.1 |

Red is more than the 50.1 average for ethic minorities

Amber is more than the 16.1 average for white applicants

national highways  HS2  NetworkRail  TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

Summary of attraction and recruitment data for candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds - 2022 Diversity Data Benchmarking Survey.
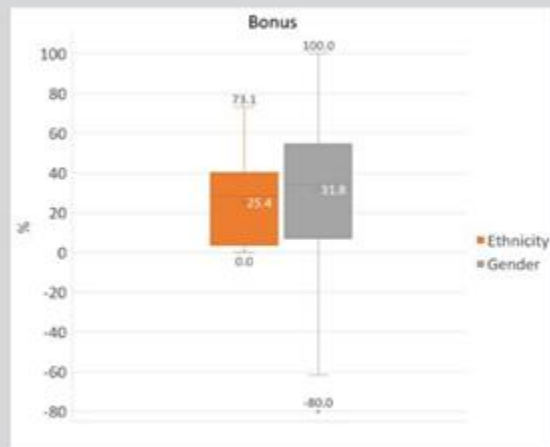
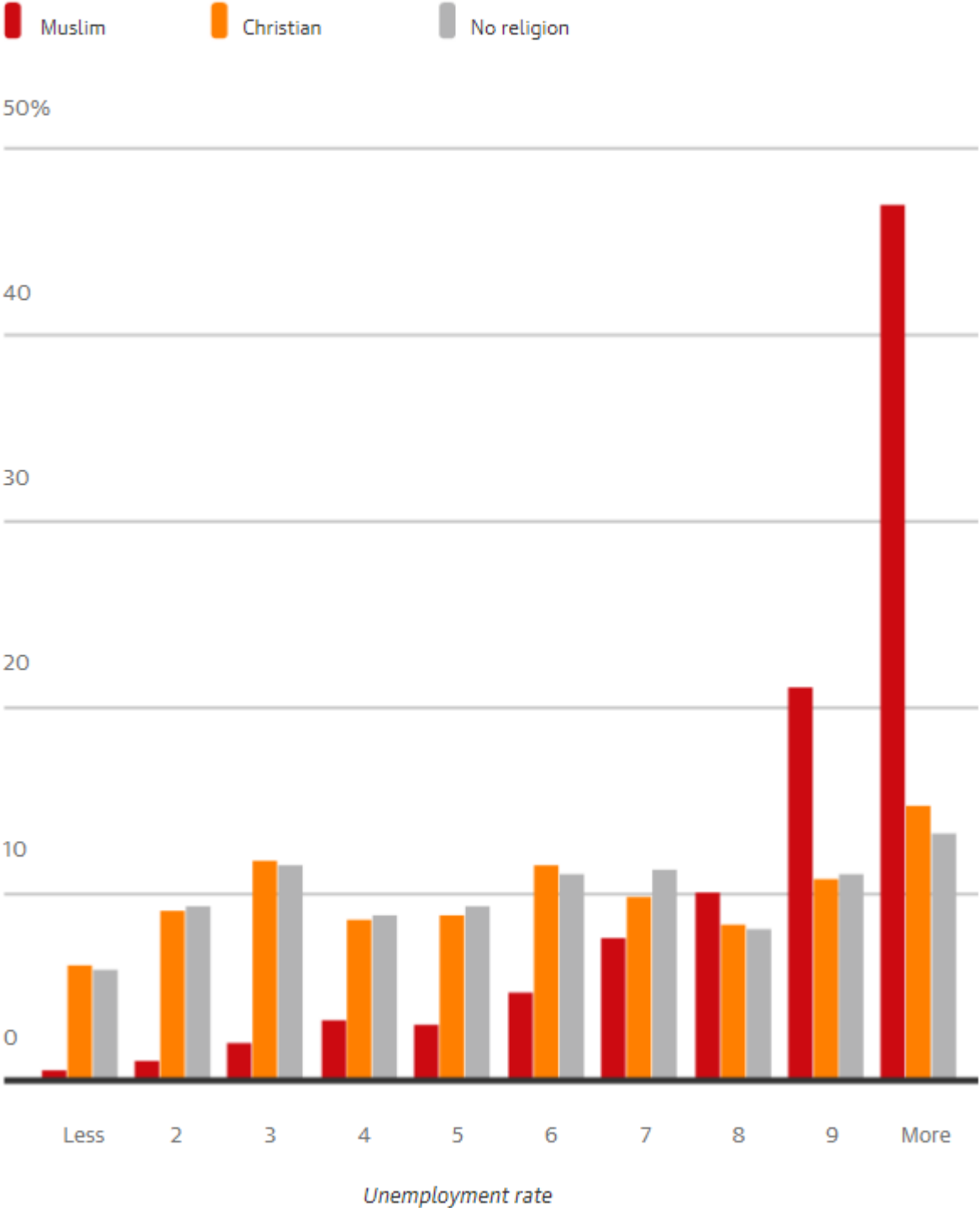Bonus pay gap against women and ethnic minorities - 2022 Diversity Data Benchmarking Survey.

Approximately 68% of the total Muslim population in England and Wales live in areas with the highest unemployment, compared to 26% of Christians and 25% of respondents who said they did not follow a religion. To some degree, explaining the high employment rate among Muslim people in the UK as a result of sociocultural factors or traditionalism seems inadequate and not reflected by reality.

Published in the peer reviewed Ethnic and Racial Studies journal, the research confirmed the existence of a 'Muslim penalty' in the employment market that discriminates against Muslims and poses a significant barrier to them accessing or progressing in work. Sociocultural variables such as gender attitudes, language proficiency, and the extent of inter and intra-ethnic social ties are not a convincing source of explaining ethno-religious differences in unemployment.

The country of origin or perceived 'Muslimness' is important when understanding how this discrimination operates. For instance, it seems that merely being Arabic (yet not being Muslim) would propel you into the highest bands of unemployment or economic inactivity in the UK. Whilst being Arab does not automatically mean that you are a Muslim, the association with the religion and being perceived as a Muslim is a huge factor in being potentially discriminated against.

# Muslim communities are more likely to live in areas with high unemployment rates

Proportion of people in each decile of employment, by religion

■ Muslim ■ Christian ■ No religion



Unemployment rate

Guardian graphic. Source: 2021 Census ONS

## Ethnicity – Key findings

**Attraction**

**Ethnicity**

**39.9%** of applicants are ethnic minorities

**17.5%** Ethnic minorities (ONS 18.5%)

**+ 1.7%** From 2021

**Voluntary leavers**

Ethnic minorities

**21.3%** Before age 34

**Pay gap\***

\*Average reported pay gap

**8.3%** Ethnicity

**Selection**

**50** Ethnic minority applicants per hire (16 for white Average

**Ethnic pay gap reporting**

Only 4% report ethnic pay gap

| No 67.9% | Intend 27.7% | 4 % |

Key findings on Ethnicity - 2022 Diversity Data Benchmarking Survey.

The Parliamentary Women's and Equalities' Committee states that British Muslims also experience the lowest earnings of any religious group, earning £350 less each month than average; only 6% of Muslims are in 'higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations' compared to 10% of the overall population.

Research has indicated that 1 in 4 employers are reluctant to hire Muslim women due to concerns they will put family commitments and caring duties above their professional duties. It is unknown if this gender disparity is due to Muslim women being more 'visible' due to wearing more overt religious attire such as a hijab, meaning that employers can identify their religion more readily and subsequently discriminate against them. Other research has shown British Pakistani women are more likely to be asked whether they have plans to get married or have children, with 1 in 8 being asked, compared to 1 in 30 white women.

Alienation and perception of Muslims in the workplace have had a drastic impact on employability and career progression. A study carried out by the CIPD noted many Muslims feel prominent and government backed programmes such as 'Prevent' which aims to tackle the ideological causes of terrorism and intervene early to support people susceptible to radicalisation is a source of fear and anxiety amongst their communities.

The Prevent programme is highly problematic in terms of positioning Muslims as automatic security risks and defining them as poorly integrated into British society far too often under the guise of 'safeguarding'.

The CIPD further went on to state that during the study 'many Muslims were reluctant to engage with them for fear that the inquiry was part of the Prevent programme'. As a result of genuine concern of being labelled a suspect community by certain public bodies, central government strategies to tackle unemployment among Muslims are less effective as they are subsequently less likely to engage, resulting in further alienation and inability to access support and resources.

### What initial steps should we take to combat some of these inequalities?

- Change the "suspect community" narrative so Muslims are not perceived as being on the outside of the needs or culture of any sector of industry.

- Spell out the business case for religious diversity and the benefits that flow to businesses by adopting an inclusive work environment, highlighting the vast array of untapped talent that exists.

- Create religious diversity champions and role models to encourage a diverse pool of applicants. The innovation and dynamism that can thus be generated to benefit businesses.

- Raise awareness amongst employers that the Equality Act 2010 outlaws direct or indirect forms of religious discrimination, and that adherence to religious dress and religious practices by Muslims is protected by law.

- Produce more accessible guidance in underrepresented industries such as the built environment to help employers openly address faith in the workplace, understand the difference between positive action and positive discrimination, and ensure they have in place effective measures to support reported cases of religious discrimination.

- Partner with employer organisations to openly address religion/culture in the workplace, remove career progression barriers creating an equal playing field based on merit as opposed to perception and dispel myths through open dialogue sessions.

**Sources:**

https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/sustainability-tool/

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Employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK | CIPD

6 charts which show the employment barriers faced by British Muslims | The Independent | The Independent

68% of Muslims in England and Wales live in areas with high unemployment | Social mobility | The Guardian

House of Commons - Employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK - Women and Equalities Committee (parliament.uk)

Realising Aspirations: (youngfoundation.org)

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