

Pearn Kandola Research

Antisemitism and Islamophobia at work (2024)

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Contents

- 04 > Survey results
- 12 > Key themes
- 13 > Interviews and focus groups
- 16 > Differences and similarities
- 20 > Recommendations

Introduction

Background

In December 2023 Pearn Kandola published the results of its groundbreaking research, examining religious expression and discrimination in the workplace. [We reported that people of all groups find it difficult to express their faith at work.](#) Whilst 50% of our sample of nearly 7000 people said they wore clothing or symbols related to their religion outside of work, less than a quarter chose to do so in the workplace, and an even smaller number felt comfortable doing so. The survey also revealed the difficulty experienced by people who had a faith, in terms of exclusion and discrimination in the workplace.

One of the questions that we have been asked most regularly since the publication of the report is what we discovered about the impact of the Israel – Gaza conflict. Our data for the Religion At Work (2023) report was gathered during 2022 and analysed in the subsequent months and so could tell us a little to help us answer that question.

This brand new research is designed to look at the:

1. Extent to which Jewish people experience antisemitism in the workplace
2. Extent to which Muslims experience Islamophobia in the workplace
3. Impact of the Israel-Gaza conflict on them
4. Actions that organisations can take to ensure people feel safe and included in workplaces



Survey results

The key themes that emerge from this data regarding the experiences of Jews and Muslims in the workplace are centred around comfort with religious identity, experiences of discrimination, and organisational support.

Here is a breakdown of the main themes:

1. Comfort with Sharing Religious Identity:

Muslims:

83%

of Muslims felt either somewhat or very comfortable sharing their religion with colleagues at work.

Jews:

58%

of Jewish people feel comfortable sharing their religion with colleagues at work

Theme: Muslims are generally more comfortable revealing their religion in the workplace compared to Jews.

This is partly due to the fact that their religion is more identifiable by name and some aspects of dress. Jewish people might feel a greater need to hide their religious identity, potentially due to past experiences with antisemitism.

2. Experience of Microaggressions and Discrimination:

Microaggressions:

Both groups report experiencing high levels of microaggressions. 69% of Muslims and 80% of Jews report encountering microaggressions at work, with small percentages experiencing them on a weekly basis.

Discrimination:

Around half of Muslims (45%) and two-thirds of Jews (66%) have either experienced or witnessed religious discrimination at work. Jewish individuals report slightly higher rates of experiencing religious discrimination (39%) compared to Muslims (24%).

Theme: Both groups face significant levels of microaggressions, but Jewish individuals report a slightly higher rate of these incidents.

The similarity in weekly occurrences suggests that both groups face continuous challenges in their work environments.

3. Religious Discrimination in the Workplace:

Muslims:

24%

have experienced religious discrimination

30%

have witnessed it

45%

either experienced or witnessed

Jews:

39%

have experienced religious discrimination

44%

have witnessed it

66%

either experienced or witnessed

Theme: Jewish respondents report higher rates of religious discrimination compared to Muslims.

While both groups face significant challenges, Jews are more likely to encounter or witness religious discrimination in their workplaces.



4. Types of Discrimination in the Workplace:

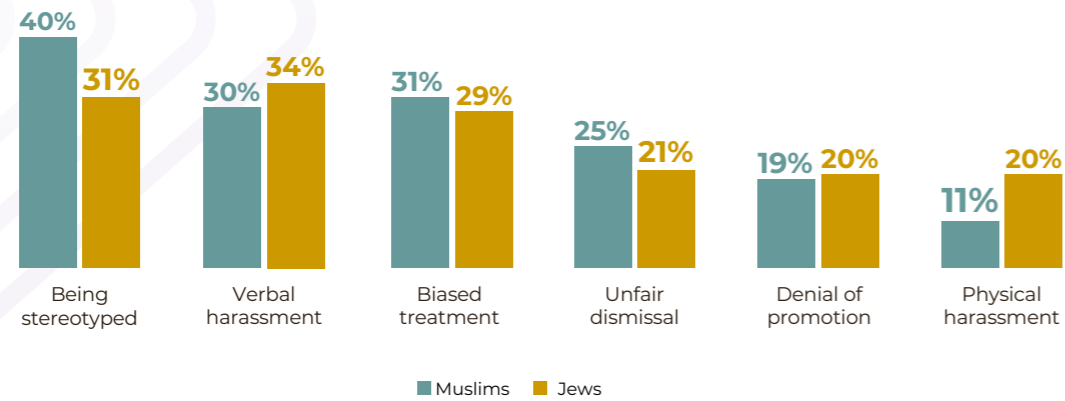


Chart 1: 'What kind of discrimination did you witness or experience?'

Theme: While both groups experience various forms of discrimination, Muslims report more stereotyping and biased treatment, while Jews face higher levels of verbal and physical harassment.

5. Emotional Impact of Discrimination:

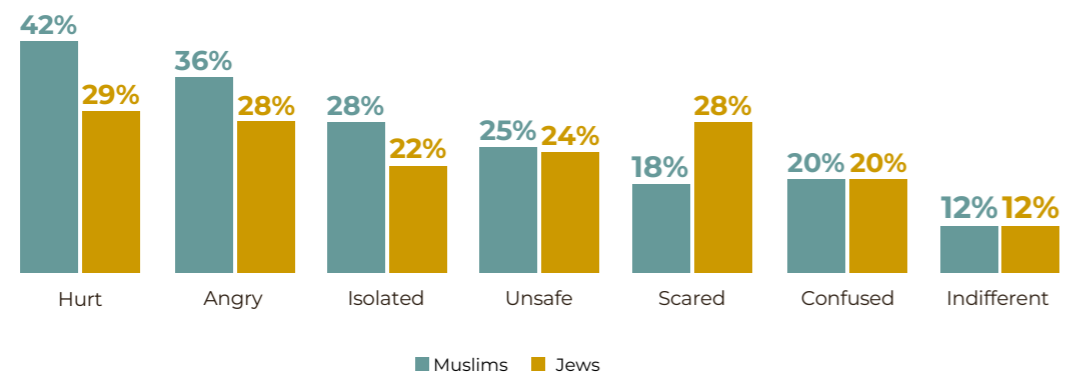


Chart 2: 'How, if in any way, did that make you feel?'

Theme: Both groups experience strong negative emotional responses, but Jewish individuals are more likely to feel scared, while Muslims tend to feel more hurt and angry.

6. Taking Action Against Discrimination:

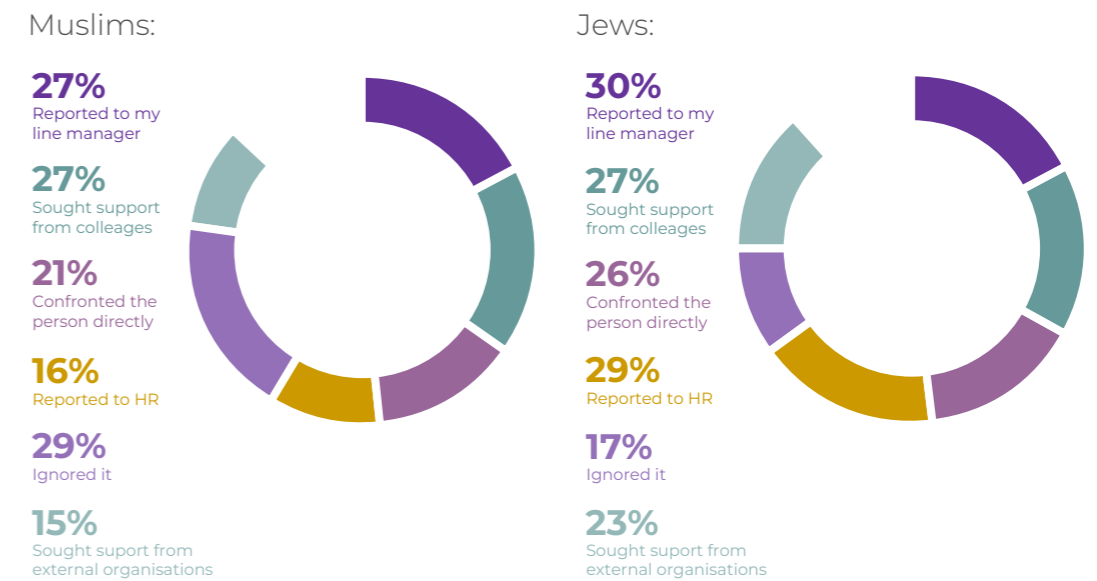


Chart 3: 'What action, if any, did you take?'

Theme: Jewish respondents are more likely to take formal action when facing discrimination, while Muslim respondents are more likely to ignore incidents or handle them informally.

This difference may indicate varying levels of trust in workplace systems or personal coping mechanisms.

7. Hiding Religious Practices:

29% of Muslim respondents somewhat or strongly agree that they hide their religious practices at work to avoid negative comments.

A higher percentage of Jewish respondents (43%) somewhat or strongly agree that they hide their religious practices.

Theme: As Muslims tend to be more easily identifiable, they tend to also be more open about their religious practices. Nevertheless, over a quarter still hide these to avoid negative comments. Jewish people are more likely to conceal their religious practices in the workplace, reflecting a greater fear of discrimination or negative reactions.



8. Confidence in Reporting Religious Discrimination:

61%

of Muslims feel somewhat or very confident in reporting negative comments about their religion.

52%

Slightly fewer Jews feel confident in reporting negative comments about their religion.

Theme: Muslims tend to feel more confident than Jews in reporting religious discrimination, possibly reflecting differences in workplace culture or support mechanisms.

9. Support from the Workplace:

Muslims

21%

Not supported

74%

Somewhat or very supported



Jews

31%

Not supported

63%

Somewhat or very supported



Chart 4: 'How supported, if at all, do you feel by your workplace in terms of your religion?'

Theme: Muslim respondents generally feel more supported by their workplaces than Jewish respondents, though both groups express a desire for more support in terms of religious inclusion.

10. Comfort Discussing Religion:

71% of Muslims feel comfortable discussing their religion at work, with only 10% feeling uncomfortable.

Only 53% of Jews feel comfortable discussing their religion at work, with 15% feeling uncomfortable.

Theme: Muslims are generally more comfortable discussing their religion at work compared to Jews, who may feel more reluctant due to concerns about antisemitism.

11. Religious Conversations and Engagement:

17% of Muslims never engage in conversations about religion with colleagues, though most Muslims will discuss their religion with colleagues at a frequency of every week to every month.

4% of Jews never engage in conversations about religion with colleagues, though most Jews will discuss their religion with colleagues at a frequency of between every 1 to 5 months.

Theme: Muslims tend to engage more frequently in religious conversations at work, while Jewish people appear more reserved about discussing their faith. This may be related to concerns about antisemitism in the workplace.



12. Perceived Impact of Religion on Professional Relationships:

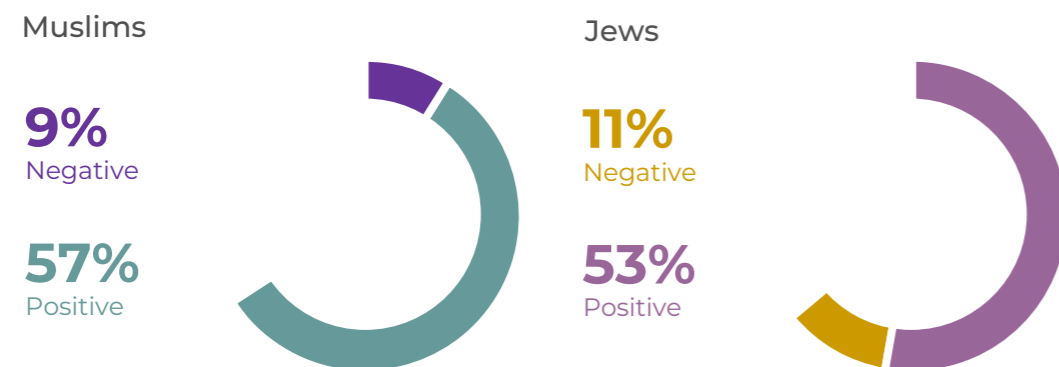


Chart 5: 'How much of a positive or negative impact do you believe your religion has on your professional relationships with colleagues and managers?'

Theme: Both groups have a generally positive perception of how their religion impacts their professional relationships, though a small percentage feel it has a negative effect.

13. Changes in Discrimination Since October 7th:

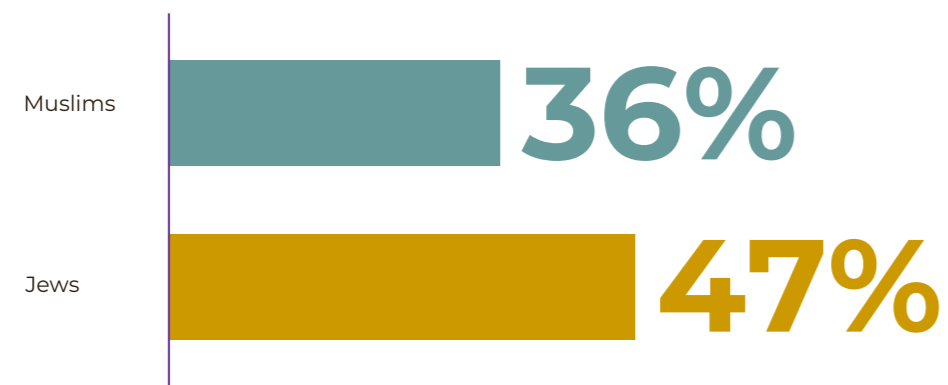


Chart 6: 'Since October 7th, would you say the levels of discrimination you experience have increased or decreased?'

Theme: Both groups have experienced an increase in discrimination following the Israel-Gaza conflict, but Jews report a more significant rise in antisemitism.

14. Desired Workplace Actions for Religious Inclusion:

Both Muslims and Jewish people wanted:

- Safe spaces for religious discussions
- Actions to address stereotyping
- Public statements, making it clear that discrimination is unacceptable

Theme: Both groups have similar desires for organisational actions that foster inclusivity, with a focus on creating a safer and more understanding environment.

15. Likelihood to Recommend Workplace:

67% of Muslims would recommend their workplace to other Muslims.

A lower percentage (53%) of Jews would recommend their workplace to other Jews.

Theme: Muslims are more likely to recommend their workplace to fellow believers, indicating they may feel slightly more satisfied with their work environments compared to Jewish individuals.



Overall Key Themes

- 1. Discomfort and Concealment:** Jews are generally more reluctant to reveal or discuss their religion in the workplace compared to Muslims, reflecting a greater sense of vulnerability and concern about antisemitism. Jews are more likely to hide their religious practices to avoid discrimination.
- 2. High Levels of Microaggressions and Discrimination:** Both groups experience significant microaggressions and discrimination in the workplace, though Jews report slightly higher levels. Both communities also report a concerning frequency of verbal harassment and biased treatment, with Jews experiencing more physical harassment.
- 3. Emotional Impact:** While both Muslims and Jews experience a range of negative emotions due to discrimination (e.g., feeling hurt, angry, scared, or unsafe), Jews tend to feel more fear and isolation, likely due to the historical and cultural weight of antisemitism.
- 4. Differences in Action:** Jews are more likely to confront incidents of discrimination by reporting to HR or directly confronting the individual responsible. Muslims, on the other hand, are more likely to ignore the incident, potentially reflecting different workplace cultures or trust in organisational structures.
- 5. Workplace Support and Confidence:** Muslims generally feel more supported by their workplaces and are more confident in reporting negative comments. Jewish individuals, however, report less support and confidence, which may reflect the persistent, subtle nature of antisemitism in certain workplace environments.
- 6. Impact of Global Events:** Both groups have experienced increased levels of discrimination since the Israel-Gaza conflict escalated on October 7th. However, Jewish individuals have been more severely impacted by the rise in antisemitism.
- 7. Desire for Organisational Change:** Both Muslims and Jews want their workplaces to take stronger action in addressing stereotyping, fostering open dialogue, and making public commitments against discrimination. There is a shared need for organisations to actively support religious inclusion and create safe environments for expressing religious beliefs.

Interviews and focus groups

People participated in the interviews and focus groups because they wanted to share their experiences and to make their workplaces more inclusive.

Jewish participants

The themes in the comments provided by Jewish individuals reflect several key aspects of their experiences with identity, faith, antisemitism, and social challenges in the context of modern events:

- 1. Jewish Identity and Faith:** Many comments reflect how Judaism is central to their lives, though expressing it can be complex. Some choose not to wear Jewish symbols openly or avoid discussing their faith due to fear or discomfort, yet Jewish values and traditions like Friday family dinners and celebrating festivals remain important.
- 2. Antisemitism:** There is a consistent theme of encountering antisemitism, both in subtle forms (e.g., ignorance or stereotyping about what it means to be Jewish) and in overt ways (e.g., discrimination, targeted harassment). Social media and modern political events, particularly since 7th October, have worsened these experiences.
- 3. Cultural and Social Exclusion:** Individuals expressed feeling misunderstood or overlooked by colleagues, friends, and even within broader society, especially when Jewish perspectives on issues like Israel are dismissed or met with hostility. The indifference or lack of solidarity during traumatic events, such as the attack on 7th October, contrasts with support seen in movements like Black Lives Matter, leading to feelings of isolation.
- 4. Fear and Safety:** Several comments touch on the fear of openly identifying as Jewish, especially in the wake of rising antisemitism online and in public protests. This fear manifests in avoiding wearing symbols like the Star of David or speaking openly about their beliefs in certain settings.
- 5. Social Media and the Impact of 7th October:** Many described the damaging impact of online platforms in fostering antisemitic sentiments and the sense of betrayal they felt when colleagues or acquaintances shared anti-Israel or antisemitic content. The discussions online often became toxic, leaving Jewish individuals feeling unsafe, unheard, and marginalized.
- 6. Trauma and Community Solidarity:** The emotional toll of recent events, particularly following October 7, was described as traumatic, causing some to retreat from their communities, while others sought support from family or Jewish friends. Despite societal indifference, some found solace in the Jewish community's increased closeness during these challenging times.

In summary, these comments illustrate the complexities of Jewish identity, the impact of growing antisemitism (both subtle and overt), and the importance of community in navigating these challenges. The trauma from recent political events has heightened feelings of isolation, caution, and a deepened need for understanding and support.

Differences

1 > Visibility and Expression of Faith

Muslims: Many Muslims wear attire (e.g., hijab, traditional clothing) that visibly identifies them as Muslim, and this visibility is a key factor in how they are treated in public and in the workplace. They often feel the need to explain their religious practices, such as fasting or prayer.

Jews: While some Jews wear visible symbols like the Star of David or kippah, many expressed that they do not outwardly display their faith due to fear of antisemitism or being stereotyped. The ability to “blend in” without wearing religious symbols can be a protective factor but also leads to assumptions and stereotyping when people find out they are Jewish.

Difference: Muslims generally cannot conceal their religious identity due to attire, while Jews often have the choice to hide or downplay their Jewishness, although both groups feel the pressure of judgment based on their appearance or names.

2 > Workplace Experiences

Muslims: In many workplaces, Muslims expressed feeling accommodated in terms of prayer rooms, halal food, and time off for religious observances. However, they often feel tolerated rather than fully accepted.

Jews: Some Jewish individuals reported negative workplace experiences, such as being refused time off for Jewish holidays or facing ignorance about their faith, leading to feelings of exclusion or even causing them to change jobs.

Difference: While both groups experience workplace challenges, Muslims seemed to experience more proactive accommodations, whereas Jews faced more instances of being overlooked or ignored when it came to religious observances.

3 > Response to the Israel-Gaza Conflict

Muslims: The conflict is deeply personal to many Muslims, and they feel pressured to voice support for Palestine. However, they also express concern about being misunderstood or labelled as extremists if they speak too passionately.

Jews: For Jews, the conflict is also personal but in different ways. First, they are more likely to have been personally affected. Second, many feel the need to defend Israel and express frustration at being targeted as representatives of the state’s actions. The rise in antisemitism post-October 7th has been a source of trauma for Jewish individuals.

Difference: Muslims generally feel the burden of defending Palestine while avoiding being stereotyped as terrorists. Jewish colleagues are more likely to have been directly affected. They feel the need to defend Israel without being conflated with its government or facing increased antisemitism.

4 > Fear and Safety

Muslims: Some Muslims expressed immediate fears for their physical safety due to the rise in anti-Muslim rhetoric, especially during public riots or protests. There’s a strong sense of needing to avoid certain spaces for their own protection.

Jews: While Jews also express fear, particularly following antisemitic incidents and marches, the fear often manifests in a more long-term sense of caution, with some avoiding showing outward signs of their faith in public spaces.

Difference: Both groups experience fear, but Muslims appear to have more immediate concerns about safety, whereas Jews often take preemptive measures to avoid being targeted.

5 > Community Involvement in Global Issues:

Muslims: Many Muslims mention strong community involvement in supporting the Palestinian cause, with visible displays of solidarity such as Palestinian flags and charity events.

Jews: For Jewish individuals, community involvement often focuses on supporting Israel or addressing antisemitic attacks, though there’s also a feeling of needing to keep a low profile to avoid backlash.

Difference: Muslim communities are often more visibly involved in activism around the Israel-Gaza conflict, while Jewish communities might take a more low-key approach due to fear of escalating antisemitism.

Similarities

1 > Visibility of Religious Identity

Muslims: Many mentioned that their identity is visible due to their attire (e.g., headscarves, traditional clothing), making them immediately recognizable as Muslims, which sometimes leads to assumptions or stereotyping.

Jews: Some Jewish individuals also noted concerns about visible symbols of faith, such as the Star of David, which they sometimes feel uncomfortable wearing in public due to fear of antisemitism.

Shared Experience: Both groups express the challenges of navigating their public identity and the anxiety of whether to be open or cautious about their religious symbols.

2 > Experiences with Discrimination

Muslims: Islamophobia is an ongoing issue, with discrimination manifesting through microaggressions, hostility in public spaces, and passive-aggressive comments in the workplace.

Jews: Antisemitism has also worsened in recent times, with social media amplifying hostility, leading to similar microaggressions, exclusion, and feeling unsafe in public.

Shared Experience: Both groups experience subtle and overt forms of discrimination, often amplified by global events. They feel othered or excluded based on their religious identity, and many comments reflect fear or discomfort in public spaces.

3 > Impact of Global Events

Muslims: The Israel-Gaza conflict has affected many Muslims deeply, leading to heightened emotions, political discussions, and concerns about being labeled or misunderstood, especially when trying to voice support for Palestine.

Jews: For Jews, the events of October 7th and the Israel-Gaza conflict have also been traumatic, increasing their sense of isolation and concern about antisemitism, especially during pro-Palestinian protests.

Shared Experience: Both communities feel the emotional toll of the Israel-Gaza conflict, though their perspectives differ. There's a shared experience of feeling misunderstood, as both sides encounter polarised reactions when discussing the issue.

4 > Community Support

Muslims: Several Muslims mentioned receiving support from non-Muslim friends and colleagues, which made them feel more positive despite difficult circumstances. However, they also highlighted that societal support can be inconsistent.

Jews: Similarly, Jewish individuals appreciated support from non-Jewish friends and colleagues after October 7th but felt disheartened by the lack of solidarity from broader society.

Shared Experience: Both communities appreciate and rely on support from their respective faith groups and close non-Muslim/Jewish friends when tensions rise, feeling that societal institutions often fall short.

5 > Social Media's Role

Muslims: Social media has been a source of misinformation and negative stereotypes, with Muslims often feeling misrepresented and forced to defend their views or clarify their beliefs.

Jews: Jewish individuals also noted the toxic environment on social media, where antisemitic rhetoric is amplified and support for Israel is often attacked or met with hostility.

Shared Experience: Both groups find social media to be a breeding ground for misinformation and harmful rhetoric, contributing to the rise in Islamophobia and antisemitism.

Conclusion:

Both Muslims and Jews share experiences of discrimination, isolation, and fear as a result of their religious identities, particularly in the context of global events like the Israel-Gaza conflict. While Muslims tend to deal more with visibility and outward displays of faith, Jews often face internal dilemmas about how much of their identity to reveal. Both groups feel the impact of social media misinformation and public protests, with workplace accommodations varying across individual experiences. Despite these challenges, both communities rely on the support of close friends and faith networks to navigate their complex social environments.

Recommendations

Based on the results of our survey and direct discussions with both Jewish and Muslim individuals, organisations can take several concrete actions to address the impact of events like October 7th, as well as broader issues of Islamophobia and antisemitism. Here are our key recommendations:

1 > Develop and Enforce Clear Anti-Discrimination Policies.

- **Review and Strengthen Policies:** Organisations should review existing anti-discrimination policies to ensure they explicitly address antisemitism and Islamophobia, incorporating clear definitions and examples to help employees recognise these forms of discrimination.
- **Zero-Tolerance Approach:** Establish a zero-tolerance policy toward hate speech and discriminatory behavior, including passive-aggressive or subtle forms of discrimination (e.g., backhanded comments, passive exclusion).
- **Enforce Consequences:** Ensure that discriminatory actions have consequences, which may include disciplinary measures or termination for repeated offenses.

2 > Create Open Channels for Dialogue and Support.

- **Facilitate Open Conversations:** Provide safe spaces for employees to discuss their concerns about recent events, including conflicts like Israel-Gaza or other global issues. These conversations should be led by neutral, trained facilitators to avoid escalating tensions.
- **Peer Support and Affinity Groups:** Encourage the formation of affinity groups (e.g., Muslim or Jewish employee resource groups) where individuals can share their experiences and support each other.
- **Organisational Statements:** Proactively release thoughtful, empathetic statements during crises or sensitive global events that acknowledge the impact on affected communities (e.g., both Muslim and Jewish employees) and offer resources for support.

3 > Offer Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity Training.

- **Educate Employees:** Provide regular training on antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of prejudice. These should include education on religious practices, stereotypes, and how to challenge unconscious biases.
- **Guest Speakers and Experts:** Bring in subject matter experts, including those from Muslim and Jewish communities, to discuss the historical and current realities of discrimination and the impact of geopolitical events on these communities.
- **Workshops on Effective Dialogue:** Teach employees how to engage in difficult conversations without escalating conflict, focusing on active listening, empathy, and understanding differing perspectives.

4 > Ensure Religious Accommodations and Inclusivity.

- **Accommodate Religious Practices:** Ensure workplaces offer appropriate accommodations for religious practices such as prayer rooms, time off for religious holidays (e.g., Ramadan, Yom Kippur), and halal/kosher food options.
- **Inclusive Holidays and Celebrations:** Be mindful of religious and cultural holidays when planning office events or meetings. Avoid scheduling important events during major religious observances or forcing participation in activities that conflict with religious values.

5 > Promote Mental Health and Well-being Resources.

- **Trauma Support:** Recognise that global events, such as the Israel-Gaza conflict, can cause trauma for employees, especially those with a direct or cultural connection. Offer access to counselors or employee assistance programs (EAPs) with specific experience in dealing with the impact of discrimination, trauma, and identity-related stress.
- **Ongoing Check-ins:** Encourage managers to check in regularly with employees, particularly those from impacted communities, to offer support and direct them to available resources.

6 > Lead by Example with Leadership and Messaging.

- **Leadership Involvement:** Senior leaders should take an active role in addressing issues of discrimination by clearly stating the organisation's stance against antisemitism, Islamophobia, and any other forms of prejudice. They should be seen visibly supporting affected groups.
- **Balanced Messaging:** Organisations should avoid taking polarising stances that may alienate one group or another but should instead focus on condemning violence, hatred, and bigotry in all forms. For example, when addressing events like October 7th, emphasise compassion and support for all employees impacted by violence, while opposing hate and extremism.

7 > Foster Cross-Community Understanding and Allyship.

- **Bridge-Building Initiatives:** Organise interfaith or cross-cultural initiatives to promote understanding between different religious and ethnic groups in the workplace. This could include joint events or dialogue sessions between Muslim and Jewish employees.
- **Promote Allyship:** Encourage employees to be allies for one another by standing up against Islamophobia and antisemitism, as well as other forms of discrimination. Provide resources and training on how to be an effective ally, including ways to offer support without overstepping boundaries.

8 > Be Proactive in Tackling Geopolitical Tensions in the Workplace.

- **Address Events Proactively:** When significant geopolitical events occur (e.g., wars, conflicts, or mass tragedies), address the situation proactively rather than waiting for tensions to escalate. Acknowledge the emotional toll on employees and offer appropriate support.
- **Avoid Polarising Conversations:** Encourage employees to keep polarising or politically charged conversations respectful, or create policies that limit such discussions to avoid workplace conflict. If these conversations arise, ensure employees are guided on how to engage in respectful and thoughtful dialogue.

9 > Regularly Review and Improve Inclusion Efforts.

- **Diversity Audits:** Conduct regular diversity and inclusion audits to understand where the organisation might be falling short in terms of religious or cultural sensitivity. Gather feedback from Muslim and Jewish employees on how to better support them during sensitive times.
- **Measure Progress:** Set measurable goals for increasing inclusion and reducing incidents of discrimination or exclusion. Publicise progress within the organisation and hold leadership accountable for meeting these goals.

10 > Respond Appropriately to External Pressures (e.g. Protests or Riots).

- **Safety and Security:** During periods of heightened tension or violence, ensure that employees feel physically safe in the workplace. Provide additional security if necessary, and offer remote working options if needed.
- **Clear Crisis Communication:** Communicate clearly with employees about safety protocols, support options, and the organisation's stance during external protests or conflicts that may affect them.

By taking these actions, organisations can create a more inclusive, supportive environment that addresses both Islamophobia and antisemitism, promotes mutual respect, and ensures all employees feel safe and valued during difficult times.

Difference inspires business

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