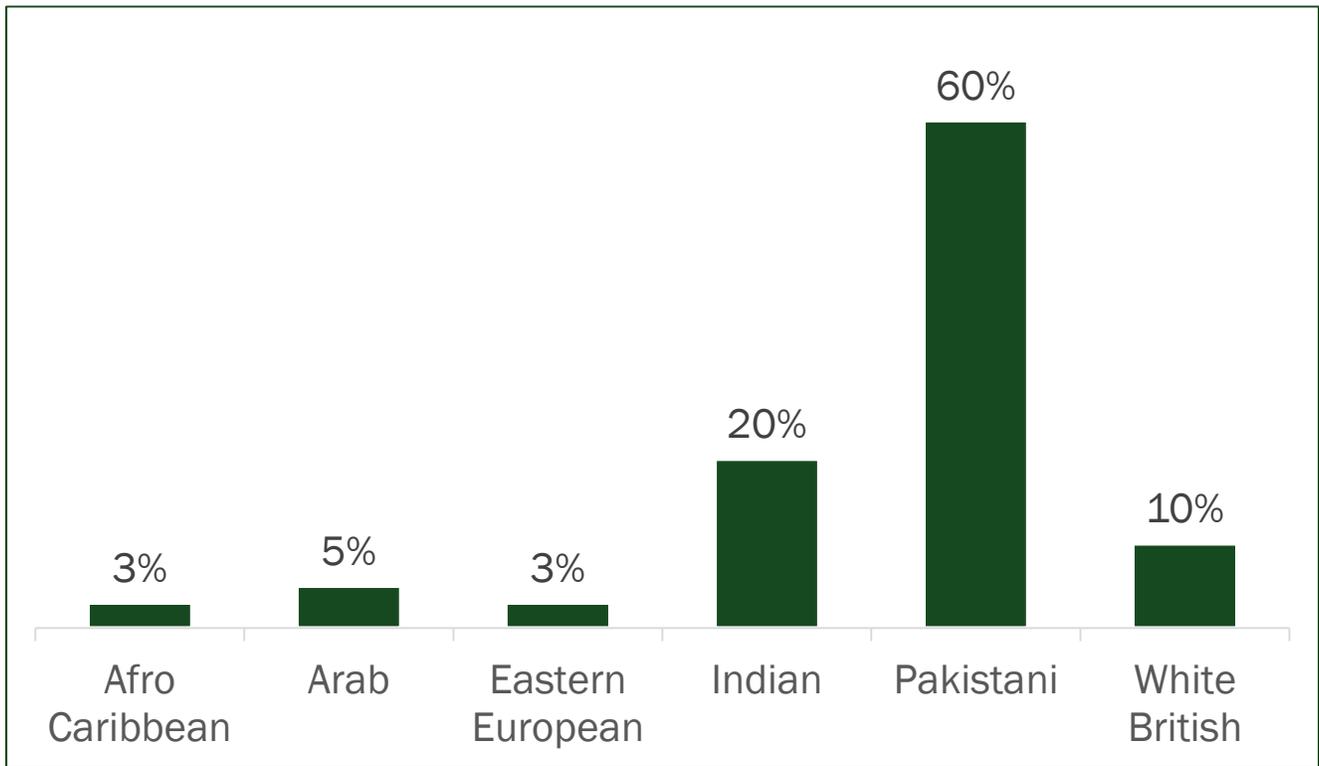




# LIGHTING PATHS, EMPOWERING HEARTS

**NOVEMBER 2025**

## Ethnicity of Participants – 40 Attendees



## Lighting Paths, Empowering Hearts

### Bio

Atia Lokhat is the founder and full-time volunteer CEO of Zubeda Welcome, a multi-award-winning UK charity dedicated to teaching the Qur'an to refugee and asylum-seeking children and supporting them in preserving their Muslim identity. Her leadership and impact were recently recognised when she was named among the “50 Most Influential Muslims” in the UK.

Atia is a qualified primary school teacher, a published children's author, a trained mental health therapist, and an educational advisor for Foster Care Link. In 2023, she launched the first ever World Quran Awareness Day and created the podcast *Tahajjud Conversations*, where she reflects

on her personal transformation through Tahajjud and the prayers that shaped the birth of Zubeda Welcome.

Motivated by her own challenges in accessing mosque spaces and witnessing systemic inequalities, Atia established FAITH, the Federation of Imams, Teachers and Healers, to raise standards across madrasas and mosques through fair pay, professional development, and greater accountability. Through Zubeda Welcome, she advocates for and supports displaced Muslim children across the UK, many of whom face pressure to compromise their faith in exchange for essential support.



This report describes the development, purpose, and ongoing work of a community-led initiative supporting displaced Muslim children and refugee families across the United Kingdom. It grew out of both personal experience and a deep commitment to providing vulnerable families with stability, belonging, and a connection to their faith at a time when they need it most.

The initiative began in 2015 after the founder went through a period of personal difficulty and visited the Calais refugee camp,

known as the “Jungle.” Witnessing children living in unstable, makeshift shelters profoundly altered her perspective. It was during this time that she felt lost, alone, and searching for purpose, and found it in serving displaced children. She returned to the UK with a commitment to explore practical ways to help them.

This mission soon took shape when she began using one of her ex-husband's properties to host refugee families. Over the next two years, she managed to bring over six families, offering accommodation, prayer mats, Qurans, and support in rebuilding their lives. Through this work, she noticed a recurring challenge: many families found themselves drifting away from Muslim community spaces simply because they lacked access to them. Churches offered friendship, consistency, and support, often filling a gap that the local Muslim community was not yet structured to meet. Although many churches acted out of kindness, the emotional vulnerability of the refugees sometimes led to unintended influence on their faith identity. It became clear that Muslim children arriving alone or without community support were at risk of losing connection to their tradition simply due to the absence of Muslim-led structures of belonging.

Determined not to leave these families unsupported, the founder expanded her efforts. What began with sponsoring the education of ten Syrian children soon grew to fifty, supported by unexpected donations



from generous individuals. As awareness increased, hotel contractors responsible for housing refugees contacted her for help, explaining that they had hundreds of children with no access to community programmes, Islamic learning, or emotional support. Although the scale was daunting, she embraced the challenge with trust that Allah would provide the people, skills, and resources needed.

Over the past two and a half years, the initiative has expanded

significantly. Today it supports more than seven hundred children from twenty-seven countries who speak over thirty languages. Many families live in hotels, making access to consistent learning and safe community activities extremely difficult. Half of these children are fully registered in the organisation's programmes, while others learn online or wait for placement. The work involves teaching, safeguarding, mentorship, administrative guidance, and simply being a reliable presence in their lives.

Operating in London and now expanding to Bradford, the initiative works closely with mosques, though this has not been without challenges. Women working in Muslim spaces face particular barriers, and some mosques operate based on cultural or language groups that unintentionally exclude refugee children. For a child who has fled war, being denied access to Quran classes due to not speaking the right language is not only disheartening but contradictory to the universal message of Islam. Addressing this issue is essential for building an inclusive and compassionate environment.

Alongside its core educational and welfare work, the initiative has launched several successful projects. These include global Quran competitions, collaborations with Ramadan Tent Project, and appearances by children on Islam Channel. Many of the young people who once arrived with nothing now thrive in education, complete university degrees, and secure employment. These successes provide daily emotional reminders of why this work matters: children often return years later to say thank you for helping them or their families during the hardest period of their lives.

A creative milestone currently underway involves supporting eight children to write and publish their own stories. Once published, the book will be launched at an event hosted by the children themselves, demonstrating confidence, growth, and empowerment.



The founder has also developed two significant future projects. The first is “World Quran Awareness Day,” a global initiative intended to create meaningful engagement with the Quran. The domain has been secured, but volunteers are now needed to take the project forward. The second idea is a podcast called “Tahajjud Conversations,” exploring the power of late-night prayer and the extraordinary ways in which people’s lives have changed through Tahajjud. The concept aims to inspire

Muslims to seek solutions to personal and global challenges through sincere spiritual practice.

Through the course of this work, deeper community challenges have become visible. Imams in the UK are often burdened with expectations far beyond their roles, yet they lack a union or official support structure to advocate for them. The initiative hopes to launch a project in April aimed at restoring dignity and professional recognition for Imams, placing them on a level similar to other respected community professionals.

As the organisation expands into Bradford, there is a significant opportunity to replicate successful models from London and meet the growing needs of refugee families there. Bradford’s diverse population

and high concentration of displaced families make it an essential site for future growth. The initiative calls on local volunteers, mosques, and community members to join in building strong, supportive structures for refugee children.

The vision moving forward is centred on ensuring that Muslim children do not lose their identity, community connection, or emotional security during their most vulnerable years. These children come from the same tents, camps, and crisis zones seen in Gaza, Syria, Sudan, and Lebanon. They have lost family members, endured dangerous journeys, and now need the reassurance of a supportive faith community. Every success story, every child who settles, smiles, learns, and finds belonging, reinforces the purpose of this work.

The initiative invites anyone willing to contribute time, skill, or leadership to join in its mission. With continued collaboration and community support, the next generation can grow with confidence, dignity, and a strong Islamic foundation.

## Appendix: Islamic Terms and Meanings

Word	Meaning
Alhamdulillah	“All praise is due to Allah,” said in gratitude.
Quran	The holy book of Islam.
Tahajjud	Voluntary night prayer performed in the last third of the night.
Imam	Religious leader who leads prayers in a mosque.
Mufti	Scholar qualified to issue religious rulings.
Dua	A supplication or personal prayer to Allah.

<b>Ummah</b>	The global Muslim community.
<b>Islamophobia</b>	Discrimination or prejudice against Muslims.
<b>Ramadan</b>	The Islamic month of fasting and increased worship.
<b>Sadaqah</b>	Voluntary charity given for the sake of Allah.



[www.zubedawelcome.org/](http://www.zubedawelcome.org/)

## Closing Remarks

We have just heard from the inspiring Atia Lokhat, founder and CEO of Zubeda Welcome, an organisation driven by the mission to empower refugee children through holistic support and to build inclusive communities where every seeker can find faith, dignity, and belonging. Her vision, a world in which refugees can live safely, preserve their faith, and rebuild their lives with confidence, reflects the heart of her work.

As Atia and her team extend their services into Bradford to reach vulnerable children living among us, we have a meaningful opportunity to stand alongside them. Let us express our sincere gratitude to Atia and the entire Zubeda Welcome team for their extraordinary dedication and let us consider how each of us might play a part in this next chapter. Whether through volunteering, donating, partnering, or simply sharing their mission with others, your support can help ensure that every displaced child receives the education, community, and dignity they truly deserve.



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Report created by the Tea & Chat participants  
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