

Article

Actions to Promote the Employment and Social Inclusion of Muslim Women Who Wear the Hijab in Catalonia (Spain)

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Abstract: The current context of growing religious and cultural diversity requires, from societies, an adequate management of the expression of religious diversity in different social spheres, including the workplace. Muslim women who wear the hijab are one of the social groups that most frequently suffer prejudice and discrimination in work settings due to the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, including gender, ethnic origin, religion and the use of a visible religious symbol. With the aim of exploring the experiences of Muslim women with hijab and identifying barriers and opportunities in their access to employment in Catalonia (Spain), a qualitative study with a communicative orientation was conducted, involving twelve communicative daily-life stories with Muslim women who wear the hijab and eleven in-depth interviews with a communicative orientation with other relevant actors in the fields of training and employment (employers, managers of internship programs, political representatives, etc.). The findings revealed some pending challenges and effective pathways to improve the employment and social inclusion of Muslim women wearing the hijab. The implications of the study point to the need to incorporate respect for diversity as a necessary value to move towards more inclusive societies.

Keywords: hijab; Muslim women; diversity; social inclusion; employment

Citation: Garcia-Yeste, C.; Botton, L.d.; Alvarez, P.; Campdepadros, R. Actions to Promote the Employment and Social Inclusion of Muslim Women Who Wear the Hijab in Catalonia (Spain). *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 6991. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13136991>

Academic Editor: Luigi Aldieri

Received: 13 May 2021

Accepted: 16 June 2021

Published: 22 June 2021

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1. Introduction

Given the cultural, ethnic and religious diversity in the European context, the different states must address the claim to accommodate the expression of a wide variety of religious beliefs and practices in different social spheres [1] in order to ensure social cohesion and inclusion for all citizens. Furthermore, combating and alleviating inequalities and discrimination based on religion or belief is a decisive step for making strides towards the achievement of different Sustainable Development Goals included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [2]: end poverty (SDG1), guarantee gender equality (SDG5) and decent work and economic growth (SDG8) and move towards more peaceful, just and inclusive societies (SDG16), to name just a few [3].

Among the main challenges for Western European states in relation to the emergence of growing religious diversity, some recent studies [4] highlight the relationships with Islam, along with the need to adequately accommodate distinctive religious practices in public spaces. In this regard, the need to advance in the definition of tools and frameworks to regulate and manage religious diversity in employment is receiving growing attention in research and policy [5]. In recent years, efforts to explore and better understand religious and spiritual diversity within organizational contexts have proliferated in different countries [6]. Religious expression in the workplace can take more or less explicit forms, including speaking about one's beliefs, praying in public spaces, requesting accommodations for religious practice, abstaining from particular behaviors such as drinking or eating