



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Debates

Draft Online Safety Bill Report

col 724 Damian Collins (Conservative): ...The Committee agreed in the report that there must be an expedited process of transparency, so that when people are using anonymity to abuse other people—saying things for which in public they might be sued or have action taken against them—it must be much easier to swiftly identify who those people are. People must know that if they post hate online directed at other people and commit an offence in doing so, their anonymity will not be a shield that will protect them: they will be identified readily and action taken against them. ... there are cases where anonymity may be required, when people are speaking out against an oppressive regime or victims of abuse are telling their story, but it should not be used as a shield to abuse others. ...

We are not just asking the companies to moderate content; we are asking them to moderate their systems as well. Their systems play an active role in directing people towards hate and abuse. A study commissioned by Facebook showed that over 60% of people who joined groups that showed extremist content did so at the active recommendation of the platform itself. ...

col 725 Facebook and companies like it may not have invented hate but they are driving hate and making it worse. They must be responsible for these systems. ...

We also have to ensure an obligation for the regulator to uphold principles of freedom of expression. It is important that effective action should be taken against hate speech, extremism, illegal content and all harmful content that is within the scope of the Bill, but if companies are removing content that has every right to be there—where the positive expression of people's opinions has every right to be online—then the regulator should have the power to intervene in that direction as well. ...

col 728 Margaret Hodge (Labour): ...No one wants to undermine anonymity—we all recognise that it is crucial for whistleblowers, for victims of domestic violence or child abuse, and for others—but we do want to tackle anonymous abuse. ...

What we are all after is not tackling anonymity but ensuring third party verification of the identity of people so that they can be traced if and when they put abusive content online.

... It is about shifting from content to the effects of the online harm. ...

col 731 Afzal Khan (Labour): I too want to say how important this work is, and I urge that this Bill is desperately needed. Refuge has found that one in three women have at some time in their life experienced abuse online. I would say that Muslim women in particular experience a triple whammy of race, faith and gender, and Tell MAMA has told us of the 40% increase in abuse against Muslim women during the lockdown. ...

col 745 Nickie Aiken (Conservative): ...I have noted some horrific examples of antisemitic abuse, which for me underscore the importance of what this Bill will do. We cannot continue in a world where there are nearly two antisemitic tweets for every Jewish person in the UK. Measures to tackle that are central to the Bill and rightly take pride of place within it. ...

col 753 Alex Davies-Jones (Labour): ...In our dialogue about the responsibilities of tech firms, we must remember that we need to consider the role of so-called niche organisations, too. In line with that, Labour commends the Committee's recognition of concerns raised by Hope not Hate and the Antisemitism Policy Trust, among others, about the harms caused by these alternative platforms. Our party leader raised concerns about one such example—Telegram—during Prime Minister's questions, and there are numerous other platforms on which misogyny, racism and homophobia run rampant, including BitChute, Gab, BrandNewTube and 4chan, to name just a few. It is absolutely right that the Government look again at categorisation so that harm caused on and by such platforms is assessed by risk and not the current determinants of size and functionality. ...

col 755 The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Chris Philp): ...This state of affairs cannot persist, and it is right for the House to act. I am heartened to note that, broadly speaking, we will be acting on a cross-party basis, because I think that that will make the message we send the world and the action we are taking all the more powerful. However, as Members have said today, even before the Act is passed, social media firms can act. They can edit their algorithms tomorrow, and I urge them to do exactly that. They should not be waiting for us to legislate; they should do the right thing today. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-01-13/debates/1B9767E0-EF19-4D77-8C73-AADA64365D2C/DraftOnlineSafetyBillReport>

The Joint Committee report on the Online Safety Bill, referred to above, can be read at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt5802/jtselect/jtonlinesafety/129/129.pdf>

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill: Public Bill Committee

col 3 Pauline Latham (Conservative): ... The provisions end child marriage in England and Wales. They do so first by removing the ability of parents or a court to consent to 16 or 17-year-olds entering into a marriage or civil partnership. Secondly, they extend existing forced marriage legislation by making it a criminal offence to arrange the marriage of an under-18 even if violence, threats or another form of coercion are not used. Those provisions are targeted at unofficial, non-binding marriages that are beyond the reach of the change to the legal age of marriage. ...

col 4 Increasing the minimum age of marriage to 18 is a necessary condition for ending child marriage in this country, but not a sufficient one. It will ensure that legal marriages cannot happen before the parties turn 18, but it can do nothing about those marriages enacted in traditional and some religious settings that are not recognised by the law of England and Wales, but are regarded just as much as a marriage by the parties, their families and their communities. Those marriages can have all the disadvantages for the children involved that legal ones do, and arguably more; not only can the parties be under the age of 16, but they fail to benefit from the legal protections inherent in marriage law. ...

The Bill therefore extends the offence of forced marriage to cover all attempts to make a child under the age of 18 enter into a marriage, whether or not that marriage would be legally binding. ...

It applies both to civil ceremonies and religious ceremonies that take place in registered religious buildings such as churches and mosques. The clause does not make specific provisions relating to marriages that take place abroad. However, it is anticipated that, following the changes made by the Bill, the common law in England and Wales will not recognise marriages that take place abroad involving under-18s where either party is domiciled in England and Wales.

The Bill will not change the age of marriage in Scotland or Northern Ireland, as marriage is a devolved matter. Therefore, the age of marriage will remain 16 in Scotland, and 16 in Northern Ireland with parental or judicial consent, although I believe that Scotland is looking at moving the age to 18 and Northern Ireland is considering it by consulting.

col 6 Tim Loughton (Conservative): ... will she clarify whether the marriage of someone of 15 or 16 in Scotland or Northern Ireland who gets married without coercion, but with the approval of parents, will be recognised in England and Wales? ...

Pauline Latham: ... yes, such a marriage would be recognised, because it took place in part of the United Kingdom, and the law is devolved. ...

col 10 Ben Spencer (Conservative): ... Marriage is a big decision, and one that we expect to be a long and lasting decision. Of course, it is not an irreversible decision because of the divorce laws that we have, but I do not think there is a situation so pressing as to not allow a decision to enter into marriage to be delayed until the age of 18. I realise that is not necessarily an uncontroversial point of view—people have different views on it, such as those with strong religious beliefs—but fundamentally I think it is absolutely right that we move marriage to the age of 18. That is because the backdrop to this is a recognition that we see people under the age of 18—children—as inherently vulnerable. ... even someone with full decision-making capacity at the age of 16 or 17, is still someone whose potential vulnerability we have concerns about, and has not moved into adulthood. ...

col 13 Peter Gibson (Conservative): ... Official figures for 2017 show that in that year, 183 individuals entered marriage at age 16 or 17. We know, however, that the recorded data do not accurately reflect the number of children marrying in religious and customary ceremonies. ...

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Tom Pursglove): ... on behalf of the Government, I very much commend the clauses to the Committee. ...

To read the full transcript see

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-01-12/debates/f582cd82-3e97-4e8a-8e4e-8e87b52a0c4c/MarriageAndCivilPartnership\(MinimumAge\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-01-12/debates/f582cd82-3e97-4e8a-8e4e-8e87b52a0c4c/MarriageAndCivilPartnership(MinimumAge)Bill)

House of Commons Oral Answers

Hate Crimes

Helen Hayes (Labour): What assessment [the Minister] has made of the implications for her policies of the Law Commission's recommendations on hate crimes. (905016)

Jess Phillips (Labour): What assessment [the Minister] has made of the implications for her policies of the Law Commission's recommendations on hate crimes. (905028)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Rachel Maclean): The Law Commission published its comprehensive review of hate crime laws on 7 December. Recognising the complex issues that the Law Commission has identified, the Government will carefully consider those recommendations and provide a further response as quickly as possible. ...

Rehman Chishti (Conservative): With regard to the wider strategy on tackling hate crime, Home Office statistics show that there are about 124,000 hate crime incidents. Under the category religion, there was a real rise in Islamophobia and antisemitism. What will the Government do in their strategy to address those two real issues concerning our society?

Rachel Maclean: I thank my hon. Friend very much for making representations on the important issue of the persecution of religious faiths in this country. The Government take these issues extremely seriously, and that is why we will publish a refreshed hate crime strategy. We are also investing in a number of measures to keep communities safe, wherever they may worship. Freedom of worship in this country is a vital principle that we all believe in.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-01-12/debates/CFA331D8-3254-4EFE-A0AF-2762229C7219/HateCrimes>

The Law Commission report referred to above can be read at

<https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lawcom-prod-storage-11jsxou24uy7q/uploads/2021/12/Hate-crime-report-accessible.pdf>

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Holocaust

House of Commons Business of the House

Ian Mearns (Labour): Due to the very heavily subscribed application for the Holocaust Memorial Day debate on 27 January, we are at the moment considering converting a whole afternoon to that debate ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-01-13/debates/3D39B368-D30E-4D7A-B0DE-281C9FA75598/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-075A82CD-8EEC-4CD4-902B-6E7E1D5A3272>

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Israel

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Paul Girvan (DUP) [842] Israel – That this House notes that in a poll from the Palestine News Network, 93 per cent of the people in Jerusalem who are ethnically Arab prefer Israeli rule; and calls on the Government to use this statistic and the simple principle of self-determination whenever hard left Governments call for East Jerusalem to be part of an Arab state and to give strong opposition to such a proposal.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/59335>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2867>

Assisted Dying Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2875>

Charities Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2877>

Education (Assemblies) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2878>

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2862>

Israel Arms Trade (Prohibition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3025>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3017>

**** Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2900>

Public Bill Committee debate

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-01-12/debates/f582cd82-3e97-4e8a-8e4e-8e87b52a0c4c/MarriageAndCivilPartnership\(MinimumAge\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-01-12/debates/f582cd82-3e97-4e8a-8e4e-8e87b52a0c4c/MarriageAndCivilPartnership(MinimumAge)Bill)

Nationality and Borders Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3023>

**** Online Safety Bill (Draft)**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-online-safety-bill>

House of Commons debate

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-01-13/debates/1B9767E0-EF19-4D77-8C73-AADA64365D2C/DraftOnlineSafetyBillReport>

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2942>

Northern Ireland Assembly

Organ and Tissue Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/legislation/2017-2022-mandate/primary-legislation---bills-2017---2022-mandate/organ-and-tissue-donation-deemed-consent-bill/>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

**** closes in 7 days**

Animal Welfare – revision of EU legislation (Food Safety) (closing date 21 January 2022)
https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12950-Animal-welfare-revision-of-EU-legislation/public-consultation_en

Outdoor marriages and civil partnerships (closing date 24 January 2022)
<https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/outdoor-marriages-civil-partnerships/>

Marriage Law (Northern Ireland) (closing date 18 February 2022)
<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/consultations/public-consultation-marriage-law>

Human Rights Act Reform: A Modern Bill of Rights (closing date 8 March 2022)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/human-rights-act-reform-a-modern-bill-of-rights>

**** CPS: Public interest guidance for suicide pact and ‘mercy killing’ type cases**
(closing date 9 April 2022)
<https://www.cps.gov.uk/consultation/consultation-public-interest-guidance-suicide-pact-and-mercy-killing-type-cases-0>

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The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438