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Game Changers: The Impact of Muslims on British Sport

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Executive Summary

This report explores the impact of Muslims on British sport and how the participation of people of faith in sport and physical activity benefits wider society: socially, economically and in health outcomes. It draws on 14 in-depth interviews with sportspeople and sports sector experts.

Sport is more than leisure and entertainment. Across the UK's football pitches, basketball courts, boxing rings and running tracks, it builds communities, boosts the economy, provides careers and reduces inactivity-related disease. It also brings together people from different backgrounds, cultures and faiths, strengthening social cohesion across the country.

People of faith play an important role in this, from the professional through to grassroots level. Elite athletes who practise their faith openly have been connected with reductions in faith-based prejudice and they act as role models for the next generation, showing the country that sport is truly multifaith. Athletes such as footballer Mohamed (Mo) Salah, runner Mo Farah and boxer Ramla Ali have changed public perceptions of British Muslims through their representation and visibility. High-earning sportspeople also contribute to funding our public services through their hefty tax contributions.

But the professionals would not be what they are without their fans, and faith-based fan clubs have had a similarly important impact on our sports. They work with professional teams to make our stadiums and matchdays more inclusive and accessible. They provide spaces where people do not have to leave behind their faith when they support their teams. And they give back to their local communities through charitable initiatives. Wider financial and volunteer investment by British Muslims related to sport also generates broader economic and social benefits, supporting local regeneration, education and community development.

However, underrepresentation in sport remains a persistent challenge across many faith communities, both at grassroots and professional levels. This has important implications for public health, as low levels of physical activity are closely associated with poorer health outcomes. Yet faith communities are also leading innovative efforts to address these disparities. Across the country, faith-based organisations are widening participation in sport and physical activity through faith-sensitive and culturally informed approaches that make opportunities more accessible. These initiatives are proving particularly effective in engaging underrepresented groups, including ethnic minorities, women and girls.

Government has an opportunity in the forthcoming National Plan for Physical Activity to build on these contributions by recognising faith communities' role in sport and strengthening partnerships between faith-based initiatives and mainstream organisations. At a time of strained social relations, this collaboration can help communities work together for the benefit of all. Acknowledging the impact of individuals and organisations of faith, and supporting their inclusion in sport, can help Britain's diverse communities contribute more fully to national life. This offers a path towards a stronger, more confident and more resilient UK.

Key Findings

1. Professional Muslim athletes make a significant financial contribution to the UK. The tax contributions for the 55 Muslim players in the English Premier League alone were an estimated £117 million in the 2025/26 season.[1] Alongside representing towns and cities on the pitch, they help fund public services.

2. High-profile athletes such as footballer Mo Salah and runner Mo Farah have helped challenge negative stereotypes and prejudice. Research has shown that after Salah joined Liverpool FC, hate crimes in Merseyside fell by 16%.[2] The rate of anti-Muslim tweeting by the club's fans also halved relative to fans of other top clubs.[3]

3. Building on faith communities' contributions to sport can strengthen social cohesion. Stronger partnerships, recognition of these contributions and an explicit focus on faith in sports inclusion strategies can improve community relations nationwide. These benefits extend to Britons of all faiths and none.

4. Faith-based fan clubs support charitable causes beyond sport, benefiting wider society. Manchester United's Muslim Supporters Club, for example, raised over £300,000 for charity in just 18 months.[4]

5. Approaches that understand and accommodate faith help widen participation in sport, encouraging physical activity and improving public health. Only 69% of young Muslims and 67% of young Sikhs enjoy physical activity, compared with 81% of young Christians.[5] Organisations like Stanmore Jafferys, Cycle Sisters and Stretford Sikhs create welcoming spaces to help address the gap.

Policy Recommendations at a Glance

• **Government should acknowledge the role of faith communities in sport.**
The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) should explicitly recognise the contribution that faith communities make to sport and physical activity. DCMS should work proactively to ensure faith communities are included in mainstream sporting organisations, programmes and events. DCMS should also encourage partnerships between faith-based and non-faith-based organisations to promote participation, social cohesion and a stronger sense of belonging.

• **DCMS should reflect faith in the National Plan for Physical Activity.**
The government's forthcoming National Plan for Physical Activity should recognise disparities in physical activity and participation across faith communities. The Plan should also acknowledge the important role that faith-based organisations can play in reducing inactivity, removing barriers to participation and engaging underserved groups.

• **DCMS should adopt an intersectional approach to participation.**
DCMS should consider faith alongside other characteristics, including gender, disability and age, when designing and delivering initiatives to increase participation in sport and physical activity. This will ensure that programmes reflect the multiple and overlapping factors that can shape participation and access.

• **The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) should strengthen the link between sport, faith and social cohesion.**
The MHCLG's social cohesion strategy recognises the importance of both sport and faith, but it does not sufficiently address the relationship between them. The Social Cohesion Taskforce

and its partners should support initiatives that bring together sport, faith and community cohesion, recognising the unique contribution faith communities can make through sport.

• **Professional clubs should support faith-based fan clubs.**
Professional sports clubs should formally recognise and engage with faith-based fan clubs that promote community engagement, inclusion and interfaith understanding. These groups can help clubs better meet the needs of faith-based supporters, create a more welcoming matchday experience and encourage wider participation in sport. Stronger partnerships with these groups can also amplify clubs' community impact and charitable activities.



Footballing icon **Mohamed 'Mo' Salah** celebrates a goal with sujud, the prostration of Muslim prayer, in thanks to God. Embraced by fans across faiths and backgrounds during his time in the Premier League, his celebration shows how expressions of faith can become part of a shared sporting identity.

(Credit: Christian Bertrand / Shutterstock.com)

Introduction

The UK is a nation that has long cherished its sport. Football, cricket, boxing, tennis and rugby, to name just a few, are practised across the country. They provide enjoyment and contribute to the nation, but their role goes beyond that. Sporting clubs and societies can play a significant role in fostering social cohesion, community engagement and collective identity. Sporting events provide shared spaces where individuals from different cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds can come together and build relationships. Through participation, spectatorship and volunteering, sporting activities become spaces for interfaith connection, cultural exchange and a shared purpose that goes beyond cultural and social differences, creating a shared identity.

The UK government's social cohesion plan highlights the important role sport can play in bringing different communities together.[6] It also foregrounds the role of faith communities in working for social cohesion, but it does not focus on the role of faith in sport in particular. Meanwhile, the 2023 strategy on sport and physical activity, which was published under the previous government, acknowledges the role of communities, yet without highlighting the contributions of faith communities.[7] This is a missed opportunity, as faith plays a key role for sport leaders, players, fans and investors alike. But it is an opportunity that can be salvaged as the government plans to publish its approach to tackling inactivity in its National Plan for Physical Activity later this year.[8]

Locally within communities, sports initiatives and faith-based organisations enable local engagement across different faiths to interact. Faith-based initiatives work with communities, using sports to improve trust, cooperation and civic participation, whilst challenging stereotypes. Faith-based initiatives demonstrate how sport and physical activity can be a practical and accessible tool for boosting social cohesion and bringing together people of different beliefs and backgrounds. Whether it is through grassroots football sessions, youth mentoring programmes, community tournaments or large-scale sporting events, sport has been shown to provide opportunities for meaningful interaction and relationship building.

Sport also plays a key role in Islamic traditions, and over 1.7 million Muslims in England alone reported being active in 2024 to 2025.[9] Physical activity and athletic competition have traditionally been encouraged as a means of maintaining health and social connection. Muslim communities across the country have left a mark on British sport, often in collaboration with other faith communities as well as people of no faith.

Sport brings people together, and faith communities are deeply embedded in this landscape. Recognising the significant role that faith and faith communities play in British sport is crucial in further strengthening social cohesion and public health. Government can play a key role in supporting existing efforts and unlocking the full potential of faith in sport, by acknowledging the contributions of faith-based initiatives. A confident, cohesive Britain will require collaboration across existing societal divides. Faith communities are an essential part of working towards that common goal.



British jockey **Khadijah Mellah**, whose victory in the 2019 Magnolia Cup made her the first woman to win a horse race in Britain wearing a hijab. (Credit: Charlie Crowhurst / Goodwood Press & Media)

Muslim Athletes: Representation and Inclusivity

Sport is an integral part of British culture and identity. It unites us and fosters a sense of pride in the human ability to push boundaries and excel, regardless of the background of the sportsperson. Sport is enjoyed by all, and it must be open to all. Representation plays a key role in this context. The visibility of sportspeople from all backgrounds matters, because it shows to communities across the country that there is space for everyone in British sport. Sportspeople of diverse backgrounds act as role models for people across the country, improving confidence and motivation. When competing at a high level, they leave a significant mark on the economy by paying taxes, often in the highest tax brackets. They also support social cohesion by exposing the players and fans to people from different faiths or cultures to themselves, challenging prejudices and stereotypes.

Representation Matters

It is difficult to know how many Muslims there are in each of the sporting leagues in the UK because the number of players by religion is not officially tracked. There are some unofficial estimates, however, and how well Muslims are represented depends upon the sport. For example, there are a significant number of Muslims in the English Premier League. In the 2025/26 season, there were an estimated 55 Muslims out of a total of around 500 players.[10] Muslims therefore account for 11% of players, as compared to their proportion of the general population of England and Wales (around 7%). But Muslim players are not just represented in British football. Other examples include the England men's cricket teams, where Moeen Ali, Rehan Ahmed, Saqib Mahmood, Adil Rashid and Shoaib Bashir have made a name for themselves. Visible diversity in sport is important, as it can help encourage people from all backgrounds to take up sport and physical activity.

Muslim Players' Tax Contributions

Muslim players are not only representing our towns and cities on the football pitch, but they are also helping to fund our public services through their tax contributions. In the 2025/26 football season alone, estimated annual tax contributions for the Muslim players in the Premier League amounted to £117 million.

Being British and being Muslim is often presented as a contradiction. However, the example of British Muslim athletes highlights that in practice, national and faith identity often go hand in hand. Asif Abbasi has won multiple wheelchair tennis tournaments, including the Wimbledon National Finals in 2023 and 2025. He described the pride he felt competing both "as a British [person] and as a Muslim".[11] Many British Muslims in the sporting spotlight also lead charities and encourage change for the benefit of the nation's communities, through uplifting disadvantaged young people and supporting social cohesion initiatives. Their contributions are crucial when it comes to widening participation.



Sir Mo Farah, Britain's most successful Olympic track athlete, with four Olympic and six world titles. (Credit: Tim Hipps, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons)

Case Study: Wasim Khan MBE

Wasim Khan's experience demonstrates how elite sports can provide a platform where faith, identity and social cohesion meet.

Born in inner-city Birmingham, Khan represented England at the Under-19 level, having begun his career when selected for Warwickshire Under-13s.[12] Khan played professionally for Warwickshire, where he became the first British-born Pakistani-origin Muslim to play professional cricket in England. He went on to play for Sussex and Derbyshire. His visibility within his sport made it possible for him to create new, inclusive opportunities for younger generations so they could participate in sports and be judged by ability rather than where they come from.[13]

After retiring from playing cricket, Khan set up Khan Cricket in the Community, which aimed to inspire children through cricket, helping to empower young people in inner-city communities.[14] This work resulted in an increase in access to tailored support in line with the young people's needs. It has helped them develop new skills, uplift aspirations and increase their confidence. Khan mentions that the community involvement is driven by Islamic values related to social responsibility: "you want to give in a selfless way to help impact and change society for the good".[15] The initiative shows the impact faith can have in driving sporting initiatives, building communities and increasing participation.

Khan has also had the CEO role at Chance to Shine, a national charity aimed at supporting children's development through cricket. This has led to a rise in cricket participation to 2.5 million children across England and Wales in 10,000 schools that had not played the game before, one million of whom were girls.[16]

Khan was awarded an MBE in 2013 for services to cricket and the community. Since then, he has gone on to be CEO of Leicestershire County Cricket Club, Managing Director of the Pakistan Cricket Board, General Manager at the International Cricket Council and more recently, Executive Director Asia designate at the Fédération Internationale de Basketball (FIBA).

Muslim players have made significant contributions to British sports, but Muslims from the UK are not as well represented in certain teams. Only four of the Muslim players in the 2025/26 Premier League are British. Tottenham Hotspur's Nayim (Mohamed Ali Amar) was the first Muslim to play in the Premier League in its inaugural 1992/93 season,[17a] and in 2004 Fulham's Zesh Rehman became the first British Muslim footballer of South Asian heritage in the top flight.[17b] At national level, Djed Spence became the first Muslim to play for the senior England men's football team in September 2025 in a FIFA World Cup qualifier game.[17c] In summer 2026, he became the first Muslim to represent England at a World Cup, where he was one of the team's standout performers as England reached the semi-finals.[17d] But there are no recorded Muslim women playing in the England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland national football teams. This highlights how more has to be done to support Muslim players from the UK to reach the top domestic leagues and the national football level, especially female players.

Significant gaps also exist in other British sports. For example, despite having some high-profile Muslims in the rugby Super League (including Nene Macdonald), overall, there are not many Muslim players in the league. Fouad Yaha was the first Muslim to appear in a Grand Final in 2021.[18] Concerted efforts are needed to ensure players of all backgrounds can contribute to British sport.

> ***"In British sports, I think visibility is lacking at a professional level. At a grassroots level, I think it's increasing. But when I first started, in established sports associations, there wasn't really anything available for British Muslims, and for females especially."*** [19]
>
> ***Yashmin Harun***
> *Chair and Founder, Muslimah Sports Association*

Participation Reduces Prejudice

Increased visibility of Muslim players can help reduce prejudice amongst non-Muslim players, fans and wider society. By practising their faith in public and speaking openly about it, Muslim players share elements of Islam with others. By simply being themselves, they show that players of all faiths, and none, can be a part of British sport. A good example is Mo Farah, the serial Olympic gold medallist for Team GB, who is known to engage in sujood (prostration) to express his thankfulness to God on the racetrack. Farah explained how he "normally pray[s] before a race" and supplicates to God.[20]

Another display of the Islamic faith by Muslim players that is becoming more common in UK sport is the breaking of fasting during matches. The Premier League formally allowed pauses in matches to allow Muslim players to break their fast for the first time in April 2021.[21] This has meant that Muslim players can practise their faith openly, while millions of people watching these games from within the stadiums and all around the country who may otherwise have no interaction with Muslims can better understand its practices. Clubs are also supporting their players in other ways, such as by opening multifaith prayer rooms. Muslim player Mohamed Elneny opened Arsenal's first multifaith player prayer room in March 2024 during Ramadan.[22]

Case Study: Mohamed (Mo) Salah

Mo Salah is one of the most well-known Muslim sportsmen, not only in the UK, but around the world. Records were sent "tumbling" throughout his nine years at Liverpool FC, where he became the club's third-highest goalscorer with 255 goals by March 2026.[23] He also shares the record for winning the Premier League's Golden Boot, an award for the leading goalscorer, on four occasions, with Thierry Henry.

For Salah, his faith is an explicit part of the game he plays. When he scores a goal, he will sometimes celebrate through sujood, the prostration that is part of Muslim prayer.

Salah's acceptance as a Muslim who visibly practises his faith on the pitch is reflected in the fans' reactions to him. In 2018, videos of Liverpool FC fans' chants went viral. They were filmed singing to the tune of the 1996 hit 'Good Enough' by the English Britpop band Dodgy:

"Mo Sa-la-la-la-lah, Mo Sa-la-la-la-lah, if he's good enough for you, he's good enough for me, if he scores another few, then I'll be Muslim too. He's sitting in the mosque, that's where I want to be."[24]

While for most fans, the chant was seen as an expression of their admiration of one of their favourite players, one fan described taking these lyrics literally. Ben Bird decided to convert to Islam because of Salah's example, despite having anti-Muslim views when he was younger.[25] Salah was the first Muslim that Bird felt he could relate to.



Mohamed 'Mo' Salah scored 257 goals in total and made 120 assists in 442 games for Liverpool FC. (Credit: Vitalii Vitleo / Shutterstock.com)

Mo Salah is a prime example of how positive exposure to celebrities from diverse backgrounds to the fans can lead to behavioural changes in prejudice.[26] After Salah joined Liverpool FC, hate crimes in Merseyside reduced by 16% and the club's fans' rates of posting anti-Muslim tweets relative to fans of other top clubs also halved. This has been referred to as the 'Salah effect.'

Researchers believe that this effect is not limited to Salah but applies to other players and the relationship with their fans, too. Christian sports players have been publicly expressing the role their faith has had on their sporting performance. When Arsenal won the Premier League in 2026, players posted faith-inspired celebratory posts on social media.[27] Players including Bukayo Saka, Noni Madueke and Jurrien Timber have referenced the importance of their Christian faith in shaping their achievements in football as well as wider confidence.[28] This group of players from the team are known as "the Bible brothers," because they meet for prayer and Bible study off the pitch.[29] Research by Christians in Sport and Eido has found that 75% of clubs reported Christian players in their first-team squad and 40% of clubs regularly host Bible studies and prayer meetings.[30]

In addition to the impact on players' personal motivation, public displays of faith can help demystify religion in the eyes of fans and the wider community. What may have once seemed strange can become more relatable if introduced by a role model. Despite positive developments towards broader acceptance of faith in British sport, official support by sporting bodies towards players of faith has not always been adequate. Improvements continue to be needed to ensure that players of faith do not have to compromise on any part of their identity. This need was recognised by Ebadur Rahman, founder and chief executive of Nujum Sports, a London-based non-profit organisation aimed at helping Muslim athletes reach their full potential. He launched the Muslim Athletes' Charter in 2021 to ensure that organisations support Muslim sportsmen and women.[31] Signatories of the Charter pledge to create the needed changes, such as the provision of prayer spaces and being allowed to fast during Ramadan. As of March 2023, more than 70 professional clubs and bodies across Britain had signed up.[32]



Footballer **Jurrien Timber**, one of Arsenal's 'Bible brothers', pictured on international duty for the Netherlands. Across Europe, athletes of different faiths represent their nations and contribute to a shared sense of national pride. (Credit: Vitalii Vitleo / Shutterstock.com)

Case Study: Monty Panesar [33]

In 2006, Monty Panesar was the first Sikh cricketer to represent England. Panesar maintained his faith-based dress when at the peak of fame, wearing a patka (Sikh head covering) on the pitch. Within Sikhism, participation in sport aligns closely with broader Sikh teachings on discipline, resilience, self-improvement and seva (service to others). While he described faith and cricket as "separate issues," he has said that his faith helped him to maintain his discipline.

Panesar was described as one of the most visible Sikhs in the UK, acting as a role model for the community. Indarjit Singh (then editor of the Sikh Messenger) said of Panesar:

"There is traditionally little recognition of turbanned Sikh people. But here is a young man whose religion is his driving force. In Sikhism we are taught that if we go into anything we must try very hard. And he, more than many other cricketers, keeps working hard."

Once he was picked for England, there was soaring demand from hundreds of children wanting to join his first club, Luton Town and Indians Cricket Club (CC). Described as the 'Monty effect,' this shows how the success of one sporting star can motivate young people to take up a sport.

Both Panesar and Muslim cricketer Wasim Khan have spoken on the need for inner-city cricket infrastructure to boost grassroots participation. The England and Wales Cricket Board announced in 2024 the aim of investing £3.5 million in the most ethnically diverse areas of England and Wales and building 450 new facilities to improve access to cricket in diverse, urban areas.[34]

While there are areas of underrepresentation at the professional level, Muslim players and players of other faiths have pushed the boundaries of sport in the UK. They have motivated young fans from their communities to love sports and stay active, tirelessly dedicating their time and resources to expanding access to sports. Opportunities for children, regardless of their background, will create the next generation of sporting stars. Positive exposure to the way faith has driven their skills and careers has also been shown to reduce prejudice against their faith, thereby supporting tolerance and social cohesion.



Monty Panesar with Mushtaq Ahmed, former Pakistan international and England's spin coach at the time. (Credit: Jim Dowling from Hong Kong, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons)

Muslim Sport Fans: Impact Beyond the Pitch

The value that people of faith bring to the sporting world is not limited to the contributions of professional players. Sports and their stars depend upon the fans who support them. Without public interest, sport would not be such a prominent part of our lives. A significant part of sports clubs' income is due to the fans supporting them. Premier League clubs surpass their European counterparts in overall revenue with a combined total of £6.5 billion, of which £920 million is matchday ticket revenue.[35] Other sports also generate significant revenue, with the 18 first-class county cricket teams earning £253 million in 2024.[36]

There is no official data that measures the engagement of British Muslims with sport clubs as fans. But the many Muslim fan clubs that have been set up across the country do reflect the popularity of sports among British Muslims. Research by British Future suggests that almost six in ten adults (57%) in England and Wales support a football team.[37] In football alone, there are eight major Muslim fan groups.[38] However, the rise in faith-based fan groups has been attributed to a lack of faith-literate spaces within sports.[39] This means that people of faith do not always feel that they can be present in sporting environments and meet their faith-based obligations. But out of this need, fan communities have grown. They foster inclusive groups, lead charity initiatives and consult with professional sports clubs to ensure that fans of faith feel welcome in stadiums and sports grounds.

"Muslim football supporters are diverse. We come in all forms. We don't fit into a box. Some of us wear Stone Island and Adidas. Some wear traditional clothing. Some blend both. Some go to midweek matches in suits, others in sportswear. We're doctors, teachers, students, engineers, construction workers. We're from every background and every neighbourhood. And that diversity is our strength, not something to apologise for." [40]

Ben Bird

Football fan and convert to Islam



Arsenal supporters in Malaysia during the club's 2011 pre-season tour, including fans who travelled from Indonesia to watch their favourite team. Such tours connect British clubs with their global following, including supporters in Muslim-majority countries whose commitment extends well beyond matchday. (Credit: CHEN WS / Shutterstock.com)

Why the Need for Faith-Based Fan Clubs?

Some may question whether the division of sports fans into faith-based clubs harms rather than supports social cohesion in the UK. But some of these clubs have developed out of a need for spaces in which people of all faiths feel equally welcome and safe. Muslims are among the least likely to attend live sporting events (18%), compared to the average for adults in England (30%).[41] According to Asma Ajaz-Ali (Interim CEO of the Muslim Sports Foundation), the increasing number of faith-based fan clubs reflects a lack of faith-literate spaces in sports. For example, she spoke of how British Muslim communities feel unwelcome in clubs and unlikely to return due to anti-Muslim hostility that they experience. Socialising is also frequently centred on drinking or gambling, and there is often a lack of accommodation for faith-based practices. This has led some Muslims to question whether there is space for them. Faith-based fan groups have been able to contribute an inclusive space for fans of all backgrounds.

> ***"More can be done across sport to connect with those groups who are embedded within communities who have that knowledge, which is easy to pass on, and little tweaks here and there would make the whole experience of belonging in sport much easier and more inclusive."*** [42]
>
> ***Anonymous professor***

Kick It Out (English football's equality and inclusion organisation) revealed how reports of anti-Muslim hostility during the 2025/26 season rose by 88% to 60.[43] Incidents of antisemitism similarly rose, by 43% to 93 reports. This mirrors the increase in the number of religious hate crimes against Muslims and Jews in England and Wales more broadly. The number of such incidents against Muslims increased from 4,479 in the year ending March 2025 to 5,132 in the year ending March 2026 (15% increase), and against Jews from 2,874 in 2025 to 3,162 in 2026 (10% increase) for the same periods.[44] Sport fans of faith who have experienced prejudice may therefore prefer to attend games with friends from the same background to feel safe or even avoid games altogether.

An additional barrier to Muslim fans' participation in mainstream spaces is the fact that UK sporting fan culture is predominantly centred on drinking alcohol. Alcohol Change UK, a leading charity raising awareness of alcohol-related harms, has reported how this culture is driving away fans of faith. Using a survey of British Asians, the charity was hoping to understand the impact of this drinking culture on people whose faith or culture discourages drinking. Half of the 830 British Asian sports fans they surveyed said that drinking had a negative effect at matches.[45] 72% of cricket fans also said that alcohol was the main source of disorder at matches. Some respondents reported feeling isolated socially for not drinking.

But it is not only people of faith who may have



Amir Khan, Olympic silver medallist and former world champion boxer from Bolton. (Credit: Taqihz, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons)

concerns about the centrality of drinking to fan culture. Thirty-nine per cent of young people aged 18 to 24 do not drink, and there is a growing trend for alcohol-free socialisation within universities and workplaces.[46] Similarly, families may not feel comfortable taking their children to matches if drunken disorder is common.

"[Muslim fan] groups also act as a constructive link between Muslim supporters and football clubs. By organising collectively, they are able to raise issues, share feedback and highlight practical improvements that can make a real difference to the matchday experience, such as better communication around Ramadan, prayer facilities, or inclusive community events. When clubs engage with organised Muslim supporters, it allows conversations to take place in a positive and collaborative way, benefiting both fans and the wider club community." [47]

Muslim Football Supporters Association

Finally, another reason why faith-based fan clubs formed was because of significant gaps in the accommodation of faith-based practices in sport spaces. In the 2010s, there were two high-profile examples of Muslim fans praying openly in the grounds, but consequently being subjected to racist and anti-Muslim abuse in person and online.[48] These incidents highlighted both a lack of designated prayer spaces and the prevalence of anti-Muslim hostility amongst fans. Since then, progress has been made, but there is still significant room for improvement. In 2015, five out of 20 Premier League teams confirmed that they had multifaith prayer facilities, while others said they would make arrangements for fans on request.[49] This number has further increased since.

The Contributions of Faith-Based Fan Clubs

"Beyond football itself, many Muslim supporters' groups are involved in wider community work, including charity fundraising, food bank collections and local engagement projects. This reflects the wider social role that football clubs and their supporters play in towns and cities across the UK. Through these activities, Muslim supporters' groups contribute positively to their local areas while also strengthening relationships with other fan groups and community organisations." [50]

Muslim Football Supporters Association

The value of faith-based fan clubs is immense. In the words of wheelchair tennis player Asif Abbasi, "fans and their support [are] the backbone" of sports.[51] Faith-based fan clubs have an important role in providing a safe place for people of faith to align both their faith and love for sports. They have become a staple of the British sporting scene and often work to improve society for the better. Faith-based fan clubs advocate for prayer facilities at stadiums, organise charity campaigns for local communities and help to widen participation in sports. Faith-based fan groups are actively transforming and expanding the remit on what fan groups can do, reshaping sports culture in the process.

Arsenal Muslims (also known as Muslim Gooners), Chelsea Muslim Supporters Group and Manchester United Muslim Supporters Club are examples of some of the Muslim faith-based fan groups in the UK. Faith-based fan groups have developed new accessible spaces where Muslim supporters can visibly show their religious identity and commitment to their football clubs. For example, Arsenal Muslims have described themselves as an "independent

voice" for Muslim Arsenal supporters.[52] The club is shaping identity and belonging for British Muslim supporters. The collective identity goes beyond attending matches to building an inclusive community of people who share a faith within sports fan culture. One Muslim football supporter from Arsenal Muslims explained how people tend to attend sporting events "in their own little pockets."[53] But this fan club has created a "community spirit" where people are able to attend and engage with each other.

Case Study: Manchester United Muslim Supporters Club

Manchester United Muslim Supporters Club (MUMSC) are more than a football group, labelling themselves as a community organisation that connects football fans. This community has 3,700 registered members across 85 countries and 200,000 followers across social media platforms.[54] They have worked with Manchester United to establish multifaith prayer rooms and Old Trafford's first Ramadan iftar, and they have also helped deliver education sessions on faith literacy and football.[55]

Asif Mahmud, co-founder of MUMSC, explained how a dedicated supporters club for Muslims is about having an inclusive space that allows fans to "integrate and participate without compromising on our beliefs".[56] Manchester United works directly with this fan club to improve access for fans of all faiths and none.

Beyond creating inclusive spaces, MUMSC also contribute to wider community initiatives. They have partnered with Manchester United Foundation, the official registered charity of Manchester United FC, to support community outreach and volunteering, raising over £300,000 for charity.[56a]

Asif Mahmud explains the group intends to "work on issues that affect everybody,"[56b] such as through donating books, clothing and collaborating with local mosques. For example, MUMSC have collected and donated 350 winter coats, helping to support those struggling with increased living costs.[56c] This work shows how faith-based fan clubs can be a force for good.



Manchester United Muslim Supporters Club with Noussair Mazraoui, the Netherlands-born Morocco defender, at a fan-led iftar at Old Trafford. (Credit: Rooful Ali, MUMSC)

Arsenal Muslims provide guidance to their fans, such as through help finding halal restaurants or prayer spaces in or near the stadium.[57] They also build inclusive spaces. For example, they have worked with Arsenal to increase engagement and organise events around Ramadan, such as community iftars.[58] These events were open to both Muslims and non-Muslims. They successfully brought fans from different communities together, tackled misconceptions and encouraged conversations around faith, representation and accessibility in sport.[59] Arsenal Muslims are amongst fan clubs that have reshaped traditional understandings of what sport fan groups do. They are not only part of British sports culture, but they are actively contributing to its transformation of what it means to belong.

The positive contributions of Muslims to the game of football have been increasingly championed since 2025, when the Muslim Football Supporters Association was established. It supports and represents Muslim football fans, grassroots groups, clubs and fan clubs to strengthen advocacy and increase the visibility of Muslims in the game.[60] The organisation also aims to tackle anti-Muslim hostility, widen participation of both players and fans, and encourage the inclusion of Muslims in the game by advising football clubs and the Football Association (FA).

Many faith-based fan groups, like Arsenal Muslims, are calling for official recognition from their clubs.[61] Official recognition would mean that the fan groups are actively promoted by the club and that they could hold events and charity matches endorsed by the club. Given the role that faith-based groups play in tackling anti-Muslim hostility and ensuring that people of all faiths and none feel welcome and safe supporting their teams, this recognition would help to further support their important work. Faris Gohir (co-founder of Arsenal Muslims with his sister, Aaliyah), said that official recognition would be "important to really further champion that diversity within the Arsenal fan base."[62]



Djed Spence, the first Muslim to play for England's senior men's football team. (Credit: Bryan Berlin / WikiPortraits, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons)

Case Study: Stretford Sikhs

There has been a rise in faith-based fan groups across different communities of faith. The Stretford Sikhs are a Sikh faith-based fan group, which was recognised by Manchester United officially in 2025.[63] The fan group has provided a platform for the Sikh community to align faith and interest in football, offering a safe space for Sikh fans. Speaking on the importance of the recognition as an official fan group, Stretford Sikhs secretary Preetam Singh explains that "becoming the first-ever official Sikh Manchester United Supporters Club is bigger than just football. It's about representation, showing Sikh fans around the world that we truly belong in the game and creating a legacy that will inspire current and future generations". The fan club has provided a space for belonging, increasing visibility whilst contributing to Manchester United's supporters' diversity.

In summary, faith-based fan clubs matter because they provide inclusive spaces for fans, help to make clubs more receptive to faith-based needs and contribute to local communities through charitable initiatives. Through faith-based fan groups, British sporting fan culture is being re-imagined in a way that aligns with the realities of the modern-day, multifaith UK that we live in. They help ensure that everyone feels they can support their team without having to compromise on any aspect of their identity.



Investments into British Sport

British Muslim contributions to sport can be felt both on the sports ground and in the wider community. One key factor in this context is investments made by individuals or organisations that allow British sports to flourish further, strengthening widened participation and social cohesion. The contributions of faith-based groups and people of faith to sport include financial investments, charity drives and volunteering, on both a local and national level.

Financial Investments

"There's a real need to showcase some of the things that we do." [64]

Wasim Khan MBE

Former Professional Cricketer and Executive Director Asia designate, Fédération Internationale de Basketball (FIBA)

British Muslim investments into sport benefit sports clubs, associations and the wider community, with both international and domestic investors playing a key role. For example, British-educated Kuwaiti-Pakistani businessman Muizz Mirza owns Plymouth Parkway Football Club, following a period of financial struggle. A statement from the club following the agreement stressed that the investment was aimed to benefit not just the club but also the city: "At the heart of the proposed new structure is a commitment to keeping Plymouth Parkway rooted in the city. The club's history, identity, supporters and community remain central to the future being developed".[65] Mirza is the founder of MEC Study Group, which has supported over 3,000 students internationally and developed a network of more than 600 university partners. It is hoped that this group will benefit the whole city through international partnerships in education, commerce and the media.[66]

British Muslim investments have also played a key role in cricket. For example, the work of philanthropic entrepreneur Qamar Khan MBE, who was born in Pakistan and moved to the UK as a child, has similarly funded extensive sport projects. This includes his work with the Hamro Foundation which he set up. The Foundation focuses on working with young people, whom it aims to inspire and help develop.[67] It has also worked with refugees, stressing the broader societal impact that investment into sport can have for Britain's diverse communities.

While the focus of the general public is often on big investments by major donors, British sport would not be the same without investments at the grassroots level. Investing into grassroots sport alone has generated £4.38 for every £1 invested.[68] The contributions have had a large impact on local communities and grassroots organisations. Investments into sport rarely benefit just the club, player or fans, but usually benefit the wider community that sports organisations are embedded in. They help regenerate local areas, attract business and create jobs.

Investment Through Volunteering

In addition to financial investments, volunteering is a key form of investing into British sport. Research by Sport England has calculated the monetary value

of volunteers to be £6.3 billion. This is a replacement cost for volunteers within sport and physical activity, based on average number of hours and wage.[69]

There is a long history of faith-based contributions to sport through volunteering. For example, many faith communities respond to the needs of local communities by organising sporting events, providing voluntary coaching and delivering inclusive sporting programmes. These contributions have multiplied opportunities available by widening participation, accessibility and wellbeing in local communities. By volunteering their time, faith groups help close gaps left by cuts to funding, enabling activities on the local level and ensuring communities continue to have access to physical activity. Volunteering includes both formal and informal contributions. Sport chaplains, who support many of the UK's sport teams and their communities, often on a voluntary basis, are an example of more formal contributions. The General Director of Christians in Sport, Dr Graham Daniels, states that there have been "Christian chaplains for probably the best part of 35 years and a significant percentage of Premier League and English Football League clubs have chaplains".[70] Their support is invaluable during matches and off the pitch.

In Muslim communities, volunteering is often informed by Islamic principles on charity (sadaqah). This is not limited to monetary donations but includes volunteering time and supporting the wider community. The work of MUMSC and Chelsea Muslim Supporters Group is an example of the impact investment in the form of volunteering can have. Both fan clubs support wider community initiatives, through volunteering members' time and fundraising campaigns. Co-founder of MUMSC, Asif Mahmud, explains that "it's good to show that we are Muslim, but we also care about local issues in the community".[71] Similarly, Chelsea Muslim Supporters Group's founder Zoheb Gaj stresses that "devotion to faith and our club intertwines seamlessly".[72] Giving back is at the heart of the groups' work. Chelsea Muslim Supporters Group organised community events including an Eid gathering at Stamford Bridge, with almost 400 tickets sold and all proceeds going to charity.[73] It is through events like this that volunteering as an investment into British sport helps create spaces for dialogue and exchange and strengthens community relations.



Moeen Ali, Birmingham-born all-rounder who won two Cricket World Cups with England. (Credit: davidmolloyphotography.com from Australia, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons)

Chelsea Muslim Supporters Group have also organised charity matches, collaborating with MUMSC. One key example in this context is the 2025 historic charity match at Cobham training ground, which raised over £9,000.[77] Proceeds were donated to football foundations and community organisations. Reflecting on the event, Zoheb Gaj, founder and chair of the Chelsea Muslim Supporters Group, stressed how "faith plays a powerful role in bringing people together, and this match was a reminder of how football can bring people together and celebrate shared values".[78]

According to Sport England, over 10 million adults volunteered to support sport and physical activity in the 12 months to November 2024, generating £8.2 billion in social value.[79] Sport England has also estimated an average value of £2,100 per adult from weekly volunteering.[80] Faith-based sporting organisations, like Stanmore Jafferys, play a significant role in investing into local communities through volunteering. They are one of the many faith-based organisations that work with volunteers to reach communities through sport. Their work leads to stronger, healthier and more resilient communities, which benefits us all.



Runners at the 2024 London Marathon. The event relied on more than 6,100 volunteers, from course marshals to teams at water stations, whose time and commitment make it possible for thousands of others to take part. (Credit: mikecphoto / Shutterstock.com)

Case Study: Stanmore Jafferys

Stanmore Jafferys is a community sports organisation that is part of the Hussaini Islamic Centre Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Community in Harrow, north-west London. Its work on the ground highlights the contributions volunteers make to invest in local communities. The organisation uses sport and faith-literate practices to provide men, women and children within the local community with weekly sport sessions. This includes football, badminton, tennis, cycling, swimming and running. Led by volunteers, the community has organised tournaments across different age groups as well as sports summer camps.

With over 1,000 members, and 150 volunteers, the club's volunteers have become the backbone of the community.[81] Sport England estimates the annual wellbeing value of sport volunteering to be £2,100 for weekly volunteers and £1,000 for monthly volunteers. Based on these numbers, Stanmore Jafferys' 150 volunteers can equate to an estimated £315,000 in annual wellbeing value if volunteering weekly, or £150,000 if volunteering monthly.[82]

Faith-based investments in sports, including in financial and social form, have positively impacted communities across the country. Their impact reaches beyond the pitch, partnering with schools, community organisations and faith groups to serve Britain's diverse communities. British sport would not be the same without Muslim investments, be it in the form of monetary contributions or volunteers donating their time. Together, they make British sport what it is today, a strong driver not just for physical activity, but also energised local communities.



Widening Participation, Strengthening Inclusion

Despite the many achievements of people of all faiths and none in British sport, significant barriers continue to exist which impact Britain's diverse communities, including faith communities, people from low-income backgrounds, women and girls, as well as ethnic minorities. An anonymous professor interviewed for this report stresses that "sport still needs to take itself into communities".[83] This is supported by research produced by Sport England, which shows that people who do not identify with a religion are more likely to be physically active than those who belong to a faith group.[84] Data also showed some faith communities were more active than others. Asif Abbasi highlights the importance of targeted approaches to widening participation, to ensure that underrepresented communities are included and hidden talent can get unlocked with the right support.[85]

To widen participation in sports and physical activity will not only help to create the next generation of sporting legends who make important social and economic contributions, but it will also help to reduce inactivity-related illness. The government stated in 2022 that physical inactivity in the UK is associated with 1 in 6 deaths and is estimated to cost £7.4 billion a year.[86] This is because physical activity can help to prevent and manage many chronic conditions and diseases, like cancer and heart disease, but it can also help to prevent premature deaths which impact the country economically. If trends continue, the government also concluded that the UK population would be 35% less active by 2030 than in the 1960s. These health risks will be greater for communities that are less active than others. Research from the Youth Sport Trust's National Girls Active Survey highlights that only 69% of young people belonging to the Muslim faith and 67% in the Sikh faith had enjoyed taking part in physical activity, compared to 81% of young people of Christian faith.[87] This figure shows how targeted efforts to address faith-based disparities are key to widening participation.

Despite progress that has been made in recent years, there remains a general lack of understanding and awareness of faith in the sector. Dr Leon Moosavi from the University of Liverpool describes the disconnect between many faith communities and mainstream sporting institutions when it comes to the provision of faith-literate spaces.[88] Yashmin Harun (chair and founder of Muslimah Sports Association) echoes this, stating that there is often a lack of understanding of religious and cultural specificities, including, but not limited to, Ramadan and the five daily prayers.[89] Barriers to participation are further highlighted when adopting an intersectional lens, an analytical framework which takes into consideration not just faith, but also factors such as gender or disability and how they interact with each other, impacting an individual's experience in life. Asif Abbasi highlights this intersection by referring to his personal experience: "I have to create my own opportunities. I have to do more than a non-disabled athlete".[90]

Faith-based organisations are key partners in efforts to increase access to sport and widen participation. They play a key part in providing opportunities to people of all faiths and none.

Case Study: Muslim Sports Foundation and the Youth Sport Trust [91]

The Muslim Sports Foundation is a charity organisation that aims to improve wellbeing and access to sport, with a focus on British Muslims. Their work is focused on breaking barriers by making space for faith-sensitive practices such as modest sportswear and by partnering with local community organisations.

The Muslim Sports Foundation partners with organisations such as the Youth Sport Trust to increase opportunities and widen participation. The Youth Sport Trust is an organisation that works with schools across the United Kingdom to increase younger people's participation in physical education. Their Girls Active initiative aims to increase girls' participation by tackling barriers they face. By understanding the needs of underrepresented groups and designing activities accordingly, they help increase accessibility.

Asma Ajaz-Ali (Interim CEO of the Muslim Sports Foundation) explains that representation and belonging are often closely intertwined. Seeing people of diverse backgrounds participate in sport "will create further belonging for the people who can see that somebody like you is in the space".

Faith-based sporting spaces are not just relevant to British Muslims, but they help increase participation across Britain's diverse communities. This is recognised by the work of a range of organisations that work with different British faith groups, including the Sikh community. Cricket is widely played in the British Sikh community. Faith-based sport groups, including those focused on cricket, often stem from faith-led community spaces such as Gurdwaras. They provide a community where members can build connections over sport. Gurdwaras work closely with communities to organise youth programmes, local tournaments, informal matches and fundraising events. The Sikh Games, a not-for-profit organisation aimed at celebrating sport, unity and Sikh values, is a good example of how faith-based sporting initiatives work with places of worship like Gurdwaras as part of community outreach.[92] This work demonstrates how British sport clubs come in different forms, and how faith-led community spaces help increase accessibility to sport.



One barrier to people supporting teams in stadiums is alcohol consumption. As mentioned above, a

survey found that 72% of cricket fans said that alcohol was the main source of disorder at matches. A YouGov poll of over 6,000 Britons from September 2026 also found that 54% believe that lifting the ban on drinking alcohol within view of the pitch at football stadiums would worsen the experience of watching football matches, compared to 15% who thought the experience would be improved.[93] But these views are increasingly being accommodated more widely. The 2026 FIFA World Cup saw a rise in alcohol-free screenings, organised by community and grassroots organisations. The screenings provided an alternative space for those who do not drink alcohol, including Muslim communities, families and young people, to enjoy major sporting events without the expectation that alcohol forms part of the experience. In London, Hulm Club hosted a number of alcohol-free screenings which were family-friendly and also provided facilities such as prayer spaces. Tickets sold out quickly, showing the demand for more inclusive spaces within football culture.

Similarly, The Scene, a South Asian-led collective, organised several alcohol-free screenings of England matches. Founded in 2024, the organisation has created a space where Britons of all faith backgrounds and none can gather and watch sports.[94] Shabna Zaheer from The Scene explains, "the aim is not only to support non-drinkers, but also to challenge the idea that football culture is always tied to drinking".[95] Zaheer highlights how the dominance of drinking can make it difficult for those who do not drink to experience a football community and environment. Creating an inclusive environment can change how people engage in sports, both by playing and spectating. Providing alcohol-free, family-friendly and culturally inclusive spaces can create an accessible environment which increases participation and social cohesion.

Supporting Women and Girls

While many members of faith communities face barriers to participation in sport, women and girls are often particularly affected, with even lower participation rates. The work of faith-led organisations which focuses on women's participation in sport is often key in this context, as they bring the cultural awareness, faith literacy and responsiveness to gender needed to engage women and girls of diverse backgrounds. Their work is groundbreaking and has helped enable people of all faiths and none to participate in, and enjoy, sport and physical activity.



(Credit: The Sikh Games / thesikhgames.com)

Case Study: Asra Club

Participation in sport is not just about accessing spaces, but also what happens once people join a sporting activity. For example, for some Muslim women, an increase in participation comes with a need for inclusive changing facilities, prayer spaces and specific clothing preferences. Without this, the sense of belonging and participation levels may remain low.

Asra Club is a community organisation which encourages Muslim women to participate in running. Founded in 2019, they act as a community space to facilitate participation, without compromising faith. The organisation runs activities such as running clubs and park walks. This includes the creation of intergenerational spaces where Muslim women attend with grandparents and children.

Sahra-Isha Muhammad-Jones, Asra Club's Founder and Head of Partnership, stresses the importance of faith-sensitive spaces and the impact they can have on Muslim women's participation in sport. Asra Club works to widen participation by ensuring sessions accommodate prayer times and clothing preferences such as the hijab; and ensuring that there are female-only changing rooms for privacy. According to Muhammad-Jones, this approach allows Muslim women to "engage and be part of [British] sport culture" without having to "compromise on their faith or beliefs".[96]

Efforts to increase participation in sport are needed across most sports practised in the UK. This includes cycling, where participation rates are often low for all women, and for women of faith in particular. Figures published by the Department for Transport showed that in 2024, men made an average of 23 cycle trips per year compared to women who made an average of 8 trips.[97] According to British charity Cycling UK, women were also almost twice as likely as men to not know how to ride a bike (11% compared to 6%), with lack of confidence also being twice that of male respondents (41% compared to 19%).[98] There is little to no reliable data on faith-based cycling participation, with datasets tending to collect statistics on areas such as age, gender and frequency but not faith. This makes it particularly difficult to measure. However, faith communities continue to participate in cycling, and organisations like the Cycle Sisters have made it their aim to create faith-literate, inclusive spaces.



Case Study: Cycle Sisters

Cycle Sisters is an example of a volunteer-led organisation that aims to increase Muslim women's access to and participation in cycling. The goal is to ensure Muslim women can cycle safely without compromising their faith. According to Sarah Javaid, Founder and CEO of Cycle Sisters, the low participation rates of Muslim women in cycling is due to a lack of faith literacy in sporting activities and institutions, rather than Muslim women being "hard to reach".[99] Sporting institutions often do not understand or adjust to the needs of underrepresented faith groups.

The barriers experienced by Muslim women are shared across other groups with lower participation. By accommodating faith, a positive impact is often created that can be felt by the wider community. For example, Cycle Sisters have worked with cycling brands such as Rapha to design clothing, including longer-length cycling jerseys. Javaid notes that this was not only accommodating to Muslim women but also women of other and no faith who preferred alternative clothing.[100]

The faith-based approach has allowed Cycle Sisters to successfully train 140 women as ride leaders, contributing directly to social cohesion and encouraging inclusive belonging. Since participating, many have gone on to work within the cycling sector, becoming qualified instructors and even volunteering further. This has increased Muslim women's representation within the field, increasing visibility. Javaid highlights the wider impact of women's participation, which is, for example, shown through more family members participating, including children.

"Even outside of the Muslim women space, there's a lot of women who don't want to wear like really tight cycling shorts."

Sarah Javaid
Founder and CEO, Cycle Sisters

The increased visibility of Muslim women in sport helps to challenge norms of who can participate in physical activity. The benefits of widened participation are numerous. It helps improve public health, increase confidence and strengthen social cohesion, as it brings people from different backgrounds together. Increased participation of any underrepresented group often has positive effects on other members of society, too. Inclusion benefits all, even if this effect is not always widely recognised.



Cycle Sisters' women-only cycling lessons for Somali women in Victoria Park, east London. (Credit: Cycle Sisters)

Case Study: Ramla Ali

The example of British Muslim professional boxer Ramla Ali highlights how visibility can increase participation. Ali won the 2015 Novice national championships in England, the 2016 England Boxing Elite National Championships, as well as the 2016 Great British Championships, becoming the first Muslim woman to win the English title.[101]

Since her achievements, Ali has gone on to establish not-for-profit organisation Sisters Club in 2018, with the goal to offer self-defence lessons for women. Initially set up for Muslim women, the lessons have since benefitted women of all faiths and none.[102]

Supported by Sports Direct and Nike and with multiple locations across London, the club provides free weekly boxing training sessions, football and running groups. The club offers self-defence training and a space to learn new skills whilst participating in physical activity.

In recent years, significant progress has been made to increase participation of Britain's diverse communities in sport. This work stresses that there is a space for people of all backgrounds in British sport. Ramla Ali and the success of Sisters Club show how visibility and representation can create new opportunities for women of all backgrounds to participate in sport. However, significant barriers remain. The work of faith-based organisations is key in this context. They help widen participation in sport by working with communities that are underrepresented, creating new, inclusive opportunities. Their work presents a key opportunity for mainstream sport organisations and government alike, to learn from and work with faith communities. The outcome is good for Britain as a whole, because increased participation, more inclusive spaces and improved community relations benefit us all.



Ramla Ali, the British boxer who founded Sisters Club for women to learn to box. (Credit: Marlene Landu, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons)

Policy Recommendations

• **Government should acknowledge the role of faith communities in sport.**
The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) should explicitly recognise the contribution that faith communities make to sport and physical activity. Faith-based groups provide safe spaces for people to enjoy participating and watching sports in which they do not have to abandon their faith identity at the door. DCMS should work proactively to ensure faith communities are included in mainstream sporting organisations, programmes and events. DCMS should also encourage partnerships between faith-based and non-faith-based organisations to promote participation, social cohesion and a stronger sense of belonging.

• **DCMS should reflect faith in the National Plan for Physical Activity.**
The government's forthcoming National Plan for Physical Activity should recognise disparities in physical activity and participation across faith communities. This approach will ensure that no community is left behind and that health outcomes can be improved for people of all faiths and none. The Plan should also acknowledge the important role that faith-based organisations can play in reducing inactivity, removing barriers to participation and engaging underserved groups.

• **DCMS should adopt an intersectional approach to participation.**
DCMS should consider faith alongside other characteristics, including gender, disability and age, when designing and delivering initiatives to increase participation in sport and physical activity. People who belong to more than one underrepresented demographic can face additional barriers to participation. This will ensure that programmes reflect the multiple and overlapping factors that can shape participation and access.

• **The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) should strengthen the link between sport, faith and social cohesion.**
The MHCLG's social cohesion strategy recognises the importance of both sport and faith, but it does not sufficiently address the relationship between them. The Social Cohesion Taskforce and its partners should support initiatives that bring together sport, faith and community cohesion, recognising the unique contribution faith communities can make through sport.

• **Professional clubs should support faith-based fan clubs.**
Professional sports clubs should formally recognise and engage with faith-based fan clubs that promote community engagement, inclusion and interfaith understanding. These groups can help clubs better meet the needs of faith-based supporters, create a more welcoming matchday experience and encourage wider participation in sport. Stronger partnerships with these groups can also amplify clubs' community impact and charitable activities.



Manchester-born footballer Zidane Iqbal, of Pakistani and Iraqi heritage, during his time at Manchester United. In 2026, he became the first British South Asian footballer to play at a men's FIFA World Cup, representing Iraq.
(Credit: mooinblack / Shutterstock.com)

Conclusion

Muslims and people of faith more broadly have had a noticeable impact on British sports. At the professional level, players of faith have been associated with a reduction in prejudice and hate crimes and have acted as role models, showing young people of faith that there is space for them in our sports and stadiums. They also make major tax contributions that help to fund our public services.

This impact can also be felt within our communities thanks to faith-based fan clubs. They have helped to make matchdays more inclusive by providing safe spaces and guiding professional teams on accommodating faith-based needs in our stadiums. These clubs also give back to their communities through charity and volunteering. The same is true of faith-based organisations and places of worship, which have helped to expand access to sports and physical activity to underrepresented groups. These initiatives not only unite communities in their love for sports, but they improve health outcomes by reducing physical inactivity.

With the forthcoming National Plan for Physical Activity, there is an opportunity for government to create targeted efforts to widen participation to underrepresented groups, including those of faith. It can also truly recognise and support the contributions of faith-inspired professionals, fan clubs and community organisations in achieving this. When everyone works together, the British sporting sector can reflect the multifaith, cohesive and healthy country that we strive to foster.



Supporters cheer on Team GB at the London 2012 Olympics. Sport can bring people of different faiths and backgrounds together through a shared sense of national pride, strengthening the bonds that unite us. (Credit: Mark Wordy / Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Endnotes

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Yashmin Harun - Chair and Founder, Muslimah Sports Association

Interviewees who chose to remain anonymous are not listed, but we thank them nonetheless for their contribution.

This report does not make any claim to represent their specific views or seek to find a median position that they can all take. All opinions and errors contained herein remain with the author.

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About the Author

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