

# Exporting islamic wear to Europe

The growing Muslim population in Europe offers many opportunities. Traditionally a market of homemade and tailored fashion, Islamic clothing is opening up to mass production and fast fashion. There is a demand for high-quality garments, as well as modern, fast fashion Islamic clothing and high-end garments for urban professional Muslim women. If you can strike the right note on modesty, tradition and style, you have excellent opportunities in the European market.

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## 1. Product description

Clothing and accessories specific to Islamic consumers include a broad range of products, among which:

- kaftans
- saris
- abayas
- hijabs
- kurtas
- thobes

Islamic clothing also includes other clothing items that confirm to Islamic dress code, such as long dresses, long sleeves, maxi skirts, wide-leg trousers, loose fitting clothes and high necklines.

### Quality

### Functionality

Islamic clothing combines religious clothing with fashion trends. The expression 'modest fashion' refers to a current dressing style that is generally less revealing, but it is also commonly used to identify religious clothing in general, and often also associated to Islamic clothing more specifically. What is considered Islamic clothing can differ from country to country and from person to person, but in general it implies below-knee length, long sleeves and high necklines.

The fabrics used in clothing for Muslims who live in relatively hot climates normally have to be adapted to keep the person cool. In Europe, the moderate and cold climates require different materials and create the need for at least a summer and a winter collection.

### Materials

Quality has traditionally been very important in Islamic clothing. The European Islamic clothing trade has long been a niche market, dominated by tailors and imports from the countries of origin of European Muslims or their specific ethnic backgrounds. Polyester fabric with plenty of decoration is often used for traditional clothing and special occasions. At the same time, there is an increasing demand for modest fashion clothing made with different materials. There are opportunities in the market for both types of Islamic clothing, which naturally are not mutually exclusive.

## Size

The European clothing industry has been pushing for standard sizing legislation, but so far sizing systems vary across Europe. The [European clothing standard EN 13402](#) can help you with guidance on the size designation of clothes. It is based on body dimensions and intervals.

The following table shows an example of differences in sizing within Europe. Each column represents the same size in a different system.

Table 2: Sizing across Europe

United Kingdom	Belgium and France	Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Netherlands and Germany	Portugal and Spain
Size 12	Size 40	Size 38	Size 42/44

Sizing for Islamic wear is very important and so is shaping more specifically. Islamic clothes should not be tight fitting.

## Colour and design

Preferences in colour and design of Islamic clothing vary greatly among European Muslims. Most follow the tradition and trends of their country of heritage. Colour and design also vary according to the occasion: for a celebration, for work or for everyday wear.

There is an increased demand for everyday clothing based on international fashion trends. When developing Islamic clothes, a good opportunity to stand out is to balance modesty, tradition, style and the wearing occasions.

## Labelling

Clothing labels should include the following important information:

- size
- origin
- wash and care instructions

The care labelling system developed by [GINETEX](#), the International Association for Textile Care Labelling, is widely used in European countries. The [GINETEX symbols](#) are also very common, but can only be used under contract with the association.

According to GINETEX, labels should include the following:

- general care and warnings
- washing
- drying
- ironing
- professional textile care (dry-cleaning)

Ecolabelling is largely unregulated in the clothing industry but can help your product attract more attention. There are several voluntary labels that have their own defined sets of standards.

### **Tips:**

Study common care labelling practices in Europe on the [GINETEX](#) website.

If you produce environmentally friendly clothing, clearly indicate this with at least one of the available label schemes, such as [EU Ecolabel](#), to attest your product's claims.

For more information on labelling, refer to the [section on buyer requirements](#) below.

## **Packaging Documentation**

External packaging documents for clothing should include: producer, consignee, composition, size, number of pieces, box identification, total number of boxes, net and gross weight.

### **Importer specification**

Each order should be packed according to the importer's instructions. Each importer has its own specific requirements for the use of packaging materials, filling boxes, palletisation and stowing containers. Always ask for the importer's order specifications, which make part of the purchase order.

### **Damage prevention**

Properly packaging clothing minimises the risk of damage. Packaging usually consists of each article being packed in a polybag to protect the fabric from humidity, water, solar radiation and staining.

### **Dimensions and weight**

Packing must be easy to handle in terms of size and weight and should ideally fit together on Euro pallets. The standards are often related to labour regulations at the point of destination, specified by the buyer. When in doubt, check the dimensions and weight of boxes with your buyer.

### **Cost reduction**

European buyers increasingly aim to reduce packaging materials. Less packaging means improved sustainability, but it also reduces cost and increases margins. While packing and packaging have to provide maximum protection, you must also avoid using excess materials or 'shipping air'. Waste removal is a cost to buyers.

### **Material**

Importers have been steadily banning certain packaging materials for sustainability reasons, as well as to reduce costs with purchasing and disposing of packaging. Economical and sustainable packaging materials are gradually growing more popular. Using biodegradable packing materials can be a market opportunity and for some buyers, it can even be a requirement.

## **2. Which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of Islamic clothing?**

**Which countries are most interesting in terms of demographics and expenditure growth?**

France has the largest population of Muslims in Europe with 5.7 million people, followed by Germany (4.9 million), the United Kingdom (4.1 million), Italy (2.8 million), the Netherlands (1.2 million) and Spain (1.1 million). Both the absolute number of Muslims and their share of the European population are expected to continue to grow in the coming years. However, Europe is expected to remain a continent where Christianity is the dominant religion.

Private consumption expenditure is an important indicator for garments demand in general, including the European Islamic clothing market, a sector closely linked to economic conditions. When money is tight, consumers postpone buying non-essential items until they have more disposable income. Even though clothes are essential items, most European consumers can postpone buying new clothes and make do with what they own.

For more information on general apparel trade statistics, see our study on [which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of apparel](#).

### 3. What trends offer opportunities in the European market for Islamic clothing?

#### Commoditisation of Islamic clothing

The marketing of Islamic clothing is no longer confined to brands targeting wealthy Muslims with one-off fashion lines for Ramadan or other festivities. The market is moving towards mainstream fashion, from luxury brands to high-street stores. Models in hijabs are walking the clothes of Dolce & Gabbana on catwalks, clothing giant H&M recently released an entire modest fashion collection called LTD and Uniqlo also sells a modest fashion line.

Different ways to make Islamic clothing appeal beyond strictly religious consumers include:

- help consumers create their own alternative style, less overtly religious but still modest in character;
- use trendier, mid-market styles;
- emphasise the craftsmanship or origin of your product.

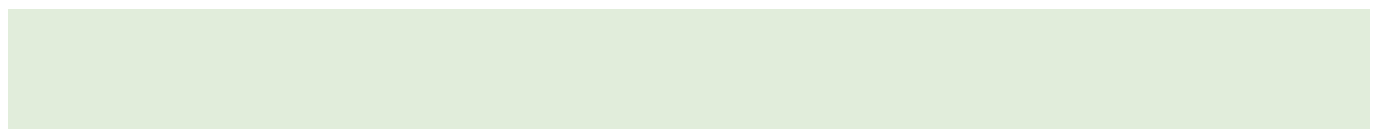
The modest fashion trend offers opportunities to reach a wide range of buyers. However, profits on fast fashion tend to be lower than profits on one-off fashion lines.

#### Bans on face covering

Several European countries and lower local jurisdictions have a [ban on face covering](#). Some European countries are working on laws to ban face covering while local authorities in other countries have brought in rules to deter public use of face veils, for example in Italy.

Some of these laws directly target Islamic face covering, while others apply to face covering in general, regardless of religion. Most laws make exceptions, for example, for reasons of health, safety of practising a specific profession or when practising sports.

According to a survey by the PEW Research Center, [most non-Muslim adults in Western Europe support at least some restrictions on Muslim women's religious clothing](#). The survey indicates that a regional median of 50% of the non-Muslims surveyed say that Muslim women should be allowed to wear religious clothing as long as it does not cover their face, while 23% say Muslim women should not be allowed to wear any religious clothing, compared to 25% who view that Muslim women should be allowed to wear any religious clothing of their choosing.



### **Tips:**

Focus on Islamic clothing that does not cover the face.

If you do sell face-covering Islamic clothing, focus on countries that have no face-covering bans and have no such rules in the making.

Combine Islamic clothing with modern fashion by using new styles and new functionalities.

## **Seasonal items and Ramadan**

Ramadan is a holy month for Muslims, a time to focus on prayer, fasting and reflection. However, Muslims who observe Ramadan, which ends with Eid al-Fitr, also mark this special time of the year wearing their best clothes, including buying mostly new clothes. In different parts of the world, the festive dress code varies from kaftans in the Middle East, to saris in Bangladesh, to very high-end modest fashion in the streets of London.

Ramadan has evolved from quiet family time to a month-long marathon of multiple Iftars, shopping events and coffee dates with friends, relatives and colleagues. When Ramadan ends, comes Eid, another three-day festival of lunches, dinners and other social calls for which everyone wants to look their best.

Traditionally, Muslims buy one or two new outfits each year at Ramadan. With growing consumerism and an increased focus on Ramadan as a month of intense socialising, in many places Muslims might even purchase almost a completely new wardrobe. For instance, Burberry, DKNY and other brands have developed special Ramadan collections.

The spirit of Ramadan and Eid influences Islamic clothing purchases in many ways, including:

- religion and spirituality: during Ramadan, Muslims feel an enhanced sense of their religiosity than in other times of the year;
- nostalgia: during Ramadan, consumers are influenced by childhood memories, when they may have been given new clothes, posing with family and friends for photos looking their absolute best;
- sharing and socialising: a very important element of Ramadan, when people eat and cook together, and make family calls;
- a spirit of goodwill, solidarity and gifting: another very important part of the Ramadan sentiment.

### **Tips:**

If you sell to end consumers, encourage your customers to purchase new clothing for the season. For example, issue a 'Get ready for Ramadan' newsletter or make a section on your website for 'Iftar Occasions'.

Try to benefit from the fact that online shopping is on the rise for Ramadan. There is also an increase in beauty-related searches during the fasting month, for example for haircare, make-up and fragrances.

## **Ethical Islamic clothing**

Islamic clothing is traditionally a market of home-made and tailored fashion, which is more prone to ethical production. As the market for Islamic clothing grows, so is the focus shifting toward more ethical ways of doing business. Sustainable clothing companies appeal strongly to a growing ethical consumer base, but Islamic clothing production is far behind, for instance, the halal food production chain when it comes to making the

supply chain more sustainable.

Fair trade generally adds value, but also makes products slightly more expensive. Around the holidays, consumers are less price-sensitive than otherwise. A Ramadan gift that gives the producer a fair price and has a well-grounded marketing story provides consumers with an added status element.

### **Tips:**

Clearly communicate your social and environmental values.

Appeal to the consumer's desire to do a good deed by emphasising the importance of purchasing ethical clothing.

Apply for fair trade certification if you feel that is close to your identity and helps you in your marketing.

Show the origin of your product or company to differentiate. For example, showcase cultural background, local materials, techniques, patterns and decorations.

For more information, see our study on [sustainable apparel](#).

## **Social media**

Social media is becoming increasingly important in the fashion industry. There is an increasing number of very popular Muslim Instagram models who are the frontrunners of the Islamic clothing industry. Models like [Mariah Idrissi](#) and [Halima Aden](#) are leading the way in bringing fashion and Islamic tradition together.

Many Muslims in Europe value their Muslim identity and, at the same time, are also looking for ways to combine and show that identity by wearing modern and fashionable looks. These consumers increasingly turn to social media to find role models.

### **Tips:**

Check the websites of European fashion magazines such as [Glamour Magazine UK](#), who regularly post lists of social media influencers, for example: [10 Global Modest Fashion Influencers](#) and [10 Muslim Bloggers to Follow Immediately](#).

Designing a modest fashion line may require a venturesome attitude but may provide an early-adopter advantage in a market that is gradually becoming more mainstream.

## **Buying locally**

European buyers increasingly want to work with clothes manufacturers closer to their European markets. This allows for easier control, lower transport costs, smaller order quantities per item, as well as lower stocks for the importer. However, for some customers — mainly in the high-end segment — when it comes to Islamic clothing, items manufactured in a predominantly Muslim country may have greater appeal than clothes manufactured in other countries.

### Tips:

Differentiate your offer by showcasing the origin of your Islamic clothing.

Have a proactive attitude to develop a strong and lasting relationship with your importer. This includes taking initiative in product development, such as generating new ideas and samples on a regular basis, as well as an active approach towards cost reduction, especially in transport — negotiate with agents constantly and look for consolidation options.

Keep pricing of your product range under control.

If you consider your company an 'Islamic' business and you intend to target predominantly Muslim customers, consider mentioning your religious denomination in your branding.

For more information, see our study about [trends in the European apparel market](#).

## 4. What are the requirements for Islamic clothing products to be allowed on the European market?

### What are the legal and non-legal requirements for your product?

#### General product safety

The European Union's [General Product Safety Directive](#) applies to all consumer products, including apparel. It mandates all products marketed in Europe must be safe to use.

### Tips:

Read more about the [General Product Safety Directive](#).

Use your common sense to ensure normal use of your product does not cause any danger.

The [Safety Gate database](#) lists products that the European Union has rejected at the border or withdrawn from the market. Check the database for similar products to yours to consider issues that may arise.

### Packaging legislation

Europe has specific [packaging and packaging waste legislation](#). These requirements aim to prevent the production of packaging waste, promote the reuse of packaging and thereby reduce the final disposal of such waste.

### Restricted chemicals: REACH

The [REACH](#) regulation lists restricted chemicals in products that are marketed in Europe. For example, REACH restricts the use of azo dyes and certain flame retardants in textile products.

### Tips:

The European Chemical Agency provides useful information and tips on REACH. See for instance [REACH Annex XVII](#) for a list of all restricted chemicals, check the [Information on REACH for companies](#)

established outside Europe and the [Q&As on REACH](#).

Follow new developments in the field of flame retardants, as new alternatives are being developed. See for instance the [European Flame Retardants Association](#) (EFRA).

## Textile Regulation

According to the European Union's [Textile Regulation](#), textile products should be labelled or marked to indicate their fibre composition in the language of the country where you are selling your products. These labels should be durable and tear resistant, securely attached, easily legible, visible and accessible.

### Tips:

For more information, see the [Frequently Asked Questions on the Textile Regulation](#).

## What additional requirements do buyers often have?

### Sustainability

Social and environmental sustainability make your products stand out in the European market. Think of sustainable raw materials, fair working conditions and production processes. European buyers increasingly demand the following certification schemes and programmes:

- [Amfori Business Social Compliance Initiative \(BSCI\)](#): European retailers developed this initiative to improve social conditions in sourcing countries. They expect their suppliers to comply with the BSCI Code of Conduct. To prove compliance, the importer can request an audit of your production process. Once a company is audited, it is included in a database for all BSCI participants.
- [Ethical Trading Initiative \(ETI\)](#): This initiative is an alliance of companies, trade unions and voluntary organisations, which aims to improve the working lives of people across the globe who make or grow consumer goods.

You can review standards such as [ISO 14001](#), [Sedex](#) or and [SA 8000](#) to read up on sustainable options. Check with your potential buyers which certifications they require.

### Tips:

Optimise your sustainability performance. Studying the issues covered by the initiatives will give you an idea of what to focus on.

Buyers appreciate a well-grounded story. Showing that you value your company's environmental and social performance may provide you with a competitive advantage.

Use a self-assessment tool such as the [BSCI Self-Assessment for Producers](#) or a code of conduct such as the [BSCI Code of Conduct](#) and the [ETI base code](#) to evaluate your performance.

For more information, see our special study on sustainability in the apparel sector.



## What are the requirements for niche markets?

### Fair trade

The concept of fair trade involves fair pricing and improved social conditions for producers and their communities. Especially when the production of your apparel is labour intensive, fair trade certification can give you a competitive advantage.

Common fair-trade certification awarding organisations include:

- [World Fair Trade Organisation \(WFTO\)](#)
- [Fairtrade International](#)
- [Fair Wear](#)

#### Tips:

Ask buyers what they might be looking for. Especially in the fair-trade sector, you can use the story behind your product for marketing purposes.

Check the [ITC Standards map database](#) for more information on voluntary standards and their requirements, including fair production.

### Sustainable textile certification

Sustainability is gaining ground across the apparel sector and so is interest from buyers for sustainable textile certification.

The [Global Organic Textile Standard \(GOTS\)](#) certifies environmental and social responsibility throughout the production chain. To qualify, textile products must have more than 70% organic fibres.

The [OEKO-TEX Standard 100](#) certification ensures responsible use of chemicals, while the [Sustainable Textile Production \(STeP\) by OEKO-TEX®](#) certification ensures that textile manufacturing and processing takes place in a sustainable manner. Textiles with the [MADE IN GREEN by OEKO-TEX®](#) label are:

- made from materials that have been tested for harmful substances;
- manufactured using environmentally friendly processes;
- produced under safe and socially responsible working conditions.

The [EU Ecolabel](#) for textiles focuses on minimising environmental impact at the manufacturing stage.

#### Tips:

Read more on [GOTS](#), [OEKO-TEX](#) and the [EU Ecolabel](#) in the ITC Standards Map.

Determine which certification programme would be the best fit for you and apply if possible.

For more information, see our study about buyer requirements for [apparel](#).

## 5. What is the competition like in the European Islamic clothing market?

The competition in Islamic clothing and modest clothing does not differ significantly from the apparel sector in general. Refer to our [10 tips for doing business with European buyers](#).

Aside from traditional Islamic clothing producers, there is new competition coming from an increasing number of designers and retailers which are producing clothing that is slightly longer, a little looser and has a higher neckline. This makes the clothing attractive to consumers looking for more modern ways to conform to more traditional dress codes.

## 6. Through what channels can you get Islamic clothing on the European market?

The market channels and segments for Islamic clothing do not differ significantly from the clothing sector in general. Islamic clothing is mainly sold via physical shops, especially boutiques for the high-end market or on weekly street markets in the low end of the market, but sales are growing in high-street stores.

E-commerce in Islamic clothing is increasing rapidly and can help you reach a broader range of customers. Retailers often combine online and offline channels. Consumers research and purchase products online, shopping around and comparing prices. To supply to online retailers you must be able to work with individual packing and labelling, as well as limited minimum orders.

### Trade fairs

These trade fairs are useful sources for finding trading partners in Europe:

- [London Modest Fashion Week](#), United Kingdom, February
- [Muslim Lifestyle Expo](#), United Kingdom, August
- [Texworld Paris](#), France, February

## 7. What are the end market prices for Islamic clothing?

Consumer prices depend on the value perception by the consumer in a particular segment. This is influenced by your marketing mix: product benefits, promoting a brand or not, communicating product benefits, reseller positioning at points of sale and a matching price.

The European consumer price for your apparel will be around four to six-and-a-half times your selling price or even more if you would cater to the high-end segment. Shipping, import and handling add 15–20%. Wholesalers account for a further 40–70% markup. Retailers may add at least another 100–150% to the price. Finally, European VAT rates range from 18% in Malta to 27% in Sweden.


### Tips:

The perceived value of your product in the chosen segment determines its price. The quality and price of your garments must match what is expected in your chosen target segment. To determine your price, study consumer prices in your target segment and adjust your prices accordingly. Use top-down calculation to determine your maximum selling price.


Understand your segment. Offer a correct marketing mix to meet consumer expectations. Adapt your business model to your position in the market.

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