

Equality & Diversity Profile – Religion and Belief

This profile presents the current information available. We would like your feedback. Does it reflect your understanding of key issues for religion and belief? If not, what would you change or add?

The Population at Risk of Disadvantage & Their Experiences

'Religion or Belief' refers to: "Any religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief which has a clear structure or belief system." National research suggests those with religious or philosophical beliefs can find themselves victims of prejudice, discrimination, harassment and abuse from others. However, the disadvantages for individuals with this belief can be more subtle in relation to accessing, or benefiting from, facilities, services and solutions designed to support the city's population, as well as lack of access to opportunity, such as good quality housing and work.

Table 1 shows the breakdown of Sunderland's population according to individuals' stated religion from the 2001 Census (the 2011 Census results are not yet available). The relatively low diversity of individuals from different faith backgrounds within Sunderland (compared to England as a whole), can underplay the importance of fully understand the religious needs of specific residents. However, it is important to note that the level of diversity is thought to have increased significantly since 2001. It is likely that this trend will continue in the medium-term.

As with black and ethnic minority groups, individuals in the major faith groups tend to be concentrated within specific wards.

Religion	2001 ONS Census	
	Sunderland	England
Christian	81.5%	71.7%
Buddhist	0.1%	0.3%
Hindu	0.1%	1.1%
Jewish	0.0%	0.5%
Muslim	0.7%	3.1%
Sikh	0.2%	0.7%
Other	0.1%	0.3%
No religion	9.6%	14.6%
Not stated	7.6%	7.7%

The proportion of people from Christian and Jewish faiths continues to decline, the former mirroring an increase in the proportion of people no religion. However, the loss of the city's synagogue and the religious observance of not travelling by car on the Shabbat led to a net outward migration of Sunderland's Jewish population over time, so there are very few residents of the city from this faith.

The Census information doesn't reflect denominations within these broad headings: for example, the Catholic Church estimated that 10.4% of the population in the diocese to which Sunderland belongs were Catholic in 2001 (though this figure is thought to have subsequently declined) – equating to one in eight of the Christian population. Discrimination and prejudice can

occur between denominations of the same religion, as well as between different denominations.

Sunderland developed an Inter-Faith Forum to facilitate inter-faith exchange, communication and understanding amongst faith groups in Sunderland. The common view of this Forum was that this dialogue, and the management and administration of the network, should be the responsibility of faith groups in Sunderland, rather than the Council or Sunderland Partnership, but statutory agencies should be able to listen to, and understand the perspectives, of people of faith in the city on a range of issues. One issue therefore highlighted was the need to build better trust between diverse faith groups and public agencies such as the Council. This echoes the findings of national research, discussed below.

The Inter-Faith Forum identified another improvement area as being a greater level of inter-faith working to promote greater tolerance, understanding, and knowledge, of inter-faith work in communities to tackle potential misunderstanding and prejudice, despite educational initiatives in schools. A lack of awareness of religious needs can result in innocent misunderstandings, such as the need to shape services around faith-based lifestyle requirements of different faith groups.

When considering meaningful interaction with people from different backgrounds, findings from the 2010-11 citizenship survey indicated that, 82 per cent of people mixed socially at least once a month with people from different ethnic or religious backgrounds in a range of settings (excluding at home). Although this proportion was higher than in 2007-08 (80%) and 2009-10 (80%), this was unchanged from 2008/09. People were most likely to mix socially with people from different backgrounds at the shops (64%), followed by work, school or college (54%), and then a pub, club, café or restaurant (45%).

There were 275 hate incidents reported to the ARCH partnership (agencies who come together, such as the police and Council, to tackle discrimination and prejudice against minority groups), 2 of which were classified as religious-based incidents. A further 227 racist incidents were reported (with some overlap and linkage reported between the two characteristics). It should be recognised however that the number of incidents that actually take place are likely to be under reported.

The citizenship survey 2010/11, found that, 7 per cent of adults in England felt racial or religious harassment was a 'very' or 'fairly' big problem in their local area. People from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely than white people to feel that racial or religious harassment was a 'very' or 'fairly' big problem (13% compared with 6%) Results from an earlier survey highlighted that younger people aged 16-64 were generally more likely to think this was a problem than older people (14 per cent in comparison with 15 of those aged 75 years). Women were also more likely than men to think that racial or religious harassment was a very or fairly big problem in their local area (8% compared with 6%).

44% of people reported that there was more religious prejudice today than there was five years ago; although this figure represents a year on year decline since 2008-09. White people were more likely to think that levels of racial prejudice had increased than people from ethnic minority backgrounds (47% compared with 23%) and were also more likely to think that levels of religious prejudice had increased (45% compared with 33%).

Research undertaken by the Home Office (Religious discrimination in England and Wales) in 2001 found that a consistently higher level of unfair treatment was reported by Muslim organisations than by most other religious groups; unfair treatment in every aspect of education, employment, housing, law and order and all local government services covered by the questionnaire. Information available from The Muslim Council of Britain also highlighted that Muslim men of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin are disproportionately unemployed compared to other Asians. (<http://www.mcb.org.uk/library/statistics.php#4>)

