Safer journeys for women and girls' inquiry
(Transport Committee)
October 2026

Introduction

1. MWNUK has been advancing equality, and social justice for Muslims women and girls since 2003 and is a registered charity (no.1155092) with a national membership. We provide direct support through our Muslim Women's Network Helpline (www.mwnhelpline.co.uk) which focuses on gender-based violence, (primarily domestic abuse and related issues) and Muslim Safety Net Helpline (www.muslimsafetnet.org.uk) which focuses on anti-Muslim abuse, hostility and discrimination. We also conduct research and use lived experiences to identify policy and practice gaps which informs our advocacy, campaign and resource production work to empower women. Further information about our work can be found on our main organisational website (www.mwnuk.co.uk) .

2. Muslim Safety Net was established in response to a report published by Muslim Women's Network UK (MWNUK) following the racially and religiously aggravated riots in the summer of 2024. The report, Anti-Muslim Hate – Concerns and Experiences, https://www.mwnuk.co.uk//go_files/resources/Anti-Muslim-Hate-Report-concerns-and-experiences-new.pdf revealed that 80% of victims do not report anti-Muslim incidents, meaning the true scale of hatred and discrimination is being significantly underestimated. Only 3000-4000 incidents are reported to police annually.

If 80% are not reporting, then actual number of incidents are more likely to be 15,000 to 20, 000.

3. Since 2023, MWNUK has also seen a rise in anti-Muslim-related calls to its Muslim Women's Network Helpline, which is primarily for domestic abuse victims. In response, it was decided that a dedicated website and reporting database would better capture these experiences and encourage more Muslims, both women and men, —to come forward and report incidents. It is important to capture data in anti-Muslim incidents to understand the scale nature and scale of the problem, which is crucial to hold governments and public institutions accountable, so they can be urge to take stronger action against anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination.

How well do the Government and transport providers understand the scale and nature of violence and harassment against women and girls on public transport?

4. There is still a need for a more complete understanding of the different forms of harassment and abuse experienced by women and girls on public transport.

5. Official data should capture not only sexual harassment and violence but also anti-Muslim hate, racism and religiously motivated harassment. For Muslim women, particularly those who are visibly Muslim, an incident may involve several forms of hostility at the same time. An incident that appears to be verbal abuse may also be motivated by hostility towards a woman's religion, ethnicity, clothing or perceived identity. – In our [1]Anti-Muslim-Hate-Report-concerns-and-experiences report (September 2024) 26% one in four Muslim women stated that they have experience anti-Muslim hostility on public transport – they did not specify whether this was underground, train or buses. That is second behind harassment on the street where – just over half (52%) reported being harassed on the street. Muslim women did not just report experiencing one off incident, 24% said they experienced incidents 5-10 times (in a range of settings) which included bus stops and public transport

[1] MWNUK Anti-Muslim Hate - Concerns and Experiences September 2024 Baroness Shaista Gohir OBE

6. Data collection should, where appropriate and lawful, identify the type of incident, the mode of transport, location and time, whether the victim was travelling alone, whether staff or other passengers were present, whether the incident involved a protected characteristic, whether the incident was reported, how the report was handled and the outcome of any investigation.

7. The Government should recognise that low reporting does not necessarily mean low levels of offending. Victims may not report incidents because they do not believe anything will happen, do not know how to report, are concerned about not being believed, fear escalation, or simply want to avoid further stress.

8. *This is particularly important in light of MWNUK's Anti-Muslim Hate – Concerns and Experiences report, which found that 80% of Muslim respondents who had experienced hate incidents did not report them. The report also found that 84% of those who had experienced anti-Muslim hate had experienced direct verbal abuse.*

9. Community-based reporting mechanisms such as Muslim Safety Net can therefore provide valuable insight alongside official police and transport data. Such services can help identify patterns of behaviour and barriers to reporting that may otherwise remain invisible.

10. There is also publicly available video footage showing Muslim women experiencing harassment, abuse and intimidation on UK public transport. These clips should not be treated as a substitute for representative official data, but they can provide valuable qualitative evidence of the nature of incidents and, in some cases, demonstrate how abuse unfolds in front of other passengers and transport staff.

11. A recent example illustrates the continuing nature of anti-Muslim hostility faced by visibly Muslim women on public transport. I[2]n July 2026, a 21-year-old Muslim woman, Salsabil , was subjected to verbal abuse and threats while travelling on a London bus because she was wearing a niqab. The incident was captured on video and subsequently reported publicly. The passenger told her that she was not welcome wearing the veil, associated her religious clothing with terrorism and threatened to remove it himself. She said that he also threatened to kill her. Another passenger intervened and a physical altercation followed, while the bus driver intervened and the man was asked to leave the bus.

[2] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c8rn8514g8ko

12. Another publicly reported incident involved a Muslim woman and her daughter being verbally abused at a London bus stop, with video footage showing the abuse and the distress caused to the woman and child. Media

13. We encourage the inquiry to consider publicly available video evidence alongside official statistics, community reporting and lived-experience evidence. Where such material is used, it should be appropriately verified where possible and handled with care to protect the dignity and privacy of those involved.

MSN Case Study – London Underground

14. *The service user disclosed experiencing anti-Muslim hostility while travelling home from work on the Central Line towards Woodford. A middle-aged white man-made gesture indicating that she should remove her hijab and repeatedly told her to take off her headscarf because she was feeling hot. The service user challenged his comments, and another passenger described the man's behaviour as "disgusting" and "unbelievable". The service user reported the incident to the British Transport Police. She stated that the incident had affected her sense of safety when travelling alone, and that her husband and children were now concerned about her travelling independently.*

MSN Case Study – Bus from Hackney to Ilford

15. *The service user disclosed experiencing verbal anti-Muslim abuse while travelling by bus with a friend. A woman in her mid-fifties allegedly made comments referring to the service user and other women wearing hijabs as potential threats and stated that they were "hiding bombs". She subsequently called them "fucking terrorists" and continued making comments that they would hurt her. The service user and her friend moved downstairs to avoid the woman, but she reportedly followed them and continued the abuse. The service user became extremely distressed and cried. She stated that other passengers did not intervene.*

How effectively are Government departments, transport providers, police and other organisations working together?

16. A coordinated approach is essential because responsibility for public transport safety is spread across several organisations, including the Department for Transport, Home

Office, Ministry of Justice, local authorities, British Transport Police, local police forces, transport operators and specialist organisations supporting women and minority communities.

17. There should be clear responsibilities between agencies, consistent reporting and referral pathways, shared standards for responding to harassment and hate incidents, appropriate information-sharing arrangements, clear escalation routes where victims are dissatisfied with a response, and measurable outcomes to assess whether interventions are working.

18. Specialist reporting helplines like Muslim Safety Net should have a meaningful role in designing, implementing and evaluating interventions. They can identify barriers to reporting and provide insight into experiences that may not be visible through statutory data.

Is the Government's current strategy sufficient to tackle violence and harassment against women and girls on public transport?

19. The Government's approach should recognise that women's experiences of public transport safety are not identical. Anti-Muslim hostility is not formally recognized as gender-based violence even though it appears most perpetrators tend to be men and most victims tend to be Muslim women – that need to change.

20. A strategy focused primarily on sexual harassment and violence risks overlooking the experiences of women facing racism, Islamophobia and other forms of identity-based abuse.

21. The Government should therefore ensure that its strategy explicitly addresses anti-Muslim hostility and hate, recognises intersectional experiences, includes Muslim women and other minority groups in consultation, contains measurable commitments, publishes progress against those commitments, and assesses whether women feel safer and more confident using public transport.

22. Safety should be understood as both the absence of violence and the ability to travel without fear of harassment, intimidation or discrimination.

23. We recognise that there is a definition of anti-Muslim hostility. A clear definition is important because it supports consistent recognition, recording and understanding of anti-Muslim hostility. However, a definition alone will not keep Muslim women and girls safe.

24. A definition must be backed by sustained investment and practical action. This should include properly funded prevention and education programmes, targeted public awareness campaigns, appropriate training for transport staff and police, accessible and trusted reporting mechanisms, consistent recording of incidents, specialist support for victims, effective enforcement and meaningful engagement with Muslim women and specialist community organisations.

25. The Government should therefore treat the definition as the beginning of a wider programme of action, rather than the endpoint. It should be accompanied by measurable commitments, appropriate funding and clear accountability.

26. MWNUK's A[3]nti-Muslim Hate – Concerns and Experiences report demonstrates why this practical action is necessary. The report found that 73% of Muslim respondents were very worried about their safety, while 67% had experienced hate incidents. It also found substantial under-reporting, with 80% of those who had experienced hate incidents saying they did not report them.

What more could be done to prevent violence and harassment against women and girls on public transport?

27. Education and awareness initiatives should begin in schools to help young people understand the harm caused by harassment and hate-motivated behaviour. This is particularly important given reports of groups of teenagers targeting minority ethnic passengers, including an incident shared online in which a Muslim woman was reportedly subjected to food being thrown at her, alongside mocking and abusive comments. Young people need to understand the impact of their actions on victims, as well as the potential consequences for themselves, including criminal prosecution and the long-term implications of having a criminal record.

[3] MWNUK Anti-Muslim Hate - Concerns and Experiences September 2024 Baroness Shaista Gohir OBE

28. Transport staff should receive mandatory, practical training on sexual harassment and violence, racism and Islamophobia, recognising intimidation and threatening behaviour, safe bystander intervention, safeguarding, how and when to report incidents, and supporting people from different backgrounds and with different needs.

29. Training should explicitly recognise that anti-Muslim hostility towards women can involve overlapping racism, misogyny and religious hostility. Staff should understand that hostility towards the hijab, abaya or other visible expressions of Muslim identity can form part of anti-Muslim abuse.

30. Training should not be a one-off exercise. It should be refreshed regularly and evaluated, with realistic scenarios involving anti-Muslim hostility included within training.

31. Train operators should make reporting mechanisms, such as dedicated phone numbers and QR codes, routinely visible throughout stations and on trains, rather than relying on occasional awareness campaigns or one-off adverts. This would enable passengers who experience or witness harassment or discrimination to report incidents promptly and easily. Where it is safe to do so, passengers should also be able to upload supporting evidence, such as photographs, audio or video recordings. Making these reporting options more accessible could help victims seek support quickly, improve the reporting and investigation of incidents, and act as a deterrent by making clear that harassment and discriminatory behaviour will be taken seriously.

32. There should be specific campaigns addressing anti-Muslim hatred on public transport, developed with Muslim women and specialist organisations. Campaigns should challenge stereotypes that portray Muslims as threatening or dangerous and make clear that women wearing hijab or other forms of religious dress have the same right to use public transport safely and without intimidation as anyone else. Train operators regularly use on-board announcements encouraging passengers to report anything suspicious, often reassuring them that the matter will be dealt with. Similar announcements should be introduced to encourage passengers to report harassment or discriminatory behaviour by other passengers. For example, announcements could say: *"If you experience or witness harassment or discrimination on your journey, please report it to a member of staff. We take these concerns seriously and are here to help."* This message should apply to all passengers and help create a safer, more inclusive

environment where everyone feels supported and confident that their concerns will be taken seriously.

33. Campaigns should also encourage appropriate bystander intervention and make clear that other passengers have a role to play in creating a safe environment. Please see link to our Muslim Safety Net Campaign Video featuring Mariah Idrissi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLvH4ZzVyZk

34. Responsibility for preventing harassment must not be placed primarily on women. Women should not be expected to change their behaviour, clothing, routes or travel patterns to remain safe. Prevention must address the behaviour of perpetrators and the environment in which harassment is allowed to occur.

How can the design of public transport infrastructure improve safety?

35. Good design can contribute significantly to women's safety. This was reinforced by MWNUK report ON **A[4]nti-Muslim Hate - Concerns and Experiences** found "around 14% had experienced abuse while waiting at a bus stop".

36. Measures can include adequate lighting, clear sightlines, well-maintained stations and stops, CCTV functioning, visible help points, clear signage, accessible emergency information, safe routes to and from stations, staff visibility and appropriate accessibility measures.

37. However, infrastructure alone cannot prevent verbal abuse, Islamophobia, or other forms of harassment.

38. Muslim women should therefore be involved in safety audits and transport design decisions, helping identify locations and circumstances where women feel particularly vulnerable. Consultation should also consider what happens outside stations and stops, including walking routes, bus stops and areas where women may feel isolated while waiting for transport.

How should the Government address the needs of women and girls who face multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination?

39. An intersectional approach is essential.

[4] MWNUK Anti-Muslim Hate - Concerns and Experiences September 2024 Baroness Shaista Gohir OBE

40. A Muslim woman may experience harassment linked to her sex, religion, ethnicity, disability, age, migration status or other characteristics. These experiences can overlap and affect both the nature of the incident and the woman's willingness or ability to report it. Need to add that women who are not Muslim but perceived as Muslim are also being targeted

41. MWNUK's research highlights the importance of understanding the experiences of Muslim women. The 2024 survey was predominantly completed by Muslim women, with women making up approximately three quarters of Muslim respondents. The report also identifies significant concerns around under-reporting.

42. The Government and transport providers should therefore consult directly with different groups of women, ensure reporting mechanisms are accessible, provide confidential reporting options, ensure staff understand different forms of discrimination, monitor whether complaints from communities receive appropriate responses, and work with specialist organisations representing affected groups.

43. Attention should also be given to disabled women, LGBT+ women, women from minority ethnic communities and women who may face language or other barriers to reporting. An intersectional approach should recognise that women may experience discrimination because they are visibly Muslim, particularly where the hijab or abaya makes their Muslim identity immediately apparent.

Case Study – Manchester

44. One woman described how concerned she is about her daughter's safety when she uses public transport. She said she now has an AirTag on her daughter and remains in constant contact with her when she travels on public transport.

Case Study – Pressure to Change Religious Dress

45. Another woman described asking her daughter to reconsider wearing the hijab and abaya altogether because of concerns about how she may be treated in public. She considered encouraging her daughter to wear the hijab only on weekends.

Case Study – Birmingham

46. *A woman in Birmingham described feeling increasingly uncomfortable about taking the bus during periods when political events or national developments have resulted in increased hostility towards Muslims, including periods associated with far-right activity. She described feeling that people look at her differently and that she can feel unwelcome on public transport.*

Case Study – Pressure to Adopt Less Visible Forms of Hijab

47. *Some women and families have described encouraging girls and young women to adopt less visibly identifiable forms of hijab, such as a turban-style head covering or a looser form of hijab, because they believe this may attract less hostility.*

What additional interventions could improve safety and women's confidence in using public transport?

48. The Government should invest in partnerships between transport providers, police, local authorities and specialist community organisations.

49. Investment must be sustained rather than limited to short-term projects. Funding should support prevention, community engagement, reporting and referral mechanisms, victim support, training, data collection, and evaluation.

50. Community reporting Hubs like Muslim Safety Net can help identify emerging concerns, improve awareness of reporting routes, support victims, provide culturally informed advice, identify barriers to reporting and assess whether interventions are reaching communities effectively.

51. Interventions should be assessed not simply by the number of incidents recorded, but also by whether women report feeling safer, more confident and more able to travel freely.

52. This is particularly important because a reduction in recorded incidents could reflect reduced reporting rather than improved safety.

53. Investment should also support sustained education and public awareness campaigns that are designed with affected communities and specifically address anti-Muslim hatred, racism, misogyny and stereotypes that can make Muslim women targets of abuse.

54. Campaigns should reinforce the responsibility of bystanders and transport staff. The burden should not fall on victims to manage or avoid harassment.

Case Study – Changing Travel Behaviour

55. A recurring theme in the experiences reported to Muslim Safety Net is that fear can alter how Muslim women use public transport. Women may change the time they travel, take different routes, avoid travelling alone, ask a family member or friend to accompany them, change their clothing or avoid public transport altogether.

Case Study – Far-Right Activity and Public Transport

56. Muslim women have also expressed concern about far-right groups and individuals continuing to use public transport and occupying the same public spaces as the communities they target.

57. The concern is not simply the presence of such individuals, but the fear and intimidation that can result when Muslim women believe they may encounter people associated with anti-Muslim hostility while travelling.

What role can technology play, and what safeguards are needed?

58. Technology can make reporting and responding to incidents easier.

59. Potential measures include simple digital reporting systems, clear incident reference numbers, updates on the progress of reports, emergency communication tools, effective use of CCTV, improved communication between transport operators and police, and secure information-sharing systems.

60. However, technology must not come at the expense of privacy or trust.

61. Any use of facial recognition, predictive policing or other surveillance technologies should be subject to strict safeguards, transparency, legal oversight and equality impact assessments.
62. Women should also have non-digital reporting options so that technology does not create additional barriers for people who cannot or do not wish to use digital systems. Technology should complement, rather than replace, appropriately trained staff and human support.

How effective are current reporting and enforcement mechanisms?

63. Reporting mechanisms should be easy to understand, consistent and accessible across different forms of public transport. Not sure if it goes here or elsewhere but if they identify hotspots then send undercover police to check those routes

64. A woman experiencing harassment should not have to understand the legal classification of an offence before being able to report it.

65. Transport providers should make reporting routes highly visible, explain what happens after a report is made, provide incident reference numbers, give information about expected response times, preserve relevant CCTV and other evidence, provide appropriate safeguarding support, refer victims to specialist services where appropriate, and review how complaints are handled.

66. Staff must also have the capacity and confidence to respond appropriately. Poor responses can discourage future reporting and undermine trust in the system, including where other passengers witness abuse but do not intervene.

67. Where appropriate, a victim's perception that an incident was motivated by anti-Muslim hostility should be recorded, with appropriate safeguards, even where an investigation does not ultimately result in a charge. This can help identify wider patterns of hostility that may otherwise remain hidden.

How can offending patterns be identified more effectively?

68. Better identification of patterns requires consistent recording of incidents across transport providers and relevant authorities.

69. Data should allow authorities to identify patterns by location, route, station or stop, time of day, transport mode, type of offending, repeat offending, hate motivation, and response and outcome.

70. Information should be shared lawfully and proportionately between relevant agencies.

71. Community reporting data, including information gathered through Muslim Safety Net, should also be considered alongside official datasets. Such information can help identify experiences that may not reach the police or transport operators.

72. 49. Authorities should publish anonymised trends where possible so that communities can see whether problems are being identified and addressed.

73. A low number of complaints should not automatically be interpreted as evidence that an area or service is safe. Authorities should consider whether low reporting reflects barriers to reporting, lack of confidence, normalisation of abuse, or a perception that reporting will not lead to meaningful action.

What sanctions and interventions should be used for repeat perpetrators?

74. Repeat perpetrators should be identified and dealt with consistently.

75. Where appropriate and lawful, relevant information about previous incidents should be available to enforcement agencies so that patterns of behaviour can be identified.

76. Responses should be proportionate to the seriousness and persistence of the offending and may include investigation and prosecution where appropriate, recording relevant hate motivation, transport-related restrictions where legally available, proportionate criminal or civil sanctions, and safeguarding measures and support for victims.

77. 54. The system should not focus solely on punishment after an incident. Repeat offending should also trigger consideration of how the perpetrator was able to continue offending and whether earlier intervention could have prevented further incidents. This should include consideration of whether previous incidents were recorded, whether transport staff were aware of concerns, and whether appropriate information was shared between relevant agencies.

Conclusion

78. Transport providers should also review ticket inspection and enforcement practices to ensure that minority ethnic passengers are treated fairly and consistently. We have heard reports of minority ethnic passengers being subjected to ticket checks when other passengers are not, and of differences in how inspectors exercise their discretion. For example, there are concerns that minority ethnic passengers who wish to purchase a ticket or resolve a ticketing issue may be referred for a penalty, while white passengers in similar circumstances are given the opportunity to buy a ticket.

79. Transport operators should introduce clear internal checks and safeguards to identify and address any potential racial bias in ticket inspections and enforcement. This should include monitoring whether minority ethnic passengers are disproportionately stopped, issued penalties or treated more harshly than other passengers in comparable circumstances. Any disparities identified should be investigated, with appropriate action taken to ensure that ticket inspection policies are applied fairly, consistently and without discrimination.

80. The experiences of visibly Muslim women demonstrate why a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient. Anti-Muslim hostility can affect not only physical safety but also religious expression, freedom of movement, independence and participation in public life.

81. We recommend that the Government improve the collection and analysis of data on harassment, violence, racism and anti-Muslim hate; recognise under-reporting and avoid treating low reporting as evidence of safety; strengthen coordination between Government departments, police, transport providers and specialist organisations; and introduce consistent and practical training for transport staff.

82. We further recommend that Muslim women and other affected communities are involved directly in safety planning and transport design; reporting is made accessible, confidential and victim-centred; partnerships with specialist community organisations are strengthened; technology is used proportionately and with strong privacy and equality safeguards; and repeat perpetrators and patterns of offending are identified more effectively.

83. The Government's new definition of anti-Muslim hostility (published March 2026) should be supported by a properly funded implementation plan. A definition alone will not keep Muslim women and girls safe. It must be translated into practical action, with investment in prevention, targeted education and public awareness campaigns, police and transport staff training, trusted reporting services, specialist support for Muslim women, consistent data collection and clear accountability for progress.

84. Most importantly, women should not have to change their behaviour to access public transport safely. Women should not have to change their routes, travel times, clothing or religious expression, avoid travelling alone, or rely on constant monitoring by family members because of fear of harassment or hate.

On behalf of Muslim Women's Network UK,

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