

ZAKAT AS BALANCE AND JUSTICE

Towards a Collective Approach for its
Administration in International Aid



OCTOBER 2025





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1. Introduction

Context and significance of the consultation

Interest in *Zakat*, a pillar of the Islamic faith, is increasing due to its potential to meet humanitarian needs amidst shrinking aid budgets. Since 2016's World Humanitarian Summit when "Islamic Social Finance" became part of the mainstream agenda¹, a growing number of UN agencies and INGOs have developed *Zakat* policies, sought *fatwas* and set up *Zakat* funds. Today, most of the largest secular INGOs are soliciting *Zakat*², as are UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM, with UN agencies primarily reliant on institutional funds also starting to solicit from the public³. During the period of the consultation (February to July 2025), both the IOM's Islamic Philanthropy Fund and the IRC's *Zakat* Fund were established.

This rapid implementation of *Zakat*'s international administration by secular actors, a role traditionally reserved for Muslim-led organisations, has not gone unnoticed. Situated within wider conversations on power imbalances in a sector long called to "localise" and "decolonise", WHAF originally set out to question whether the secular *Zakat* boom is permissible according to its mandate and/or if it instead constitutes a new form of disempowerment.

As WHAF began examining the scope of this topic, however, it became evident that it rested on two key assumptions: firstly, that eligibility and legitimacy to administer *Zakat* is derived from Islamic identity alone; and secondly, that a verdict, if sought, on the question of secular administration would be enough to halt it (it won't). Instead, rather than presenting as the only issue of concern relating to the international administration of *Zakat*, the broader question asked was whether *Zakat* was being administered according to its mandate at all, by anyone. For that reason, the starting point shifted back to the basics, asking what *Zakat* should be for and how it should be administered in the international aid sector, with the expectation that this would also shed light on the secular question, as well as anything else.

As an instrument that obligates the movement of wealth from rich to poor, we were also interested in understanding more about *Zakat*'s justice principles, and its relationship to an aid sector not widely recognised for its focus on the same. To examine this breadth, it was important not to limit the conversation, nor participant perspectives, to a narrow aid sector lens, but instead widen our understanding, with the hope of hearing what it meant for the sector.

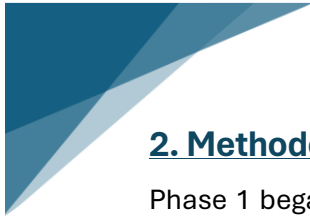
This report shares the learnings of the first phase of an intended two-year *Zakat* consultation. It shares the perspectives of academics, Muslim-led *Zakat* administrators, and individual givers of *Zakat* on *Zakat*'s role and intended impact, its relationship to social and economic justice, as well as the obligations and legitimacy of administrators. It further shares ideas, suggestions and visions for *Zakat*.

The findings of this phase highlight participant perspectives on what is required to better uphold *Zakat*'s mandate, and the direction being pointed towards, namely: a collective and strategic approach to *Zakat*'s administration in international aid.

¹ Reliefweb, [World Humanitarian Summit - Islamic Social Finance: Special Session Summary](#) 24.05.2016 (Accessed 22.10.25)

² See examples: Oxfam [Zakat Ramadan Appeal](#); IRC [Rescue Zakat Fund](#); Save the Children [Zakat Charity Fund and Policy](#) (2022), noting their [current appeals \(2025\) are for Sadaqah](#) rather than *Zakat*; Street Child [Zakat Policy](#); MSF [Islamic Giving](#); Water Aid [Zakat Appeal](#); Action Aid [Gulf Partnerships](#), no policy but statement of partnership enabling the receipt of *Zakat*; Action Against Hunger [Zakat Appeal](#); IFRC, [Islamic Humanitarian Giving](#) (All accessed 22.10.25)

³ See: UNHCR Refugee *Zakat* Fund, [Zakat App](#) (Accessed 22.10.25)



2. Methodology, challenges and shortcomings

Phase 1 began with a desk review of related reports, papers and articles, followed by advisory meetings with key stakeholders. This helped to clarify the research question, purpose and intended value of the phase. The goal was for it to be a preparatory listening phase that would inform the direction of phase 2, as well as to identify key themes, issues and questions with which to meaningfully shape the engagement with scholars and other stakeholders.

The research question

The overarching research question for the full consultation period is:

What is Zakat's meaning and role, including in relation to social and economic justice? How, therefore, should it be administered within the context of humanitarian and development aid?

Phase one intended to engage both theoretical and operational perspectives, and welcome opinions on what is being realised and what is considered to be Zakat's unrealised potential. The findings are to inform the direction and enquiry taken forwards.

Interviews

Between March and May 2025, 31 in-depth structured interviews were held with academics and administrators of Zakat. Individuals were identified via purposive sampling based on their expertise and experience, to reflect global experiences and perspectives. The questions were tailored according to the group, yet featured the same topics: the meaning and role of Zakat; its relationship to social and economic justice; the rights of donors (givers) and rights holders; the obligations of the administrator; the role of secular actors; and what a vision for Zakat might look like. Interviewees were also asked for their opinions and suggestions regarding the role of scholars in this discussion, and any questions they would like to put forward. Five of the interviews were classified as “hybrid”, meaning these were individuals who were former administrators turned advisors, or who worked across both academic and administrator stakeholder groups.

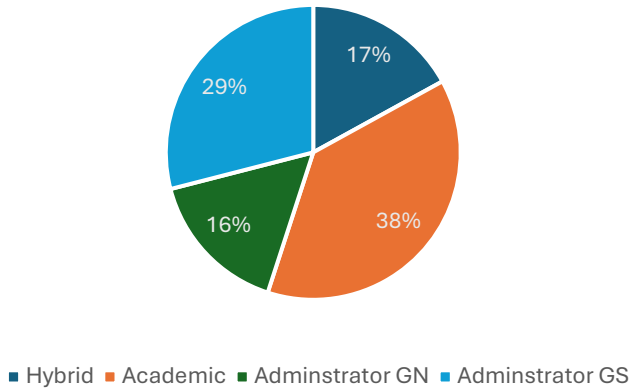
It should be noted that there is no precise delineation between “academic” and “scholar.” In this report, we distinguish between religious scholars (*‘ulama*), who have received traditional training in Islamic sciences such as jurisprudence and hadith, and academics, who hold advanced degrees in various modern disciplines and may possess a deep understanding of Islam and its intellectual traditions, although they are not necessarily religious scholars. The next phase of the project will include consultations and interviews with the religious scholars.

Administrator interviews were conducted with representatives of Muslim-led organisations that collect and distribute Zakat. The individuals representing the administrator were either senior-level staff members, or those who worked directly in the management of Zakat-funded programmes. All participating academics are recognised for their expertise on the subject matter.

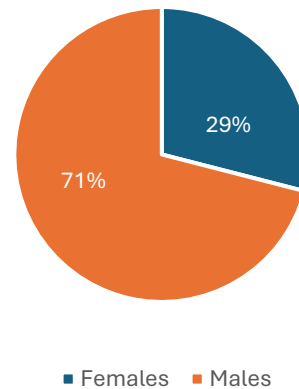
The target sample of 10 academic interviews, 10 interviews with Global Majority (GM) based administrators and 10 interviews with UK based administrators, became: 5 hybrid interviews, 12 academic interviews, 9 interviews with GM administrators and 5 with UK administrators.

Interview breakdown

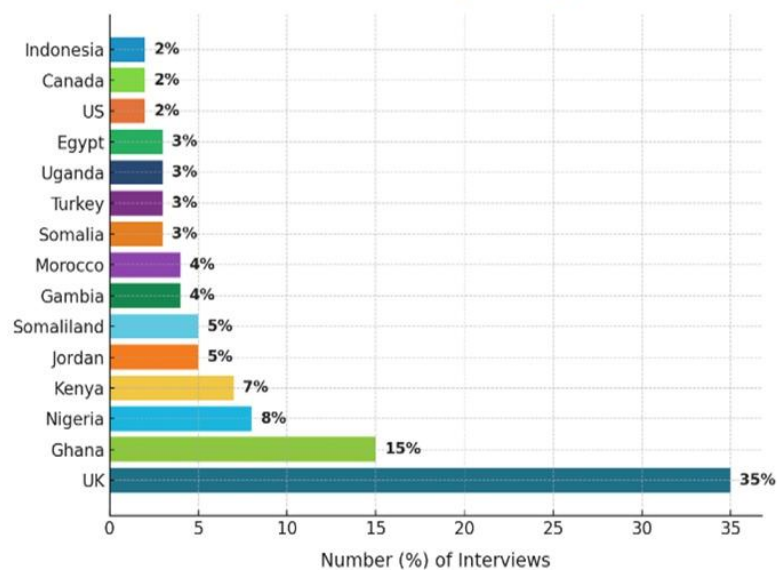
Interviews by type



Interviews by gender



Interviews by Country



The interviews offered a high degree of flexibility, allowing for open-ended responses and for the interviewee to influence the direction of the conversation. As a result, there was not an even topic coverage across all interviews.

Donor survey

During the same period, a survey was circulated to individuals that give Zakat. This survey sought donor perspectives on the same topics and was circulated in both English and Arabic. It was circulated during Ramadan in order to capture perspectives and decision-making processes during the period that most Zakat is given.

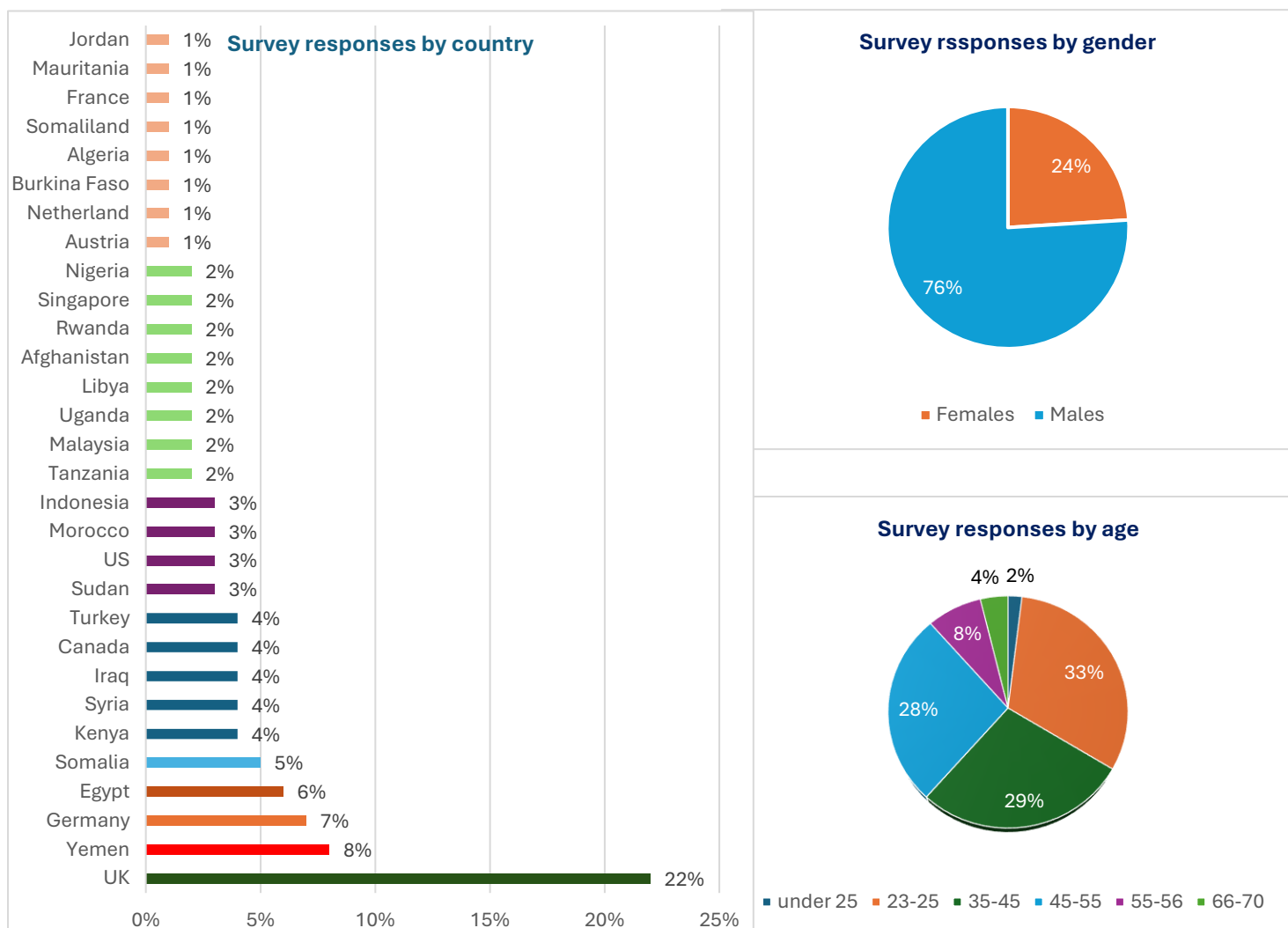
Throughout the consultation it became evident that the term “donor” was considered inaccurate to describe the people who give Zakat. Whereas donor, and donation, implies giving charitably

out of choice, giver and giving better represents the nature of giving what is obligated to give. However because donor is a term frequently used, expressed by some interviewees and used in (I)NGO communications and Zakat appeals, “donor” will still appear occasionally throughout the report, in reference to the survey and depending on the context of the discussion.

The survey included multiple-choice, open-choice and Likert-scale questions regarding giving practices and preferences, factors that influence decision making, and overall preferences concerning how Zakat is administered. Respondents had the opportunity to ask questions and make suggestions.

In total, the survey received 114 responses from people in 30 countries. The UK received the largest share of responses, followed by Yemen, Germany, Egypt, Iraq, Somalia, Turkey and Canada. Less than 50% of respondents answered the optional question concerning which school of Islam (*Madhab*) was followed. All that did respond were from the Sunni school. 88% of respondents answered that they were paying Zakat this year, with questions asked hypothetically for the 12% that were not.

Survey breakdown





Data Analysis

Interviews were translated and transcribed, themes were refined – expanding the foundational topics raised in the interview questions where necessary – and a coding framework developed. Transcripts were then coded in MAXQDA and reviewed to identify major themes, subthemes, and relationships, which informed the overall interpretation of the findings. All interviews have been analysed collectively. However, distinctions between groups have been identified where evident.

Similarly, findings from both the Arabic and English surveys have been analysed together. Survey insights are highlighted throughout the report.

Notable considerations, challenges and shortcomings

Navigating a sensitive topic

Maintaining appropriate focus and care when engaging with such a broad, nuanced, and deeply personal topic – one that intersects spiritual, social and political dimensions – has been both intellectually engaging and methodologically challenging. Given the diversity and strength of opinions expressed, it has been essential to approach the material in a balanced, evidence-based, and contextually sensitive manner, while avoiding positioning the findings as confrontational. To navigate this, all permitted quotes stand alone, whereas the summary of the discussion anonymises the individuals whose perspectives it presents. There are a couple of exceptions, where a particular viewpoint or theory unique to the contributor has been drawn on significantly throughout the report, the individual has been credited.

Researcher positionality

While the lead researcher did not conduct all of the interviews, it is relevant to note that they are not a Muslim. Given that the study focused on Muslim-led organisations and practicing Muslims, this presents a methodological tension that warrants acknowledgment, particularly considering established critiques of *etic* (outsider) perspectives in research. On the one hand, the researcher's positionality may have limited the theological depth of inquiry due to knowledge gaps and lack of insider familiarity. On the other hand, the absence of an assumed theological stance may have fostered a more open and unguarded dialogue, as participants often felt comfortable expressing their views freely.

The research process was strengthened by the input and oversight of two Muslim staff members—whose expertise derived from practice and lived understanding, rather than formal theological training. They provided clarification, contextual explanations, and relevant references from the Quran and Hadith.

Finally, in reflecting on researcher positionality and inherent biases, religious or otherwise, the research also revealed that many of the explored themes and theological concepts hold relevance beyond an exclusively Islamic framework. Care was taken, therefore, to return to Islamic definitions when defining the core concepts.

There was an effort to ensure that all inputs were represented, as well as actively reflecting as a team on instances where particular perspectives appeared to align with researchers' own views. While the precise influence of researcher positionality on the findings cannot be conclusively determined, it remains an important factor to acknowledge when interpreting the results.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI tools were explored throughout this report with mixed review and utility. Transcript generation was somewhat helpful, but summaries of transcripts and codes were found to be extremely unreliable, lacking detail and failing to pick up on nuance – overall inefficiently increasing the time



required to analyse findings.

Donor survey focus

In hindsight, a narrower focus might have resulted in more indicative findings. Additionally, with more time, the survey might have been staggered and used to test and further explore some of the key findings from the interviews. Ensuring that the survey reached respondents that were not associated with the aid sector was also challenging – owing to a reliance on WHAF’s network for dissemination. Going forward, it will be important to develop partnerships to support outreach when perspectives independent of aid sector influence are desired.

A further point to note is that the survey was conducted during Ramadan, when many focus on worship and giving Zakat. As a result, respondents may have been busier than usual and perceived the survey as less relevant to their spiritual priorities.

Data/sample shortcomings

Regarding interview sample size and limitations, it is considered a significant omission that no individuals practicing Shia Islam were interviewed – despite best efforts to ensure balanced representation. This is something that will be actively addressed in the next phase of this project.

Interestingly, however, the school of Islam with which interviewees identified did not appear to have a significant bearing on the perspectives shared. On the contrary, when (inconsistently) asked, interviewees sometimes downplayed the influence it had on the opinions they considered based on universal understandings of Zakat. Some interviewees explicitly mentioned how their perspectives were more influenced by global best practices, and others explained how perspectives are frequently borrowed from schools of thought favourable to the position taken. This implied that geographical and sectarian influence is as globalised as the nature of Zakat’s international administration itself.

Given its global reach the donor survey sample size is small and findings should therefore be considered as inferences rather than conclusions. It is furthermore acknowledged that the interviewee sample size cannot sufficiently provide conclusive findings. However, as this phase was not intended to produce final conclusions, rather serve as a starting point for continuation, it is considered that the sample size, particularly given the depth of the interviews, has reliably achieved this.

The perspectives of women were underrepresented in this phase of research, accounting for 29% of interviews and 26% of donors surveyed. Further, consultations with rights holders were not conducted due to limited team capacity, resources, time, and logistical constraints. These will be addressed in the next project phase.

3. Zakat – a brief introduction

Zakat (الزكاة) is an obligatory pillar of Islam and a financial act of worship. It requires eligible Muslims to give a fixed portion of their wealth to specified categories of recipients, serving both spiritual purification and social justice. There are two types of Zakat given: *Zakat al Mal* (زكاة المال) refers to the annual calculation, and *Zakat al-Fitr* (زكاة الفطر) is paid by Muslims at the end of Ramadan, usually in the form of staple food, to purify fasting and provide for the poor during Eid. The *Fiqh* of *Zakat* (فقه الزكاة) refers to the Islamic jurisprudence governing the rules, calculation, collection, and distribution of Zakat; and is derived from the Quran, the Sunnah, and scholarly interpretation.

The eight eligible recipient categories of Zakat as described in the Quran (9:60) are:

1. *Al-Fuqara'* (الفقراء) – the poor;
2. *Al-Masākīn* (المساكين) – the needy;
3. *Al-Āmilīna 'Alayhā* (العاملين عليها) – administrators of Zakat;
4. *Al-Mu'allafati Qulūbuhum* (المؤلفة قلوبهم) – those whose hearts are to be reconciled;
5. *Ar-Riqāb* (الرقاب) – those in bondage (historically slaves or captives);
6. *Al-Ghārimūn* (الغارمون) – those in debt;
7. *Fī Sabīlillāh* (في سبيل الله) – “in the cause of Allah” (traditionally linked to defence of the community);
8. *Ibn as-Sabīl* (ابن السبيل) – the wayfarer (a traveller or displaced person).

See Glossary of Terms on for a fuller description.

Historical to contemporary context

As one of the five pillars of Islam, Zakat is considered as inseparable from its wider Islamic framework, including the other forms of charitable giving: *Ṣadaqah* (صدقة), which refers to voluntary charity, and *Waqf* (وقف), which refers to endowments. However, whereas *Sadaqah* and *Waqf* are voluntary forms of giving, Zakat is mandatory. Whilst this project focuses on Zakat, it is understood that it cannot be treated as theologically, nor operationally isolated.

Zakat, which began as a voluntary charitable payment, became an obligation for Muslims after Prophet Muhammad's migration to Medina in 622 CE. At that point the practice of Zakat became institutionalised. A formal system for collecting and distributing Zakat was established, with official collectors (*al-Āmilūn*), and it was accumulated in the public treasury (*Bayt al-Māl*) – thus transforming Zakat into a fundamental pillar of the first Islamic state.

The Rashidun Khaliphs who were the first four righteous leaders of the Muslims after the death of the Prophet, took up the mantle of shaping the early Islamic state. This period was defined by the exponential expansion of the Islamic *Khilāfa* across Africa and Asia, a trend that continued during the subsequent centuries. Following the rule of the Rashidun Khaliphs, the Umayyad dynasty took over the rule of the Islamic empire, transforming a religious institution into a hereditary monarchy. The 8th of the Umayyad Khaliphs, Umar bin Abdul Aziz, is credited with implementing Zakat so efficiently that absolute poverty was eradicated, and the need for Zakat consequentially fell. Some interviewees cited this period as the time that Zakat achieved its objectives.

The geopolitical shifts that took place after this golden period were also detailed by interviewees. These included colonialism (both Islamic and European); the transition from khilafat to monarchist governance; and the emergence of nation states and economic globalisation – within which citizen and state relationships have evolved, influencing perceptions of the state as the legitimate administrator of Zakat.

Zakat today

Nowadays, there are various models for the collection, administration and disbursement of Zakat, which vary from country to country. In Muslim-majority countries, for example, you can see:

- State-mandated compulsory collection (for example, in Libya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Yemen).
- Voluntary collection with no state regulation (for example, in Afghanistan, Algeria, Oman and Tunisia).

- A hybrid of voluntary collection and state regulation (for example, in Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Bangladesh and Indonesia).

Some countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan, offer tax credits or deductions for Zakat payments.

In non-Muslim-majority or secular countries, giving Zakat is never state mandated, compulsory, collected, nor administered. There are, however, rare examples of secular-state regulation of Zakat, such as in Singapore, where the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore is mandated with the responsibility of regulating Zakat according to Sharia law.

In voluntary collection contexts, both within Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority contexts, the extent of institutionalisation varies, as does the relationship between the institution and the state. In voluntary contexts, giving is often carried out informally via individuals, or through mosque collection systems and independent charities. Within state-mandated or regulated models, specific state-approved charities might be the stipulated vehicle for administration. Due to contemporary considerations, nowadays there are mixed opinions on the necessity of state administration, and the general perception is that there is not one way or model that works for all. The exact amount of Zakat in circulation globally on an annual basis is not precisely known but estimates have put it as anywhere between US\$200 billion and US\$1 trillion⁴.

International giving

Beyond national collection and distribution, a significant amount of Zakat, varying from country to country – is administered internationally. Although precise figures again are not available, in the case of the UK, it has been identified that approximately 98% of a conservative £262m estimate is sent outside of the country annually⁵.

Some states facilitate the international distribution of nationally-collected Zakat funds. This international distribution may happen via entities officially mandated by the government, and/or by UN agencies. For example, Kuwait's Zakat House (بيت الزكاة : Bayt al-Zakat) is an "independent government authority" tasked with administering Zakat nationally and internationally. They have held a formal partnership with UNHCR since 2000⁶. Kuwaiti organisations, such as Rahma International Association (or Rahma Global Society), also receive funding from Kuwait's Zakat House⁷, which in turn passes on funding to charities, such as the African Relief Committee (Somalia).⁸ Indonesia's national Zakat instrument, BAZNAS, for example also funds UNICEF⁹.

International giving in the context of Zakat that is collected outside of Muslim states, such as in the UK, is done so informally via individuals, through mosques, directly to national or local NGOs and administrators in the country of distribution, and through International NGOs (INGOs). A snapshot survey carried out by Muslim Census in 2023 found that the "overwhelming majority of British Muslims distribute their Zakat abroad", with 80% of respondents stating that they gave internationally – and half of those to their countries of heritage.¹⁰ It is also acknowledged that payment of Zakat by Islamic Banks and Private Companies is also a significant part of the global

⁴ UNDP, [Zakat for the SDGs](#), 07.09.18 (Accessed 22.10.25)

⁵ NZF, [Zakat in the UK](#) (accessed 22.10.25)

⁶ UNHCR, [Our Partners: Zakat House](#) (Accessed 22.10.25) .

⁷ Rahma Global Society, [Rise of Charity](#) (Accessed 22.10.25) .

⁸ African Relief Committee, [Medical News](#), 04.09.2020 (Accessed 22.10.25)

⁹ UNICEF, [BAZNAS X UNICEF 2020](#) (Accessed 22.10.25)

¹⁰ Muslim Census, Snapshot Survey: Zakat in the UK 08.04.23 (Accessed 22.10.25)



circulation of Zakat, nationally and internationally. Islamic Banks play a role in distributing Zakat on behalf of their customers as well as a portion of their own profit and facilitating philanthropic funds in partnership with other entities¹¹.

It is generally perceived that incomplete global data on Zakat giving, collection and disbursement, prevents an understanding of its true scale and potential¹². This scale and potential of giving hence continues to be debated, with some projections considering Zakat as able to have a profound impact on global poverty¹³.

INGOs collecting Zakat within the UK are either Muslim-led or secular – indeed, as pointed out by interviewees, UN agencies are increasingly soliciting public donations as well. Presently, there exists no centralised entity tasked with overseeing, coordinating and regulating Zakat activities by international actors in contexts such as the UK, whilst it is clear that there are widely accepted best practices and standards.

4. On the meaning, role and intended impact of Zakat

What is Zakat?

Zakat's literal meaning was widely, and without contention, defined by interviewees as “to grow and to purify”. It was described consistently as a pillar of Islam, a religious duty and an act of worship. It was also described by interviewees as: an institution, an obligatory charity, a divine tax, an Islamic welfare system, a wealth redistribution system, a political economy instrument, and a social finance or socio-economic system. Some interviewees emphasised that its definition, and its purpose, was implicitly related to the broader Islamic political and moral economy within which it is situated.

Survey respondents primarily picked “an act of faith and worship” (70%), an “obligatory charity” (52%), and “a form of Islamic social finance” (40%) as ways of describing Zakat. Other perceptions – empowerment, redistribution, welfare, and investment – appear, but are secondary.

What does Zakat do? For what and for whom is it intended?

Interviewees expressed a range of opinions concerning Zakat's intended role and impact, which tended to fall into three interconnected definitions:

- 1) As an act of faith and worship, Zakat plays a role in building and strengthening faith – for the giver, the recipient, and society.
Interviewees emphasised the spiritual importance of Zakat in terms of wealth purification, spiritual fulfilment, and the “spirit of life” or the “spirit of bonding” that is created via the giving and receiving of Zakat.
- 2) As a system and institution, Zakat uplifts society and fosters bonds between givers and recipients, creating social peace, resilience and solidarity amongst Muslims.

¹¹ See for example: UNICEF, [The Global Muslim Philanthropy Fund for Children An innovative new funding platform from UNICEF and the Islamic Development Bank Group](#) (Accessed 22.10.25)

¹² Dr. Mohammed Obaidullah, [How Much Annual Zakat Is Collected Globally](#) 21.07.25 (Accessed 22.10.25)

¹³ See for example: NZF Worldwide Mufti Faraz Adam, [Zakat as an Economy](#) (Accessed 22.10.25) in which Zakat is considered equivalent to the world's 17th largest economy, or: UNDP, Zakat for the SDGs 2018, where Zakat's ability to meet the financing gap for the Sustainable Development Goals is considered.



Interviewees emphasised cooperation, social responsibility and solidarity, including a description of Zakat as “Faith-Based Activism” that can empower communities, as well as build solidarity and community cohesion.

- 3) As a tool and system for wealth redistribution and circulation, Zakat alleviates poverty, economically empowers rights holders, and contributes to the economic wellness and prosperity of society.

Interviewees emphasised the restoration of access to Allah’s wealth for all, redefining inherent value, and countering appropriation.

The realisation of “balance” was described in all accounts, and Zakat was viewed as a holistic system and solution that has the potential to positively impact givers, rights holders, the relationship between them, and society as a whole. This holistic view was expressed with regards to short-term and long-term vision, implementation and impact, and the relationship between the spiritual and temporal. It was also widely perceived to be an institutional, systemic endeavour with macroeconomic aims.

The impact of Zakat on the giver

“It purifies the heart of the payer. Once he pays Zakat, it is purifying and cleansing him from spiritual diseases, and it improves his spiritual well-being.” (Prof. Aliyu Dahiru)

“People who give will receive reward from Allah.” (Faiza Yusuf)

“It builds that kind of empathy and responsibility towards the less fortunate.” (Dr Othman Moqbel)

Interviewees explained that paying Zakat purifies the wealth and the soul of the giver, with two using the term “*barakah*” to describe the blessing received from Allah – considered as beyond what one can imagine. Any wrongdoings associated with the acquisition of wealth are considered purified by fulfilling Zakat as a spiritual obligation. Furthermore, the giver’s faith is also said to be strengthened, having a positive psychological effect, and improving emotional well-being and inner peace through exercising empathy and social responsibility. Blessings were also said to be received through the grateful prayers of the recipients, and that the benefits for the giver will be carried beyond their current lifetime. There was also the idea expressed by four interviewees that the giver’s wealth actually increases through paying Zakat.

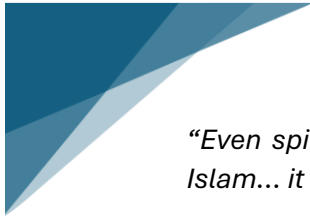
Some interviewees distinguished between the spiritual and material benefits of Zakat, suggesting that it benefits the givers more in a spiritual sense, and the recipients in a material sense. For others, this distinction was redundant, believing that the two are implicitly connected.

Considering the above impacts for the giver, three interviewees held the belief that Zakat was primarily intended to benefit the giver.

The impact of Zakat on the rights holder

“Zakat is actually meant to empower the person or the people to then be able to be in a position to give Zakat in the near future.” (Prof. Aliyu Dahiru)

“Zakat is not just a financial transaction; it is a human relationship... When the person feels seen, supported, and included, those feelings of shame or sadness are replaced with dignity.” (Dr. Lobna Abdelaziz Mohamed)



“Even spiritually for the one who receives... wealth has a role in the holistic worldview of Islam... it enhances your spiritual life.” (Dr. Abdul-Rahim Adada Mohammed)

The most frequently cited impact of Zakat on recipients is its role in alleviating poverty and overcoming immediate economic hardship. Respondents from across academic and practitioner backgrounds describe Zakat as a tool that enables recipients to meet basic needs, such as food, shelter, healthcare, and education. Many, however, stressed that meeting immediate needs is the starting point and not the end goal – rather it should be situated within a longer-term vision of empowerment and sustainable poverty alleviation that uplifts all of society. Thus, Zakat as a tool for empowerment, ending dependency and supporting economic self-sufficiency was a strong theme. As was the idea that if Zakat were to be properly administered, the result would be the graduation of Zakat recipients to Zakat givers.

The non-material dimensions of Zakat were also discussed, such as the restoration of dignity and social status for the recipient. This was connected to inclusion, self-worth and psychological relief. It was also described as an opportunity to overcome discrimination if administered in a targeted manner that informal giving cannot achieve. Several respondents also noted the spiritual benefits for the receiver, who would experience solidarity and be able to better participate spiritually once their material needs have been addressed.

Different expectations were, however, expressed on the extent of Zakat’s impact on recipients. Some interviewees advocate for the entire liberation from need, so that no one qualifies for Zakat; whereas for others, Zakat is not a promise to end poverty, but rather to mitigate the effects of poverty and maintain social cohesion.

A clear majority of survey respondents (96.5%) either strongly agreed or agreed that Zakat relates to poverty alleviation. Only one respondent strongly disagreed, and a small portion (4.7%) remained neutral.

Theological divergences were also cited over whether Zakat is meant to result in receivers becoming givers. Some interviewees referenced classical *fiqh* prohibitions against this (e.g., among the Hanafis), while others cited Shafi’i texts that encourage giving enough to sustain someone for a year.

The impact of Zakat on society

“They are uplifting them, and the whole society is benefiting... they are not going to consume it alone... So that is when the society will begin to benefit from Zakat received by the recipient.” (Prof. Aliyu Dahiru)

“The giving out of Zakat actually goes ahead to ensure there is a certain justice... where not only the rich [benefit], but also the poor have their own share in the wealth.” (Imam Sa-id Mukhtar Abubakar)

“In the distribution of Zakat, and in this value of social solidarity, there is life for the community. The relationship between the state—or the organisation responsible for distributing Zakat—and the beneficiaries carries within it a spirit of life. (Dr. Lobna Abdelaziz Mohamed)

Zakat is widely perceived as a pillar of social cohesion and economic justice. Its impact on society is seen through its ability to rebalance wealth, reduce inequality, and strengthen communal bonds. Many interviewees highlight its capacity to build peaceful, equitable, and



resilient communities, with both immediate relief and long-term transformative potential.

Several interviewees described Zakat's ripple effect on society – that by benefiting individuals, whole societies are uplifted. One of the most widely-cited impacts of Zakat on society is its role in correcting economic imbalance and reducing inequality through the redistribution of wealth. Respondents emphasise that Zakat prevents wealth from becoming concentrated among only the wealthy, by levelling the playing field and ensuring a more just society. This wealth circulation is credited as building societal resilience and fostering more secure, stable and economically active communities.

Zakat is seen by many respondents as a mechanism for building trust, empathy, unity and peace between social classes. By creating a sense of mutual care and responsibility, it reduces resentment and alienation among the poor, and fosters social harmony and stability. Thus, the impact on society is due to Zakat's relational nature, connecting giver and receiver within a community. This relational dynamic facilitated through Zakat was described by one interviewee as “a spirit of life.”

A clear majority of survey respondents (85%) strongly agreed or agreed that Zakat is related to wealth redistribution. One strongly disagreed and 14% remained neutral.

Interviewees described the societal role of Zakat as building and bonding community; encouraging social cohesion, cooperation and solidarity; maintaining peaceful coexistence; promoting shared responsibility and mutual support. By fostering mutual consciousness and social responsibility, social peace is created. Others pointed out that Zakat tempers the misuse of power by the wealthy.

As in the discussion on impact for rights holders, some interviewees felt that Zakat could return society to a time when it was administered so well that it was no longer needed, while others were not quite as ambitious.

Zakat's “soft power”

“Zakat definitely has a financial side. But it also has a symbolic or “soft power” component. It's not just about redistributing wealth. It's a form of worship. And, as such, it carries spiritual, ethical, and institutional implications.” (Adil Bader)

“When Zakat is used as a political economy tool, as we have sometimes seen; if it becomes an instrument of soft power, to transform societies away from their religious or cultural norms for market purposes, then I would have a big problem with the use of Zakat in that way.” (Dr. Mehmet Asutay)

Two interviewees referred to Zakat's “soft power” or religious and spiritual power, in relation to its faith-building potential. This was particularly with regards to the recipient category, *Al-Mu'allafati Qulūbuhum* (those whose hearts are to be reconciled). However, “soft power” was also referred to by other interviewees in terms of its more commonly understood, and arguably more contentious definition: leveraging soft influence through culture, values and politics for political and economic ends. Because “soft power” primarily invokes this connotation, the “soft power” framing has been avoided when describing the religious and spiritual impacts of Zakat.



Zakat as an institution, instrument and system

Interviewees emphasised that Zakat is not merely a financial transaction but, in addition to its religious and spiritual significance, it is an institution with macroeconomic aims able to offer structured support to eligible recipients.. The most frequently cited aims are wealth redistribution – the right of the poor over the wealth of the rich – and economic empowerment through a system based on fairness, balance, justice and poverty eradication, rather than generosity or charity.

Zakat was also described as faith-based taxation, a Social Finance System or a political economy instrument originally administered by the state. It is considered to be the foundation of an Islamic welfare state capable of building long-term infrastructure and community resilience.

Some pointed out that Zakat needs to be understood within the wider Islamic framework, and that despite its unique characteristics – for example, that it is compulsory – it cannot be considered separately from *Sadaqah* and *Waqf*. Zakat is described as part of an Islamic socio-economic system, situated within Islam's political and moral economy, and replete with substantive ethics that should be understood in their entirety in order to arrive at a full understanding of what Zakat is.

That *Al-ʿĀmilīna ʿAlayhā* (the administrator of Zakat) is one of the eight eligible recipient categories of Zakat, is noted to be an inbuilt indication that Zakat is meant to be a structured institution.

Respondent focus and prioritisation

A core theme throughout the interviews was the description of Zakat as a comprehensive and holistic system that benefitted the giver, the receiver and society, both materially and spiritually. Despite this, differences of opinions were expressed with regards to whom interviewees felt were mostly intended to benefit and to what extent. Interviewees tended to have a priority focus that they centred in their responses, which fell on a spectrum ranging from the purification of the giver's wealth to societal liberation. These fell into five categories:

- 1. Giver focused (Zakat purifies wealth)**
Represents views regarding the impact of Zakat on the giver, as detailed earlier – spiritual purification and growth.
- 2. Recipient focused (Zakat alleviates suffering)**
Zakat is intended to alleviate suffering and improve the economic status of the rights holder.
- 3. Recipient focused (Zakat empowers)**
Zakat is meant to empower the rights holder and lift them out of poverty so that they might one day give Zakat. Interviewees discuss “productive Zakat” and focus on programmes that deliver empowering interventions and support.
- 4. Systemic focus (Zakat uplifts society)**
Zakat is intended to be an institutional system with macroeconomic aims, that comes under the leadership of an authority (or authorities). This system oversees the administration of Zakat so that it fulfils its obligation to givers, rights holders and society in redistributing wealth and uplifting society, both economically and spiritually. Views include returning to a time when Zakat was administered so well and strategically that no one in the community was eligible to receive it. Everyone who held the view that Zakat is meant to have a macroeconomic impact, advocated for a systemic, structured and institutionalised approach to achieve it. Compared with existing macroeconomic



systems, many considered Zakat to have a tempering influence that provides morality, rather than an alternative to capitalism.

5. **Systemic focus (Zakat liberates)**

Comprehensively articulated by Dr. Memet Asutay, this position sees Zakat as a systemic and holistic instrument and institution. Understood as being part of Islamic moral political economy, Zakat is intended to return resources to society, overcome barriers that prevent access, and liberate society from need in the process. Considered in this way, Zakat presents an alternative to existing macroeconomic systems – such as capitalism and neoliberalism – that prevent the pre-Zakat condition of *Ihsan* (perfection) from being fulfilled. Ihsanic governance (within which Zakat is situated) is meant to sustain the *mizan*, which is the balance that Allah created when resources were available.¹⁴

Most interviewees across all interview groups centred the rights holder in their response. The majority again considered Zakat as offering a way to lift people out of poverty, thereby empowering them, rather than only easing their suffering. Many expressed the sentiment that recipients should one day become payers. The median perspective could, therefore, be plotted at the third priority: a recipient-focused vision of Zakat that empowers rights holders and improves their economic reality.

Within this spectrum, perspectives on the intended role of Zakat as a system and institution varied. For some, a structured systemic approach would make the impact of administration more effective and efficient. Whereas for some others, a systemic approach would be regulatory in function, ensuring

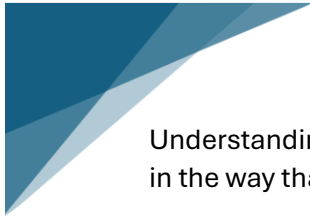
The survey responses showed a slightly different spread of opinions, with the majority saying the primary benefactor was society (40%), followed by the giver (28.9%) and recipient (26%) almost equally. The remaining responses expressed the opinion of holistic, mutual benefit – as indicated by the primary response.

administration adhered to Zakat's conditions and constraints. And for others, leadership and vision of a collective and systemic approach would ensure that long-term impact was prioritised alongside relief. Some considered that a systemic macroeconomic view had the potential to provide morality to economic systems, rather than offer an alternative.

In general, but not exclusively, academics adopted a broader, more systemic focus, viewing Zakat through an institutional lens that has transformational potential for society. They were more likely to discuss long-term objectives and the need to be strategic. Administrators, on the other hand, tended to centre the rights holder; and discussions on Zakat's potential impact focused on poverty alleviation and empowerment in the more immediate term. Administrators also expressed frustration with what they perceived as limiting short-term focuses that impeded the realisation of empowerment goals. The opinion that purification of wealth for the giver was Zakat's primary aim was expressed, but uncommonly.

To summarise, the opinion that Zakat is a holistic, comprehensive and mutually beneficial system is popularly held. However, within this there is a rather wide spectrum of prioritisation and focus.

¹⁴ Dr. Mehmet Asutay's thesis on Islamic moral political economy and the substantive ethics of Islam has been referred to frequently in this report. For further reading, see for example: Mehmet Asutay, [Islamic Moral Economy: Bringing Back Substantive Morality to Humanise Islamic Finance](#), Global Policy, 2025; 16(Suppl. 1):7-11



Understanding this starting point is arguably key to understanding why Zakat is operationalised in the way that it is, why perhaps it is falling short, and the direction it is being called towards.

On terminology

“When you say Zakat and you try to translate it directly with a single word, it loses some of its meaning intended by Almighty Allah.” (Imam Sa-id Mukhtar Abubakar)

Naturally, terminology choices reflect meaning and, as the scope of Zakat’s meaning is broad and multifaceted, so too was the terminology used to describe it. Interviewees were, however, asked to share their opinions specifically on the term ‘Islamic Social Finance’, a term popularised by the United Nations at the World Humanitarian Summit as a catch-all within which Waqf, Sadaqah, Zakat and any other Islamic philanthropic or micro-financing mechanisms and instruments were placed.¹⁵ Responses were varied. Some interviewees were unfamiliar with, or indifferent to the term. Others were strongly disapproving. These interviewees described how the term, considered to inadequately capture Zakat’s scope, was coined without consultation. There was a considerable sentiment that Islamic Social Finance reduced Zakat’s spiritual and social roles to merely its economic function, which they believed demonstrated the UN’s primarily transactional interest.

Some put forward alternatives that they felt better captured Zakat’s fuller meaning, such as Islamic Social Finance System, Muslim Social Responsibility, Muslim Social Care, Redistributive Justice System, and Islamic Social Taxation. Interviewees also cautioned the use of singular terms in English that alone cannot hold the full meaning of Zakat. It was suggested that the term Zakat should remain as it is: Zakat. And others lamented that the problem rested not with terminology but with practice.

5. Zakat and justice (social and economic)

“Allah commands justice, good conduct, and giving to relatives; and forbids immorality, bad conduct, and oppression.” (Quran 16:90)

Social and economic justice forms a central pillar of the Islamic view. It is founded on the principles of fairness, equality, and solidarity; ensuring human dignity and the fulfilment of basic needs. The Quran repeatedly links justice with equity and balance, calling believers to ensure it is maintained at all times: *“O you who believe, be steadfast in upholding justice” (Quran 4:135)*. It also affirms that human worth is not measured by wealth or status, but by righteousness: *“The most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you” (Quran 49:13)*.

Justice in Islam stands on several key foundations, including:

- Fair distribution of wealth, with a warning against allowing resources to be concentrated among the wealthy few: *“...so that wealth may not merely circulate among the rich among you.” (Quran 59:7)*
- Prohibition of exploitation, such as usury (*riba*), monopolies, and practices that lead to unjust accumulation of wealth.

¹⁵ Reliefweb, [World Humanitarian Summit - Islamic Social Finance: Special Session Summary](#) 24.05.2016 (Accessed 22.10.25)

- Mutual solidarity (*takaful*), which makes society collectively responsible for protecting its most vulnerable members through Zakat, charity, and other acts of social support.

Zakat is among the most important instruments of justice in Islam, which is not only seen as a means of providing relief for the poor, but also as a comprehensive mechanism or system that enables rights, restores balance within society, and empowers the marginalised to become participants in ownership and production. Many scholars understood that Zakat is not designed to prolong or allow the existence of permanent poverty, but to serve as a transitional tool — for example, enabling debtors (*al-ghārimīn*), wayfarers (*ibn al-sabīl*), and others in need to regain independence and return to economic activity. In this way, Islamic economic justice is proactive: it protects common access to resources, supports those temporarily in need, and motivates every individual toward self-reliance. All of which strengthen the bonds of solidarity and social justice within the community.

Wealth and resources are seen as a trust from Allah that must be managed responsibly and shared fairly, so that no one is left behind or excluded. Social and economic justice in Islam is not limited to acts of charity; it is about building fair systems that protect dignity, prevent exploitation, and strengthen solidarity. The Quran emphasises balance and fairness: *“Establish weight in justice and do not make the balance deficient”* (Quran 55:9).

Participant definitions of justice

“All Arabic words for justice come from the root of balance; and the movement of wealth from a surplus to deficit is addressing an imbalance by definition.” (Dr. Sohail Hanif)

“Ihsanic governance is to sustain the mizan, the balance through which Allah created. When Allah created the Earth, the resources were available, liberated.” (Dr. Mehmet Asutay)

Interviewees across all groups consistently rooted their understanding of justice in Islamic ethical and theological concepts. Interviewees described Islam as a religion built on justice, and related the relationship between Zakat and social and economic justice to the Islamic concepts of balance (*mīzān*), justice (*adl*), the pursuit of excellence and perfection (*iḥsān*) and Iḥsānic Governance, as well as universal concepts, such as empowerment and rights.

Interviewees considered **social justice** in terms of dignity, inclusion, community cohesion, protection of the vulnerable, and social security. **Economic justice** was defined in terms of equitable wealth distribution; poverty alleviation and financial independence; access to capital, work and opportunity; and the avoidance of monopolies, hoarding, and exploitative systems. While wealth redistribution was central to these discussions, one interviewee clarified that it does not necessarily imply enforced equality, rather it sought to achieve fair access to resources and a greater degree of balance.

Interviewees offered a holistic understanding of justice, with most viewing social and economic justice as fundamentally interconnected—sometimes indistinguishable—often using the term “socio-economic justice.” Interviewees explained that economic justice (poverty alleviation, resource access) led to social justice (cohesion, participation, dignity) and was, therefore, often understood as the end goal of broader Zakat frameworks. That economic balance (*mizan*) would



lead to societal harmony because people are brought closer together when wealth disparities are addressed.

Zakat as a vehicle for justice

“Zakat has this socio-economic dimension – a socio-economic justice – because Allah says in the Quran, ‘so the wealth does not circulate only among the wealthy among you.’ One of the fundamental principles, and one of the important requirements in an Islamic economic system, is that the resources should be circulated among the majority of the society, not just circulated among a few people.” (Prof. Aliyu Dahiru)

“(Zakat is) an Islamic built-in socio-economic system that ensures there is a balance in terms of the utilisation of resources that Allah has provided for use for humanity.” (Imam Sa-id Mukhtar Abubakar)

“Allah has created all those resources for everyone to access, but when you privatise the resource, that implies that compensation — because this is an expropriation — compensation has to take place. So, when you privatise that area, that resource, whatever it is, then you have to return the right of society to society, because you have excluded them from the accessibility to those resources.” (Dr. Mehmet Asutay)

Across all interviews, Zakat was consistently seen as a divine mechanism for advancing justice—spiritual, economic, and social. This is thanks to its defined roles of redistributing wealth, offering economic empowerment, balancing wealth, regulating economic activity, fostering solidarity and social cohesion, preventing exploitative systems, and returning resources to communities.

The majority of interviewees considered empowerment – not only relief – as necessary for fulfilling Zakat’s justice mandate. Interviewees linked empowerment to increasing social participation, thereby achieving social justice. Zakat was also discussed as part of a solution, situated within Islamic Economics, and not the entire answer to questions of injustice. Infrequently, but notably, arguments were made that other Islamic mechanisms, particularly Waqf, are better suited for social and economic justice interventions.

The concept of Zakat as restoring access to Allah’s wealth was raised a couple of times, with the emphasis being that Allah is the source of wealth, and that, because it is his, it is inherently valuable – as opposed to value being defined by markets. Restoring communal access to what is inherently valuable is an idea that connects to Islam’s rejection of appropriation and monopolisation of the same. It is likened to an obligatory compensation that offsets the inequity and injustice created when Allah’s resources are privatised.

With regards to survey respondents' views on the extent of Zakat's relationship with different social and economic justice concepts:

75% agreed or strongly agreed that Zakat is **related to equal opportunities** (access to education, employment and healthcare, for example). **Two** individuals strongly disagreed, and the **remaining** were neutral.

66% agreed or strongly agreed that Zakat is related to **social protection systems**. **30%** were neutral, and the remaining disagreed or strongly disagreed.

38.6% agreed or strongly agreed that Zakat is related to challenging systemic inequities such as racial, gender, or class-based discrimination. **31%** disagreed or strongly disagreed, and the **remaining** were neutral.

36% agreed or strongly agreed that Zakat is related to fair wages and improved working conditions. **Nearly half** were neutral, and the **remaining** disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating greater uncertainty that Zakat could be linked to this concept.

29% agreed or strongly agreed that Zakat was related to **climate justice**. With a **larger number** disagreeing, and the remaining neutral – indicating that this is a more contested area compared to other justice-related concepts.

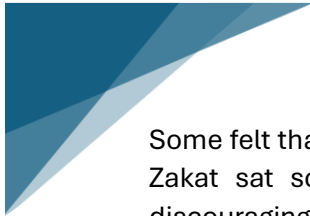
Zakat, justice, and macroeconomic concepts and considerations

“Actually Zakat doesn't challenge the system, but it provides morality to the system... It creates a social conscience for the system.” (Dr. Shariq Siddiqui)

“Not only do I think there is a relationship, I think there is a direct correlation. Again, I think the concept of Zakat being an obligatory distribution of wealth is really rooted in this idea of social justice and social equity, and it's almost antithetical to concepts of capitalism where this hoarding of wealth and the monopolisation of wealth is encouraged. This concept is really more about communities, and the obligations and responsibilities towards our communities.” (Naila Farouky)

“Zakat is not just a form of charity—it's a system, a comprehensive tool for justice. It's designed to correct market failures and ensure a fair economic structure. But we can't achieve that alone, as just one organisation. So we need to ask: Can Zakat be formally integrated into modern economic policies as an alternative to neoliberal welfare systems?” (Shahin Ashraf)

Interviewees discussed the relationship between Zakat and justice concepts, such as empowerment and wealth redistribution, at different levels. This included what it meant for the individual and for the community, but also how it related to macroeconomic systems, such as capitalism and neoliberalism. For some interviewees, Zakat could not be isolated from macroeconomic conditions and considerations. It was, therefore, discussed how Zakat relates to, compares with, and/or offers an alternative. They considered how Zakat's pursuit of justice necessitated an analysis of what caused injustice. A range of perspectives were offered on the extent to which Zakat was a complement or corrective to capitalism.



Some felt that Zakat could offer morality and a social conscience to capitalism. Others thought Zakat sat somewhere between capitalism and socialism, allowing private enterprise but discouraging hoarding, and encouraging taking care of others in society who are in need. Others still described the relationship between Zakat and capitalism (and neoliberalism) as diametrically opposed, as Zakat is redistributive, unlike capitalism and neoliberalism, which encourage wealth concentration. Contrary to monopolised access to resources, Zakat seeks to restore access. And, distinct from determining value according to markets, Zakat recognises inherent value. One interviewee explained that capitalism does not believe in a value-based system of justice, but instead the market operates without interference under the promise that it will deliver justice. Zakat, on the contrary, obligates the rights of the poor over the rich, which highlights a value-based system of justice.

Some interviewees described the characteristics of capitalism, such as individualism, as being contested by Zakat, which promotes collective obligation and social responsibility. One interviewee pointed out that the tendency to compare Zakat with capitalism and socialism, however, prevented Muslims from upholding “*our own system, our own ideology.*”

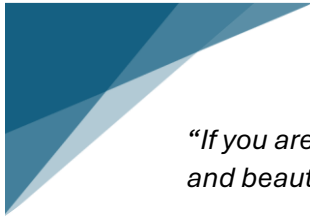
Survey respondents were asked whether they thought Zakat offered an alternative to global systems or dynamics that contributed to inequality and injustice. A majority of **68%** said ‘Yes’, while **32%** said ‘No’. If they answered ‘Yes’, respondents were asked to specify, to which they offered that Zakat is an alternative to:

Interest-based financial systems (<i>riba</i>, global banking, debt structures)
Capitalism and neoliberal inequality
Unjust global economic and political systems (colonial legacies, corruption, exploitation)
Weak or unfair welfare/social protection systems

The rights of the recipient

“For the beneficiaries, it is their right to receive the Zakat from the rich people.” (Mukhtar Bihi)

“Zakat recipients should be treated with dignity and respect. When giving Zakat, you should not humiliate the recipient.” (Faiza Yusuf)



“If you are going to give God a gift, how will you package it? You make it as nice and respectful and beautiful as possible before you give it out.” (Sherif Shaban)

“Really the concept of Zakat and charity in Islam is that people in need have a right over me.” (Lamees Hafeez)

The reference to the rights of rights holders can be found in the Quran, cited as “And in their wealth there was a rightful share ‘fulfilled’ for the beggar and the poor.” {51:19}

The most frequently cited right of recipients was to Zakat itself, described as the “*right of the poor*”. The most frequent framing offered was “*the right of the poor over the wealth of the rich*.” This right, as described by academics and administrators, is that recipients have a right to what is theirs: the resources and wealth. It was also expressed that once resources are available, recipients should not be denied their right to it. The right to Zakat was framed as a matter of ownership, which has implications for how it is delivered – with cash sometimes being preferred, as it enables recipients to exercise their right to own and, consequently, to make decisions more freely than other forms of aid allow.

The next most frequently cited right across both groups was that of the rights holder to be treated respectfully and with dignity. This sentiment can be found in the Quran, with the passage: “*So do not oppress the orphan, nor repulse the beggar*” (93:9-10)

It was important to many that Zakat is administered in a way that the recipient is not regarded as lower than the giver, although it was acknowledged that this is not always the reality. Respectful treatment was connected to enabling decision making. Others described dignity as upholding the sacredness of the individuals receiving Zakat – including their right to privacy. One interviewee shared a story from the early days of Islam, narrated by a companion of the Prophet, which describes charity as reaching the hands of Allah even before it reaches the hands of the recipient. This emphasises the need to give Zakat with Allah as the recipient in mind.

A few administrator interviewees pointed out the Islamic roots of the term “rights holder”, which is preferred amongst some Muslim-led organisations over terms like “beneficiary.” It was explained that this is owing to the perspective that recipients are not in receipt of charity, rather to that which they have a right.

One interviewee cited the right to know there is a community, an *Ummah*, that will support the recipient, ensuring they are fed, clothed, sheltered and can live a life of dignity. Others emphasised the right to not be discriminated against, that Zakat should be administered fairly.

The identity of the rights holder was touched on in the interviews and, whilst there was no disagreement with regards to the eight categories qualifying need, there were some differences of opinion with regards to whether the recipient necessarily had to be Muslim. For many, if not most, the expectation was that they be Muslim, but a couple of interviewees challenged this idea, saying the Quran does not specify it should be for Muslims only.

62% of survey respondents said it was important or highly important that the recipients of Zakat are Muslims. The remainder said it was not important. The majority of those saying it was not important had responded to the English language survey, where the majority of respondents were from the UK. Familiarity with typically secular administration of international aid might, therefore, explain this finding.



The right of society

“When you privatise that land, the garden, water, whatever it is, you are appropriating the right of the society. And, therefore, Zakat is a compensation. The right of the society has to be returned when it comes to resources. The right of the society has to be returned.”
(Dr. Mehmet Asutay)

Some (academic) interviewees discussed the rights of society, in addition to the right of the poor, to receive Zakat. They explained that once you understand the societal value of Zakat, so too can you understand that it is the right of society as a whole. For those who explained Zakat as compensation for illegitimate appropriation or commodification of resources – where the right of society is returned to society and a “divine balance” is restored – recipients and society were indistinguishable.

The donor (giver) of Zakat

“Islamically, from an Islamic legal background, the payer has an obligation to discard part of the excess amount as prescribed.” (Saqib H. Khateeb)

“By fulfilling the giving of Zakat, the donor is fulfilling the rights of the receiver. So, it’s a responsibility. The donor has the responsibility to fulfil the rights, and the receiver has the right to be taken care of by the rich. So it’s more the receiver having a right, and the donor a responsibility.” (Dr. Abdul-Rahim Adada Mohammed)

“Going back to that phrase: “Wa aqemus-salat wa aatuz-zakat” (Establish prayer and give Zakat) — Your prayer has to be spiritually fulfilling. Shouldn’t Zakat be the same?” (Shahin Ashraf)

Interviewees were asked whether they considered givers of Zakat to have rights. The vast majority across all groups explained that givers have obligations rather than rights. It was an obligation, morality, or responsibility to give the money back to the poor. This giving back was also described as “discarding the excess amount” and the responsibility of the giver to uphold Allah’s wisdom, which is to create balance in the socio-economic status of people. Giving Zakat was not merely a “good thing” to do or a kind act of charity, but an obligation on givers to fulfil the right of the poor to receive. It was further considered to be an obligation that giving Zakat is carried out respectfully and properly calculated.

After this first emphasis on obligations, the next most frequent consideration on givers’ rights was in relation to being educated, informed and knowledgeable about where and how Zakat is distributed, even though it was recognised that not all necessarily want to know. In this regard, interviewees considered that their right is to have an understanding of Zakat – how to calculate it properly, and to know how it is spent. Having information and knowing the impact was considered by some interviewees as important for spiritual fulfilment and for developing trust with the administration. Spiritual fulfilment obtained through understanding the impact the Zakat has had, was likened to a sense of belonging, shared responsibility and connection to community. It was pointed out that this has been stripped away from international Zakat administration.

There were differences of opinion on the extent to which givers should be able to have a say. Some commented that they should have the right to give instructions, while others insisted that, as Zakat is not theirs – rather it is Allah’s, and must be returned to society – they don’t have a right

over it and, therefore, should not influence how it should be administered. Instead, some suggested that givers could make recommendations rather than dictate instructions.

A small number of interviewees noted that the role of givers could be to hold the administrator to account by asking questions and ensuring it is administered correctly, so that the receiver receives what they are entitled to.

Survey Responses on Giver Practices and Preferences

Aspect	Response / Percentage	Key Insight
Decision-making about Zakat	45% of respondents make decisions about Zakat with their families, and 40% make decisions independently.	
Importance of knowing the recipient	80% important/highly important	This indicates that a high number of respondents were likely giving directly and informally.
Giving internationally	56% of all respondents said they give Zakat internationally.	Respondents in the English survey were more likely to give internationally (70%) than respondents to the Arabic survey (37%), where most give within the county.
When giving internationally	~50% give directly to recipient. 36% preferred to give through NGOs. Remaining had no preference.	Respondents did not indicate that they experienced issues donating by the method of their choice. In terms of how respondents make decisions, across both surveys the dominant influences on decision-making are personal networks (family / friends / imams) and independent research. Secondary influences include fundraising campaigns, social media, and long-standing donation habits.
Importance of helping people from country of heritage	50% of all respondents considered it essential or very important that Zakat helps people from their country of heritage. 25% were neutral, and a 25% considered it of no or little importance.	
Importance of supporting a cause they are passionate about	A significant majority of 70% of all respondents considered it essential or very important that the Zakat they gave supported a cause they were passionate about.	When asked which country or cause their Zakat would be given towards this year (2025), Gaza was by far the most frequently cited destination (45% of responses), followed by Somalia, Egypt, Syria, Sudan and Yemen.



6. The Zakat administrator

The identity and role of the Zakat administrator almost invariably occupied a significant part of the interview discussions, covering perceptions regarding traditional to contemporary understanding and practice, the role of the state and non-state actors, who has legitimacy to administer and where is legitimacy derived from, and whether or not UN agencies and secular INGOs should be permitted to administer Zakat in the international aid sector. The obligations of the administrator towards givers and receivers were also discussed.

The conditions of Zakat administrators are derived from the Quran, the Sunnah, and classical scholarship. They must be appointed by a legitimate authority, as shown in the *fiqh books* where the Umar Bin Khatab appointed Ibn al-Sa'di to collect Zakat and permitted him to take payment for his service (Abu Dawud 2944). They must be trustworthy and competent, following the Prophet's declaration that anyone appointed and provided a salary commits embezzlement if they take more (Abu Dawud 2943). Administrators must perform an actual role, such as collecting, recording, or distributing Zakat, as noted by Al-Qurtubi (*al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 8/183–184). Finally, they may be rich or poor, since their share is a wage for service, not charity, as explained by Al-Kassai (*Bada'i Alsana'i*, 2/44).

Perceptions on state administration

Given the discussed history of the inception and evolution of Zakat, geopolitical shifts and evolving state-citizen relationships, respondents had different opinions on the extent to which Zakat should be administered by states. For some, within Islamic governance, the state was considered to be responsible, noting that the state had the original mandate to administer Zakat. These discussions highlighted that this was relevant only in “purely Islamic contexts.” Others expressed the opinion that the role of the state has passed, and instead it should be administered by Muslim civil society.

Indeed the role of the state – even in Islamic contexts with Islamic governments where Zakat does fall under state mandates – was noted by interviewees to be problematic due to issues such as lack of trust, corruption, and the conflation of Zakat with tax, which it was argued allows states to shirk their responsibilities whilst eroding the nature of Zakat as an act of worship. Whether or not Islamic governments are actually secular in practice was also highlighted as a factor undermining their legitimacy in administering Zakat.

The administrator in secular contexts

“In our world today, especially in secular environments, it is for the community to come together, to select capable people, to agree on the entity and the framework with which Zakat should be managed; and it is supposed to be managed accountably, transparently and fairly. Those are very critical aspects of it, as well as making sure that it is efficient because waste is a danger to the system.” (Mohammed Fawzi Amadu)

Participant across groups expressed the opinion that, in secular contexts, where there is no Islamic government or government-regulated system for administering Zakat, the responsibility falls on the Muslim community to come together, select qualified people, and agree on how Zakat should be collected and managed. Others contributed that the Islamic community and Muslim leadership should organise themselves to establish collection and distribution systems. The key to acquiring legitimacy in these contexts was asserted to be trust.



The (I)NGO

The relationship between the NGO administrator of Zakat (moreover, specifically in the international aid context as is the focus of this consultation) and the jurisprudence and mandate of Zakat, was approached by interviewees from different perspectives.

Dr. Sohail Hanif detailed his perspective that “*the theory of the collecting agency*” or the theoretical positionality of the charity in jurisprudential and theological terms, needs to be resolved as a prerequisite to determining the legitimacy of the administrator, as well as the rights of givers and recipients. Indeed, resolving the issue of “*who are you?*” was connected to questions on how much Zakat, if at all, charity administrators could allocate to themselves. It was also connected to whether or not secular actors could be considered legitimate administrators. Legitimacy, Dr. Hanif explains, as derived from public trust, is undermined when administrators are perceived as self-appointed. Dr. Hanif further discussed different positionalities of the charity administrator, as agents of the poor and/or as upholding the will of donors.

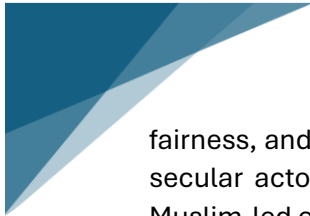
Another perspective suggested that the starting point to resolving questions on how international administrators, such as INGOs, engage with Zakat’s mandate should be the defined objectives of the NGO sector. Questions concerning the administration of Zakat would then fit within this pre-definition. At the same time, as this report details, a key complaint of interviewees across all groups was the perceived failure of INGOs to uphold Zakat’s mandate. Indeed, the aid sector, within which Muslim-led INGOs are situated, was deeply critiqued, thus questioning whether the objectives of the NGO sector make for an adequate starting point, or whether that itself needs to be reviewed.

Discussions on the nature and role of the NGO administrator were connected to conversations on size, scope and institutionalisation. Interviewees that considered Zakat to have a macroeconomic mandate advocated for its institutionalisation, so that this mandate could be effectively implemented. Others drew on the role of Prophet Muhammad as a leader with administrator implementors, as a lesson to argue for the need for central leadership in the distribution of Zakat, through which Zakat becomes more obligatory than discretionary.

Others emphasised the importance of the comprehensive institutionalisation of Zakat, arguing that it needed to bring in all relevant disciplines, including “*political science, sociology, media, economics and development*”, and be subjected to strict oversight and good governance practices.

Administrators of Zakat (Al-‘Āmilīna ‘Alayhā): The category of administrator as a recipient

A small group of interviewees were primarily focused on the experience of the administrator - justified by the fact that the administrator is a recipient category. Challenging a perhaps binary focus on donors and recipients, the administrator as a recipient becomes more than a conduit for administering funds and a stakeholder category with its own particular considerations. That the administrator is a recipient was suggested as evidence of the original intention for Zakat to be a structured institution. It was further discussed in relation to costs that administrators cover for themselves out of the Zakat they collect and administer. For some, that the administrator was factored into the equation of Zakat, demonstrated Islamic principles of justice and fairness, and should eliminate the controversy around administrators also receiving Zakat. That some INGOs and UN agencies purport to direct 100% of Zakat collected to the remaining seven categories, excluding themselves as administrator, was said to undermine the principles of justice and



fairness, and thereby mislead givers on the permissibility of administrators as recipients. Where secular actors take this practice as an offset for not being Muslim, interviewees argued that Muslim-led organisations were placed at a competitive disadvantage as a result.

The issue concerning how much Zakat, if at all, administrators can take for themselves was also said to need resolving because some scholars are of the opinion that, because the *khalifa* is no longer, no administration costs should be taken – again circling back to the earlier point on the need to resolve the identity of the administrator.

Of administrators that do receive a cut of the Zakat received, the practice of allocating a maximum of one-eighth of the total (12.5%), proportionate to the number of Zakat categories. This, however, was also problematised by some interviewees who argued that this is not stipulated in the jurisprudence, and that there should be more flexibility and discretion as to the proportion allocated.

Administrator duties, responsibilities and obligations

“These non-profit organisations that are collecting Zakat have to stop being part of the problem... They're looking at what the consumer wants and then doing that. That's not what the Zakat collector is. The Zakat collector and administrator is a leader, is a visionary.” (Dr. Shariq Siddiqui)

“Civil society and humanitarian organisations are responsible for safeguarding the integrity of Zakat. These institutions must serve as agents of moral transformation and act as protectors of the Ummah's rights, particularly the poor and vulnerable.” (Dr. Saif El-Din AbdulFattah)

Interviewees were asked what the obligations of Zakat administrators were considered to be. Further to the obligation to administer Zakat correctly, responses described the qualities and capabilities expected of administrators, which could be grouped into the overlapping categories of: trustworthy, with principled management of Zakat; professionally competent and knowledgeable. The characteristic cited the most frequently, by a considerable margin, was trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness and transparency

“Institutions are not independent actors — they are servants of a sacred trust, responsible for carrying out Allah's command and protecting the rights of the poor.” ... Zakat institutions must be built on solid trust—community-based, independent, and focused on proper Zakat distribution and also on collecting charity (Sadaqah) ... That way, all efforts can be inclusive, God willing, because people of goodwill will always exist in this Ummah.” (Dr. Saif El-Din AbdulFattah).

“Our scholars of Fiqh and Islamic Studies say that Zakat should be performed by those who are trustworthy, by a group of people who are trustworthy. Because the essence of this worship or the essence of this command of Allah's is the fact that a portion of wealth of wealthy people belongs to the poor. So the poor has the right on the wealth of wealthy people.” (Yusuf Biligin)

Trust was widely considered to be the most important required virtue of the administrator. To administer Zakat, you have to be trusted to uphold the rights of the poor and the will of the donor,



as well as administer Zakat correctly. Being trustworthy was a factor related both to the management of Zakat, and to the intention and integrity of the administrator.

Organisational management principles, such as transparency, accountability and subscribing to the relevant regulatory bodies (where they exist), were listed as important factors affecting trust and trustworthiness, and directly impacting the relationship between givers and administrators. However, it was explained that trust in the NGO as administrator is complicated by the ambiguous identity of the NGO – a matter that, as aforementioned, requires jurisprudential resolution. Trust in governments, where they are responsible for administering or regulating Zakat, was also frequently cited as problematic. The scholars that administrators engage with to guide their policies and oversee administration were also discussed with regards to their legitimacy and how they, therefore, affect the relationship of trust in the administrator. It was argued that scholars should be engaged on the basis of the trust they have earned from society, the *Ummah*. Factors, such as the payment of scholars for their contributions and guidance, were said to undermine this trust and legitimacy.

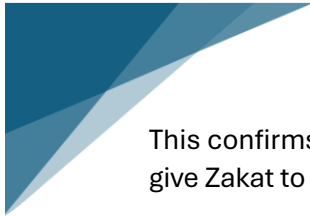
It was, furthermore, considered important that administrators are trusted to make the best decisions for appropriately distributing Zakat. Many interviewees commented that transparent frameworks, policies and audit reports fostered trust. As did being contactable, being open, answering questions and providing information. The larger the entity, the more systemic processes to build trust were considered essential, whereas for small entities, trust was considered to be built more interpersonally through a closer proximity to communities.

Administering Zakat with integrity was regarded highly by interviewees, who pointed out that administrators are managing a trust from Allah. Wealth itself, defined as a sacred trust, or *Amana*, obligates that the administrator of Zakat administers it correctly, with this relationship of trustworthiness described as being between the administrator and Allah. This morally implicates the administrator to uphold the integrity and mandate of Zakat. Being ethically principled, and upholding Islamic values – such as not harming humans, the planet or society – was part of this sacred trust with Allah, and thus expected of administrators of Zakat.

The ethical expectations of trusted administrators include that they administer Zakat justly, fairly and inclusively; that they administer responsibly with the right intention; and that they uphold Islamic values. Principled, trusted administrators were required to uphold the rights of rights holders; act as a bridge between giver and receiver; be a leader and visionary, committed to Zakat's "true role"; to strategically seek impact and compel givers to fulfil their obligation of paying Zakat; to work cooperatively with others; to inform, raise awareness, and advocate by speaking up and addressing the roots of oppression, even when political.

A couple of further points were made on ethical integrity – noting that administrators, and the way in which Zakat is distributed, should not be linked to political objectives that undermine Zakat's conditions of access to resources. Finally, occasionally these discussions touched on the compatibility, or incompatibility, between Islamic values and those of the traditional, secular, humanitarian sector. Neutrality, for example, was cited by one interviewee as explicitly at odds with the core moral ethics of Zakat, and, therefore, the obligations on the administrator to uphold the same.

Lack of trust in Zakat administrators – whether governments, NGOs, or government-affiliated, national institutions – was the reason that the majority of eligible givers still choose to give their Zakat directly, from individual to individual, rather than through organisations and institutions.



This confirms that if an administrator is not perceived as credible and trustworthy, givers will not give Zakat to them.

Professional Competence

“When I say professionalism, it goes beyond the theological knowledge. I've seen it myself. Most of the time, someone will not pay Zakat because you've recited the Quran from the start to the end. No, he will pay Zakat because you have a Facebook page, you have a YouTube channel where you can watch what you do. You communicate well and sometimes you show that you are committed to what you're doing.” (Dr. Namungo Hamzah)

At times, specific competency criteria were explicitly connected to the type of outcome the administration of Zakat should be pursuing. For example, where macroeconomic, or economies of scale, were being considered, the administrator was expected to be big enough to deliver at that scale. The administrator is expected to be capable, competent, professional, and qualified (which implies meeting a qualifying criteria).

Professionalism was linked to the employment of systems that ensure transparency, accountability and proper financial management, as described above, as well as having professional communication practices and the technical expertise required to collect, record, disburse and report back. Professionalism was also linked to having an institutional approach. Additionally, it was on the topic of professionalism that more lenient attitudes to secular involvement were expressed, and where some interviewees considered that being Muslim was not, on its own, a sufficient qualifying criterion.

Administrative practices considered highly important were: financial accounting and management (including having a separate account for Zakat and spending it within its required timeframe); proper budgeting, transparency and reporting; having systems in place to track income and expenditure specifically for Zakat; measuring and reporting on impact; having policies and oversight procedures; and staff training.

Knowledgeable

“Zakat administrators are supposed to be people who know both the social and spiritual reasons for which Zakat is prescribed.” (Imam Sa-id Mukhtar Abubakar)

Administrators were, therefore, expected to be knowledgeable – spiritually, technically, and socially. They should have a deep understanding of the principles and ethics of Zakat, including its constraints and obligations, as well as an understanding of the need and social context relevant to its disbursement, in order to enable strategic and impactful distribution. Without understanding the needs of rights holders and Zakat's criteria, administrators were considered unable to fulfil the obligation of Zakat that it reaches the eligible recipients. There was general appreciation that different stakeholders bring different expertise, and that knowledge sharing and collaboration were, therefore, considered essential in ensuring informed administration in an interdisciplinary way.

Local vs. international administration considerations

“There are many reasons why I don't think it's correct to say it's wrong to go overseas. But what I try to separate is it's not an either/or, we just have to do our best to the ties and duties that we have, and the tie to the local is a real tie.” (Dr. Sohail Hanif)



“We know that if you cut out the middleman, it increases efficiency, and so this is a chance to actually increase efficiency within the system and embrace that reality, whether it's with Zakat or with anything else.” (Lamees Hafeez)

While the Quran does not explicitly command that Zakat must be spent locally, scholars draw on verses used in Zakat jurisprudence, such as *“Whatever good you spend is for parents and relatives, orphans, the needy, and the traveller”* (Quran 2:215), to support the principle of prioritising local giving. This principle is further reinforced by the Prophet’s instruction to Mu’adh ibn Jabal: *“Take from their rich and give to their poor”* (Bukhari 1395; Muslim 19), highlighting that Zakat is ideally collected and distributed within the same community.

Five interviewees anticipated that the opinion of scholars is likely to be that Zakat should be given out locally, in the location it is collected. It was pointed out that, in classical jurisprudence that pre-dates the nation state, ‘local’ actually refers to the city level. At the same time, there were a number of opinions shared that both local and international giving is justified. Interviewees discussed how, in contemporary times, the globalised nature of communities and the economy warrants a more nuanced understanding of the view of Zakat as a strictly localised phenomena. There were mixed views on whether national versus international administration of Zakat stood in competition with each other.

A little over half (57%) of all survey respondents considered it important or highly important that recipients of Zakat are local to where they, as givers, live.

At the same time, the relationship between Zakat’s tie to the local, as well as the push for localisation in the international aid sector, was raised as a potentially complementary discussion.

The relational role of the administrator

“Their relationship with us is based on trust and credibility. It’s not a legal relationship but a voluntary one. When they hand over their Zakat to us, they consider us accountable before God for using it properly, and usually don’t follow up on the details afterwards.” (Dr. Talioua Brahim)

“How do we make sure that they believe in the work that we do, essentially? And how do we create trust? And I think things like the Zakat guide, being transparent about how we administer and how we make our decisions is an important part of that.” (Lamees Hafeez)

“The whole purpose of Zakat is that the recipient is on top, and the donor is told - your needy. Your wealth is impure - you need some of the poor to take it, and that allows you to enjoy your wealth. So that the scale is tipped to make the donor needy and the recipient deserving. But the modern charity structure’s not designed like that, and so we’re operating in an imperfect structure where the donor is on top.” (Dr. Sohail Hanif)

Based on the obligations that administrators are perceived to have, interviewees were asked what this meant for the relationship between the administrator, the giver and the rights holder. The opinions expressed in this section mostly summarise those of administrators, for whom this discussion was more applicable.



A couple of interviewees regard the relational role that the administrator facilitates between giver and receiver as carrying the “*spirit of life*” or the “*spirit of bonding*” with the organisation representing the community of givers.

As aforementioned, trust was stated as a key ingredient to this relationship. Different examples were described as to how to build this trust. One administrator interviewee explained how their Ulama Council (a group of Islamic scholars providing religious guidance and rulings) was intentionally made up of people known and trusted by the communities that give their Zakat to them. Another interviewee explained how they were building relationships with public authority structures seen as key to winning public trust. It was further pointed out how organisations employ certain tactics to foster trust. For example, calling an appeal “*Zakat eligible*” plays on the expectations of givers that a higher percentage of their Zakat will reach rights holders. This further calls into question the ethics of marketing, which can be an inspiring or manipulative tool. Thus, how organisations market themselves and influence others was deemed a factor in the extent to which givers were giving from a place of sincerity.

Communication and information sharing was also cited frequently as an important element in building relationships between administrators and givers. Some interviewees expressed that it was important that givers be given the opportunity to engage. Whereas for others, transparency was crucial, so that givers could ask questions, understand impact, and hold the administrator to account. For the same purpose, reports were also regarded to be valuable.

The survey found that 60% of respondents considered it very important or essential that they were kept informed about the impact of the Zakat they had given. 20% said it had little to no importance, and the remaining were neutral.

Again, the discussion around who should lead in decision making – the giver or the administrator – was varied. There were strong opinions expressed that administrators should not be following or defaulting to the demands of givers, particularly in the context of only giving to short-term, emergency responses. There was a recognition, even amongst those who took a more accommodating view concerning the administrator as upholding the will of givers, that it could be limiting if Zakat’s full scope is not properly understood. At the same time, some recognised that givers are sometimes well informed and can play a role in holding administrators to account.

A fair number of interviewees considered it important that administrators raise awareness and inform givers about the religious obligation of Zakat, and the needs that the organisation is meeting. Further suggestions included: keeping givers informed and involved when decisions and policies were being made; recognising the role of various media in building rapport and influencing attitudes and perceptions; considering the importance of the relationship with givers for building loyalty. Interviewees pointed out that the relationship depends on the size of the organisation, with smaller organisations able to have a more personal relationship, foster trust more easily and accommodate donor requests.

*When asked about their preferred categories for Zakat allocation, the **poor and destitute** were consistently the top priority of all survey respondents. “**For the cause of Allah**”, and “**those in debt**”, are strong secondary preferences. “Stranded travellers”, Zakat administrators, and freeing slaves were mentioned less often but still appeared.*



The relationship between the administrator and the rights holders

Which relationship was centred by the administrator was acknowledged a couple of times as problematic. One interviewee expressed the opinion that sometimes it says rights holder on paper, but it is not upheld in reality. Another explained prioritisation as the wrong way round – that administrators should be centring the rights holder over the giver. Some interviewees shared the opinion that sometimes the administrator was not delivering Zakat in a way that upheld the dignity of the rights holder. Notably, the perspective of rights holders is essential in understanding this relationship.

Programming considerations

“Zakat’s eight categories really could fit into any of the buckets that we can see today as modern challenges to our society, whether it’s injustice, whether it is climate issues, whether it is any of those things, in my mind could fit within that.” (Dr. Shariq Siddiqui)

“Instead of us waiting for Ramadan, we take Zakat in Ramadan, then we administer it for just one thing. Let’s say a one-time project in Ramadan and then we all crawl back into our shelves waiting for the next Ramadan for the next Zakat. Zakat is not supposed to be collected and given only in Ramadan. You can collect it in Ramadan and work with it all year long. So Muslim leaders could sit back, draw sustainable goals for the Muslim communities in which we find ourselves in. We take the Zakat as our resource and work it on to the sustainable goals that we have set for our communities and our people, and create sustainable implementations and interventions that will take us out of our vulnerability and the extreme poverty.” (Nuhu Alimatu Sadia)

“For other projects, maybe you can report it and say, oh the project has failed because of this and that. But Zakat money, it can’t be like that. So, I don’t know how that (the Zakat) will be replaced. So the organisation has to have a contingency plan.” (Mukhtar Bihi)

“I think the reason a lot of people stick to that very conservative one (concept), sometimes even though the leadership might think otherwise, is because they’re worried about turning off their donors when they take a new approach. They want to make sure that donors don’t mistrust or question how their Zakat is being used and thus stop donating their Zakat to them. I think that plays into how we administer Zakat. But there is an education piece around that... there’s a lot of education that needs to be done in the community around Zakat and what Zakat can be used for.” (Lamees Hafeez)

Interviewees discussed the implications of the obligations on Zakat administrators on programming decisions.

In terms of meeting needs and achieving a more sustainable impact, some called for administrators to provide more to fewer people; to provide business capital; to be more strategic and intentioned with interventions. Many expressed the opinion that it should do both – meet immediate needs and seek to empower – and that finding this balance was context specific. One stated that following a graduation approach to meeting needs was helpful. Whilst there was an overall sentiment that administrators should be programming more proactively for empowerment, one administrator expressed the belief that Zakat could not be spent in that way, and could only be allocated to emergency programming.

There was also some discussion on whether Zakat should be spent on community-benefit projects, or given directly to individuals or households, with some preferring that individuals are

given preference, and others saying both options are possible. Some mentioned that specific requirements need to be fulfilled if the project is community based. Firstly, there needs to be a consultation to reach an agreement on how the Zakat is spent. Certain criteria were suggested – for example, that 75% of the community be eligible to receive Zakat, or that the allocated proportion of Zakat matches the proportion of eligibility, then other funds be used for remaining requirements. The considerations around community-benefit projects focused on the concept of ownership and the obligation of the administrator to correctly transfer ownership of Zakat.

Zakat helping individuals directly	62% of survey respondents said it was either important or essential that the Zakat they give helps individuals directly (a scholarship or business investment, for example), whereas 9% said it was not important, and the remaining were neutral.
Zakat contributing to community projects	A similar number, 67% , said it was essential or very important that the Zakat they give contributes towards a project (a school or a hospital, for example) that will benefit individuals and communities.
This may mean that most survey respondents do not see an incompatibility between the importance of supporting individuals and the importance of supporting communal projects with the Zakat they give.	

Due to the responsibility of transferring ownership, one interviewee expressed the risk aversion they had witnessed, where community welfare projects are avoided if they have a risk of failure. The same applies when it comes to meeting needs in more inaccessible locations and how the pressure to administer Zakat correctly can sometimes lead to decisions being made that are considered safer and easier.

Further Zakat programming challenges were shared: the difficulty in securing long-term funding for community projects when Zakat fluctuates; decision making being constrained by donor wishes; the challenge of competing crises; the difficulties associated with *Zakat Al Fitr*, which is received during Ramadan and must be distributed within three days.

Staggering Zakat income and expenditure was a key theme, with some expressing frustration with steep fluctuations, and that it was not more evenly received across the year. Some of this critique pointed to the lack of awareness of givers who believe they can only give during Ramadan, and it also touched on aforementioned issues of marketing practices. Another aspect that came into question was the ethics of emergency appeals that raise a lot of Zakat that is then retained by organisations for a year.

Impact and monitoring

“When it comes to Zakat, if you ask nearly any organisation, what are the plans for Zakat to be used over the next 10, 15, 10, 15 years, nobody’s thinking of Zakat impact ... so that next year’s donors also give us Zakat. So very, very parochial, very myopic, short-term use of Zakat.” (Sheikh Muhammad Nuruddeen Lemu)

“When you are transferring, what is the purpose of transferring? Its purpose is to alleviate their poverty. If you check, and you transfer, and it does not alleviate their poverty, or their hunger, or whatever, then I think you are not achieving your purpose.” (Prof. Aliyu Dahiru)



“Zakat is currently delivered in a very, well, in a delivery manner. In most places, we're not even looking at building a system that allows it to be administered in a fashion which would even look at impact, right? I mean, impact measurement in the sector is terrible anyway.” (Lamees Hafeez)

“If an organisation has operated within the same community for four decades and that community remains dependent on external assistance, this raises a critical question about the effectiveness of such interventions. Zakat should serve as a mechanism for empowerment and sustainable development, rather than perpetuating dependency.” (Shahin Ashraf)

In the international giving context, neither secular, Muslim-led NGOs nor UN agencies measure the impact of the Zakat they distribute according to the expected impact criteria found by this consultation: faith building; community building; economic empowerment. UNHCR's Islamic Philanthropy Fund 2024 Impact report¹⁶ for example shares delivery statistics (no. of families that have received Zakat) but omits longer term findings with regards to the impact receiving Zakat has had for rights holders. The same can be said for Muslim-led and secular NGOs, who primarily report delivery indicators. There is therefore a general absence of information relating to the impact international administration of Zakat is having on people's faith, sense of belonging to community, and longer term economic situation.

The pursuit of impact – measuring and sharing the findings – was considered important by a number of interviewed administrators. It was expressed that impact should be demonstrable, tangible, and an improvement, and that its pursuit would encourage more strategic decision making. As earlier detailed, the most popularly held view is that Zakat should be achieving poverty alleviation and empowerment. Interviewees discussed the difference between the distribution of Zakat and its utilisation, where the latter refers to a focus on impact. Others described this as 'productive Zakat'.

Engaging with givers so that they understand the impact of their Zakat was widely considered as important, particularly so they could learn the importance of longer-term programming. However, administrators frequently admitted that the pursuit of impact rarely happened. Rights holders are not routinely asked for their feedback on the impact that Zakat has had on their lives. Although delivery statistics are being collected, impact statistics are not. One interviewee suggested that perhaps organisations are not focusing on impact because they suspect the findings will not be flattering.

Focus Area	% of Respondents Who Considered It Essential or Very Important
Humanitarian purposes	81% of all survey respondents considered it essential or very important that the Zakat they gave was used for humanitarian purposes (immediate relief from the impact of conflict or environment-related crises).
Long-term societal improvement	At the same time, a similar proportion (76%) considered it essential or very important that the Zakat they gave was used to achieve long-term impact for the improvement of the society where it is given.
Considering preferences for supporting individuals versus communities, survey responses overall demonstrate that there is not necessarily a perceived contradiction between short- and long-term goals, or between individual and community needs. This mirrors the opinions of interviewees who advocate for Zakat administration that addresses both immediate needs and longer-term, sustainable impact.	

¹⁶ UNHCR, [Islamic Philanthropy Annual Report](#), 2024 (Accessed 23.10.25)



Policies, Zakat compliancy and eligibility

“We must have best practice certification for Zakat as well. If you are a Zakat entity – who made you? And who gave you the certification of compliance? And what metric have you met to be that compliant?” (Mohammed Fawzi Amadu)

“If Maliki will not allow for the benefit of the masses, but Hanbali provides it, they will go for the Hanbali ruling. If it is the Hanafi rather, they will go for it. So here also, in Nigeria, we are still Maliki in terms of collection and distribution, but we are also borrowing some fatwas from across the world, because the world is now a global village.” (Dr Muhammad Lawal Maidoki)

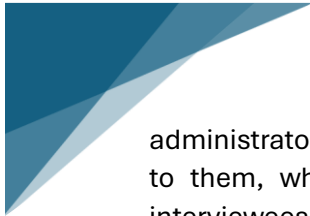
“If that person trusts you, they are going to give it you. There is no: ‘Are you compliant or not?’” (Mukhtar Bihi)

“On a high level, the theologians are giving their verdict on what Zakat can and cannot be used for, so they can sign the Zakat policy. But I think there needs to be greater oversight, and a deeper understanding operationally regarding what that means for the organisation that has the Zakat policy. Because you can get a Zakat policy signed off, but are you actually implementing the policy? I am not convinced that many people are. And, at the same time, I think theologians can work in theory and they need to understand the practicality and understand the wider sector. So, from a religious perspective, the allocation of Zakat and collection of Zakat by X organisation may be working fine, but you need to look at the broader picture and what does that mean for the institute of Zakat? What does that mean for Zakat in the future? What's the broader impact of approving or allowing this to take place? I don't think that's understood, I don't think it's been looked at.” (Adil Bader)

Many interviewees considered having a Zakat policy to be essential for building trust and transparency, and to guide correct practice and auditing. Interviewees explained that policies should be written in engagement with scholars and should include Zakat's unique considerations and administrative obligations. Staff training on the staff policies should also be implemented. Many, but not all, administrative interviewees reported having such policies and Sharia boards, or Ulama councils, with legal scholars overseeing the policy. A number of administrator interviewees explicitly mentioned both Islamic Relief and The National Zakat Foundation as two organisations whose policies and approaches were being used to benchmark best practices. One interviewee likened policies to a box-ticking exercise, and another referred to its role as a marketing tool.

Some interviewees without specific Zakat policies explained that administrators that are trusted do not need policies, that policies are not required when the staff have sufficient knowledge about Zakat, or that some policies cover Sadaqah and Waqf in addition to Zakat.

It was pointed out that the scholars should be named, and that ideally their contributions should be provided on a voluntary basis – otherwise they should declare the compensation received. There was a view shared by a couple of interviewees that scholars overseeing Zakat matters in international administration tend to be consultants from the Islamic Finance sector. The trust that scholars have, which was described as needing to be derived from the community, was also said to be a factor guiding their engagement. Based on the responses, it seemed that some



administrators engage with scholars known to be trusted by the communities that give their Zakat to them, whereas others suggested that this is not necessarily common practice. Some interviewees commented on the lack of knowledge some scholars have on the practices of the administrator and the implementation of the policies they are signing, noting that in some cases scholars sign off on policies having been provided with very limited information.

That there is not one authority granting scholars legitimacy was cited to sometimes be a challenge. The practice of borrowing *fatwas* from different schools, according to what suited your needs, was discussed in both a positive and negative light. Suggestions for systems that regulate best practice were put forward as ways to evaluate and determine compliancy, without which compliancy could be against anything, eroding its value. Interviewees suggested establishing bodies to certify which organisations are eligible to administer Zakat and to regulate their compliance with agreed-upon criteria.

In the UK context, there is no centralised authority offering certification or regulation concerning compliance. The Muslim Charities Forum offers advice on how to check whether or not organisations are following best practices¹⁷, and the Islamic Finance Advisory offer a “Zakah Eligibility Certification”¹⁸ based on their Zakah policy. Take-up, however, does not appear to be widespread, with only five charities listed as certified on their website.

7. Perspectives on secular administration

Building on discussions concerning the role of the administrator and its obligations in administering Zakat, interviewees were asked for their opinion on the role of secular actors specifically – whether they felt they should be collecting it, and why, or why not. Survey respondents, or givers of Zakat, were also asked this question, framed as preferences for the administration of Zakat. The UN was the main reference point regarding secular actors, but discussions also included IFRC / RC societies and secular INGOs.

Comments on the growing interest of secular actors

“There was not a single discussion in terms of what are the principles and the core ethics about Zakat and how it should be used. No. It was: ‘Oh, there is a lot of money out there.’”
(Naser Haghamed, in reference to the World Humanitarian Summit 2026)

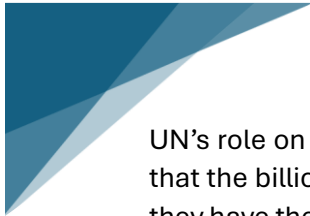
“It is like you are getting into someone's backyard and building a pond there for your own use.” (Dr. Namungo Hamzah)

A number of interviewees shared their experiences engaging in UN-led discussions on Zakat. As previously noted regarding comments on the emergence and mainstreaming of the term “Islamic Social Finance”, these interviewees shared the opinion that the UN perceived Zakat purely for its potential to fill funding gaps. It was noted that interest in faith-based humanitarianism was minimal prior to the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. Some interviewees described the introduction of Zakat to the summit agenda as lacking meaningful engagement and consultation of Muslim-led NGOs.

Other interviewees discussed experiences of attending the World Zakat Forum in 2019, where the UN sought approval from attending organisations to collect and administer Zakat. Pitching the

¹⁷ Muslim Charities Forum, [Is your Zakat Charity Compliant? Here's How To Check](#), 17.03.25 (Accessed 22.10.25)

¹⁸ Islamic Finance Advisory, [Zakah Eligibility Certifications](#) (Accessed 22.10.25)



UN's role on the basis that the global demographic in greatest humanitarian need are Muslims, that the billions generated by Muslims via Zakat and other funds are not filling the gap, and that they have the institutional capacity to do so. When they did not get the answer and approval they sought, a couple of interviewees described a pattern of “*fatwa shopping*”, where specific *muftis* or scholars from various schools were successfully solicited for their favourable response.

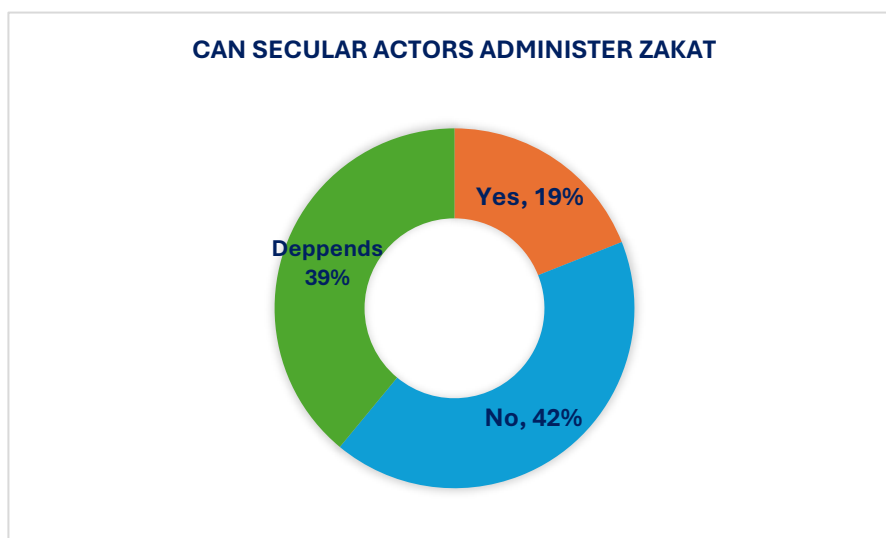
Another interviewee noted that the challenges Muslim organisations were facing with regards to de-banking and de-risking contributed to their weakened position when it came to Zakat distribution and negotiations around the same. Instead of helping to address obstacles to enable Muslim-led facilitation of Zakat money, UN agencies were seen instead as exploiting the space – pitching themselves as better able to deliver. Interviewees also pointed out the growing interest of INGOs, which was described as opportunistic and lacking awareness of the principles and ethics of Zakat.

A number of interviewees also discussed the partnerships between Muslim governments and UN agencies, and expressed fears of the ripple effect it could have on the entire sector. Namely, that it charts a path to normalising and mandating UN administration globally. Growing UN interest in *Waqf* was also discussed. Common to these comments was the sense that the growing interest and influence of secular actors posed a threat and Muslim organisations needed to be more proactive in addressing it.

It was explained that some Muslim countries restrict western-based, Muslim-led INGOs from operating due to the perceived threat of such organisations to governmental authority and legitimacy. One interviewee argued that they, INGOs, cast a spotlight on the failure of said governments to use Islamic principles to help the most needy. Consequently, in regions where organisations have been restricted from operating and transferring money, it has been mentioned that the UN has filled the vacuum, becoming the largest recipient of government resources, and “*basically having a free ride.*”

Although not currently concerned about the funding environment, one interviewee (whose organisation received Zakat from givers in the UK) recognised that if UN funding progressed from receiving government funding, to receiving corporate funding, it could very likely then progress to influence the giving practices of individual givers.

Opinions on whether secular actors can administer Zakat



Responding to the question of whether secular actors could collect Zakat, 19% of interviewees replied 'Yes', in their opinion, this was fine. 42% of interviewees answered 'No', and almost as many (39%) responded without a fixed position, noting that it depended on various considerations.

This somewhat surprising result contrasts with the survey finding that 81% of respondents consider it either “essential” or “very important” that their Zakat is distributed by Muslims.

This is particularly notable when considering the proliferation of Zakat Funds administered by secular organisations, as well as the more recent indications that some Muslim charities are beginning to donate the Zakat they have collected to UN agencies for their onward distribution¹⁹. It is unclear whether or not individuals donating Zakat to these charities have been consulted on the same.

'Yes' responses

“We need evidence from the Quran or Sunnah, or something that shows it's contrary to the Maqasid of Sharia, to say it is haram. Otherwise halal is the default position.” (Sheikh Muhammad Nuruddeen Lemu)

“The whole point is to do what is best for the beneficiary receiving that money. It's all about them.” (Mukhtar Bihi).

The 19% of interviewees who responded that secular actors could administer Zakat cited the absence of scriptural evidence to the contrary. They referenced the story of Prophet Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Medina, noting that the person he trusted along the way was not a Muslim²⁰. Further, some interviewees who answered that secular actors should not

¹⁹ See: UNHCR, [Executive Summary 2024](#) (Accessed 22.10.25) detailing contributions received to the Refugee Zakat Fund from Islamic Relief USA amongst other organisations, and; Muslim Charity, [Muslim Charity Joins IOM Islamic Philanthropy Fund](#), 23.97.2025 (Accessed 22.10.25)

²⁰ Ibn Hajar Al Asqalani in *Al-Isabah fi tamyiz al Sahabah* (1372)



administer Zakat also acknowledged that they were unable to provide scriptural evidence supporting this position.

Other interviewees emphasised that the priority should be the rights holder, as well as that Zakat fulfils its role in the community and that the administrator is capable of effective delivery, regardless of whether they are Muslim.

Occasionally, the view was expressed that the UN and secular actors are better positioned to meet people's needs, sometimes offering more accountable and professional systems to deliver at scale. Affirmative responses were given with the same conditions outlined elsewhere in this report—that secular actors abide by Zakat's rules and are trustworthy, capable, and principled.

'No' responses

42% of interviewees expressed the position that secular actors should not be administering Zakat, the largest group by a small margin. Reasons provided can be grouped into two categories:

- **Ideological concerns:** the view that secular administration contradicts the ethical framework of Islam.
- **Structural and systemic concerns:** the belief that secular administration upholds inequitable power dynamics.

In some cases, there was an overlap in the reasoning provided by interviewees who rejected secular administration outright and those who viewed it as dependent on conditions.

Secular administration contradicts Islam's ethical framework

"These institutions do not view Zakat as an act of worship ... If we're not present in these discussions, Zakat will be reduced to a mere tax—and its spirit and status will be lost." (Dr. Talioua Brahim)

For some interviewees opposed to the secular administration of Zakat, the primary concern was predominantly focused on the clash between Islamic and secular principles, and the resulting inability of secular actors to uphold Zakat's religious, spiritual, and ethical tenets. Some interviewees also spoke about the inability of secular actors to fulfil Zakat's "soft power" role – namely, its influence in strengthening faith, and developing the connection and "spiritual feeling" between giver and receiver, which serves to foster solidarity and peace among Muslims.

Unlike Muslims, who were considered as being better able to "have the condition of the Muslim community at heart" secular actors were seen as not being able to fulfil the faith and community building aspects of Zakat's mandate. One interviewee explained that secular actors would not be able to understand Zakat's nature as an act of worship and its spiritual status would be lost as a result.

For some interviewees, the contradiction with Islam's ethical framework was linked to concerns of morality regarding gender and sexuality. Three interviewees expressed concern that the secular administration of Zakat could negatively impact Muslim communities by promoting secular, liberal attitudes toward gender and sexuality that are perceived to be in conflict with Islamic values.



Secular administration upholds inequitable power dynamics and systems

“If we want decision-making power to sit over here, well, then Zakat is part of that power, right? If I want to have the power of deciding really how my Zakat is spent for my communities and the impact it has on my communities, then I need to hold the power over the Zakat.” (Lamees Hafeez)

“So, in the case of the UN, I’ll say that the intention could be there, but the intention is buried... because it’s a force... 192 countries all over the globe they come into play to form the UN. I think they’re too strong. So, if someone wanted to question the compliance with Sharia, who is going to be questioned? It’s too big.” (Dr. Namungo Hamzah)

Several interviewees highlighted systemic issues, inequities and prevailing power dynamics to explain their opposition to secular administration (predominantly referring to the role of the UN). These systemic reflections were at times directly linked to Islam's ethical framework, or to its political and moral economy, with interviewees explaining that secular administration contradicts these principles. In other cases, such reflections were shared without reference to Islamic frameworks.

The role of Zakat as a source of influence for diaspora-led INGOs within the inequitable power dynamics of the aid system was highlighted in responses. Interviewees also expressed a preference for secular actors to empower local communities to improve Zakat administration, rather than appropriating that power for themselves. One interviewee assessed that the UN's increasing interest in Zakat is in line with long-standing power structures in the sector, amounting to *“just an extension of more imbalance of power.”*

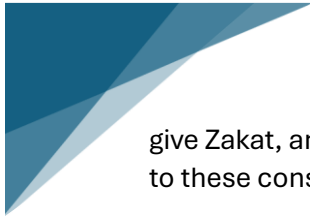
Geopolitical critiques were also offered. One interviewee pointed out the structural flaw in relying on colonial institutions to regulate Zakat, and how it undermines Islamic sovereignty. They asserted that the responsibility should rather be on Islamic institutions, which are grounded in the knowledge and values of the faith. A couple of interviewees pointed out the problematic governmental nature of the UN, describing it as *“handicapped”* by the politics of the organisation. They administer only in line with those politics, instead of with concepts of Islamic finance and matters of economic justice.

One interviewee mentioned how the role of the UN Security Council, the power of the veto and the dominant influence of secular governments within it, often work to the disadvantage of Muslim communities globally. Another interviewee noted how the size of the UN places it outside the realm of accountability.

Of the interviewees that responded ‘No’, a couple acknowledged that the UN was leading in financial transparency and accountability (while others pointed out UN inefficiencies), and they indicated that this was something that Muslim organisations should be aiming to strengthen. One administrator interviewee advised that Muslim communities in the West *“establish an authority”* of their own.

‘Context-dependent’ responses

Of the 39% of interviewees who said secular administration depended on the context, some for example discussed the underlying issues that need to be addressed before a clear opinion can be formed - including resolving the theory of the administrator. The perspective of Muslims who



give Zakat, and whom they trust to fulfil this obligation on their behalf, was highlighted as central to these considerations.

For many interviewees, whether or not secular administration of Zakat was acceptable depended on whether the obligations of the administrator were being fulfilled.

This included upholding Zakat's spiritual mandate and meeting key criteria, such as having a specific department to manage Zakat; a Zakat board of scholars to guide administration; adhering to relevant policies; having the necessary skills, knowledge and professionalism; and being accountable.

While interviewees often expressed a preference for Muslim-led administration, many noted that secular administration could be acceptable—provided these conditions were met.

One interviewee weighed religiosity against professionalism, arguing that quality should also be considered an important factor.

Some interviewees broke down the role of Zakat administration into distinct components and considered the role of secular actors in relation to each part. One academic interviewee, for example, divided administration into collection and implementation, explaining that it is important for Muslims to collect (under a structured and strategic authority), but the secular actor could disperse. This proposal would allow Muslim actors to maintain control over the vision and its coherence.

Another administrator interviewee expressed a contrary opinion, emphasising how important it is for those delivering the programmes, and the community-interface, to be Muslim. To them, this was where faith identity mattered the most, but the organisation itself could be secular.

For respondents in the 'No' group, having Muslim staff did not make a secular organisation eligible to administer Zakat.

Also within this group were respondents who weighed the pros and cons of both options, ultimately concluding that acceptability depended on the specific situation, needs, and exceptional circumstances.

Cross-cutting discussions on the topic of secular administration

A common rationale among interviewees with a more accommodating view toward secular administration was that the primary concern should be the rights holder and who is best positioned to meet their needs.

A couple of interviewees indicated that understanding the issues surrounding secular administration was important for them to gain a more informed view on the matter.

This point was raised by others who questioned whether scholars endorsing secular administration are doing so in a fully informed manner, or whether they are only reviewing the limited information provided to them. Interviewees also discussed how compensation shapes a scholar's decision to approve administrative eligibility. One interviewee commented that *"the market is open... with love and respect, they are consultants."* This echoes the calls of others for transparency with regards to compensation (applicable to scholarly engagement with both secular and Muslim-led actors), and touches on questions concerning the derivation of legitimacy.



In a couple of responses, the interviewee clearly distinguished between the official scholarly opinion that secular administration is permitted under specific conditions, and their own opinion that it is not. Others recognised the sensitivity of the topic, understanding why there are strong feelings about it, but also felt that being too strict causes challenges. Frequently, interviewees across all responses reiterated that the answer to this question cannot be found conclusively in the religious texts.

There was a notable tendency that Global Majority administrators were more sympathetic to secular administration. This might be due to having a different experience with the power structures in the sector, and not sharing the concern that their donor base was threatened, as many received locally, from diaspora communities and from Muslim-government funding. Perhaps, as one interview indicated, there might also be opportunities in secular administration for local administrators.

For example, during one interview, an administrator shared a conversation they were engaged in with a secular actor due to be receive government Zakat funding. That secular actor was engaging in discussions with local Muslim-led organisations for the purpose of developing partnerships for its disbursement. For this interviewee, the secular actor disbursing funds to local organisations was not perceived as problematic as such, rather the competition of local secular organisations, falsely positioning themselves as Muslim-led in order to qualify for the same partnerships.

Discussions concerning secular administration were also linked to general discussions on the administrator as a recipient category and the percentage of Zakat that administrators are able to take to pay themselves. Interviewees commented that when *fatwas* are obtained by secular administrators, they often include the caveat that no percentage is taken due to not being Muslim. These secular actors are then able to market their Zakat funds as going directly to recipients in their entirety, miseducating the giver on the permissibility of administrator costs and giving the secular actor a competitive advantage.

Funding cuts and Zakat

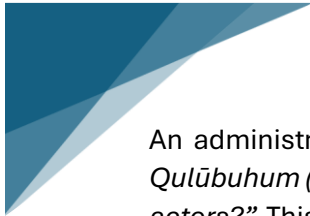
“Now that USAID has scaled back and many donors are facing financial challenges, there seems to be a growing focus on exploring how to access Zakat funds.” (Farhia Ahmed)

Administrator responses were mixed as to whether they perceived an increased threat due to the USAID-led aid cuts. Some were not worried and alluded to a sense of security in their donor bases. Others felt that the cuts would increase interest—particularly from secular organizations—in Zakat as a means to address their growing funding gaps.

Shared critiques

“There are still a lot of Muslim charities looking at Zakat as transaction fund. But actually Zakat is not a transaction. Zakat is not a transactional fund. Zakat is a communication of bonding, and community building.” (Dr. Hany ElBanna)

Some of the critiques levelled against secular administration, actors and the aid system broadly were also applied to Muslim organisations and governments. One academic interviewee disagreed with the administration of Zakat as a political economy tool if and where it becomes aligned with neo-liberal agendas that undermine the “*pre-Zakat condition*” from taking place – applied the argument equally to the UN, Big Tech, and Muslim governments.



An administrator noted how Muslim-led organisations avoid the Zakat category *Al-Mu'allafati Qulūbuhum* (those whose hearts are to be reconciled), and asked, "Are we any different to secular actors?" This category is often considered controversial within the secular system and under principles of neutrality. Without upholding the spiritual and theological layers of Zakat's framework, and the objectives of Zakat to seek social cohesion and faith strengthening, it was suggested that Muslim-led organisations are not administering Zakat differently to secular administrators.

Another asserted that the absence of the spiritual components of Zakat depended on the size of an organisation, suggesting that the larger it is, the more spiritually removed Zakat becomes, and the more it becomes reduced to a financial mechanism. Again, it was reflected upon whether there was any difference between them and secular NGOs in this regard.

It was pointed out by another administrator that some Muslim-led organisations also uphold inequitable power dynamics; contradict localisation and power shifting efforts; and enforce a colonial approach to aid.

8. Is Zakat's Mandate Being Fulfilled? Interviewee Quotes

"When we think of Zakat today, it has actually lost its real purpose. Its purpose has always been to be a macroeconomic tool... I think this is one of the systemic problems today."

-Dr. Shariq Siddiqui

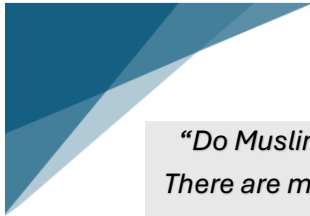
"Sometimes the practice really contradicts the main point of Zakat in Islam. Because Zakat, for me, it's very simple, that it should lift people from poverty. And the practice... is just help them maybe to stay alive, survive. So, there is some kind of contradiction between the practice of distributing Zakat and the main purpose of Zakat in Islam. Therefore, we need to redefine, not the meaning of Zakat itself, but how charities, NGOs, and Zakat-operating institutions handle its collection and distribution. It's very simple and transformative." -Dr. Othman Moqbel

"If we were fulfilling Zakat properly, as we should have been doing, then the poverty levels in society would have significantly reduced. But because we have neglected that responsibility, the rich are growing rich and the poor are growing poor. In fact, that gap between the rich and the poor, its expanding nature is the outcome of the free-market society and their beliefs."

- Dr. Abdul-Rahim Adada Mohammed

"Currently, our aid system is very delivery focused. It's not about enabling. It's not about empowerment. It's not really about long-term change and real social and economic empowerment. It's not about that at all. It just feeds itself. It truly is an industry." ...

"If we look at the history of our NGOs, and then the history of Muslim NGOs, Muslim NGOs have very much copy and pasted the format of INGOs that existed prior to them, and a very colonised approach to aid, for want of a better word, which means that you just put Zakat within that, right, as another funding stream. You're not actually thinking outside of that in terms of how we can build a system that works and might not be exactly like the system that already exists. You're sort of just replicating what already exists and trying to fit within that system. And I think that's part of the problem that we've consistently faced." -Lamees Hafeez



“Do Muslim donors have options? Yes, they certainly do, and we should be open about that. There are many organisations to choose from. But the real question is: are these organisations truly fulfilling their purpose and reaching their rightful recipients? Zakat givers should focus on the difference and impact their contributions make, rather than just the administrative costs.”

-Fadi Itani

“Most Zakat institutions are focused on poverty alleviation. But they don’t think in terms of economic redistribution. So when we talk about integrating sustainability into Zakat management—it’s not just important, it’s a core Islamic principle. What we really need is to modernise our Zakat thinking—shift our institutions to focus on economic inequality and environmental justice. That’s how you create meaningful redistribution—by addressing climate resilience, sustainable resource use, and ecological balance.” (Shahin Ashraf)

“Muslim charities are not engaging with the questions of why these people are being killed, why these people are being oppressed...Because that’s an important aspect of Zakat as a notion. Not Zakat as money, but Zakat as a notion, bringing peace. But no one asked that question....No. Collecting money, feeding people. Yes, of course, we have to do that. That’s our responsibility. But the larger issue, how to overcome the barriers. And how to break barriers.” ...

“The ultimate Islamic political, economic condition of Zakat is how we can emancipate people, how we can make people free, free of the need. That’s the Zakat condition as well. But unfortunately, that is not debated.” - Dr. Mehmet Asutay

“Zakat is both a personal duty and a major global resource: with roughly two billion eligible payers, even a two-percent global levy could tackle climate change and economic inequality. Zakat is a God-given recipe to address many challenges.” -Dr. Sandra Pertek

“If we do not take part in shaping the discourse, proposing legal and institutional alternatives, and defining how Zakat should be integrated — then others will fill that vacuum, possibly in ways that do not respect the religious essence of Zakat. So, the real danger is our absence, not their presence. We have a religious, moral, and strategic responsibility to engage. We must reclaim the narrative and propose viable mechanisms that ensure the preservation of Zakat’s sacredness, while also responding to the realities of modern public policy and social protection systems. Otherwise, Zakat risks being reduced to just another “tax” — stripped of its spiritual meaning, disconnected from its intended recipients, and managed by entities that may not fully understand its ethical and civilisational dimensions.” Dr. Talioua Brahim



9. Addressing challenges and limitations: Participant suggestions

Participants shared what they perceived as challenges, limitations or issues relating to knowledge of Zakat and/or practice. These ranged from general, cross-cutting observations, to insights relating to specific stakeholder groups, as well as from theoretical systemic concepts to operational applications.

Challenges

The general perception of a considerable number of interviewees was that focus and knowledge of Zakat – namely, its meaning and potential – is broadly lacking across Ummahs. Some shared that certain knowledge is common, such as the obligatory nature of Zakat, but knowledge about other aspects was lacking, such as Zakat's social justice role, and its ethical dimensions beyond giving. Country-to-country differences in theoretical engagement and practice were also observed.

Practice / Administrator challenges and limitations included:

- Administrators are not educating givers, and prioritising marketing over raising awareness.
- Administrators are not integrating core Islamic principles and ethics in a holistic way. This includes not addressing underlying causes, or how considerations such as sustainable resource use and ecological balance are also central to questions of redistribution.
- Administrators focus on short-term delivery at the expense of longer-term impact.
- Administrators are impacted by competitive dynamics, rather than developing a collaborative approach.
- Administrators are led and influenced by the system which they then reinforce and replicate, without considering otherwise.
- Administrators treat Zakat transactionally, not distinguishing it from other forms of funding.

Some felt that there was a degree of Zakat illiteracy amongst some administrators and staff, whereas others felt that the issue was less about knowledge and more about practice. One observation that could be made from interviews with administrators was that different norms and practices were upheld with regards to having a Zakat policy. There were certain assumptions considered clearcut by some, such as what Zakat could and could not be used for, that were not shared by all.

Donor / Giver limitations and challenges:

- Givers lack understanding of how much they should be paying, how to calculate the *nisab*, and sometimes how to give and who to give to. Some givers estimate rather than working out in full what the payment should be.
- Givers do not fully understand the obligations and importance of Zakat. They are unaware of the benefits for people receiving and for themselves.
- Givers lack understanding of Zakat's developmental dimensions and impact objectives, which then limits administrators to short-term responses.
- Givers sometimes give in ways that are unhelpful and exacerbate inequalities. For example, informal giving that leads to some communities having more support than others.



Scholars, gaps and challenges:

There were considerable critiques with regards to the role played by scholars on the question of Zakat, as touched on elsewhere in this report. Many interviewees, representing diverse geographies, felt that there is a detachment between scholars and society. This lack of understanding of societal needs led to unhelpful *fatwas* that limited the fulfilment of Zakat's objectives. There were also strong opinions on the "stagnation of *ijtihad*". Some felt that scholars were not engaging in or leading discussions on contemporary considerations for Zakat's application.

Some interviewees, as previously noted, felt that scholars were not being provided with, nor asking for, sufficient information before signing policies, nor were they overseeing the implementation of the policy and whether it materialised into practice. With regards to secular administration, it was suggested that scholars are not aware of the long-term damage that can be created by endorsement.

The perspective was also expressed that some scholars are engaging with administrators as consultants rather than representatives of the Ummah. One interviewee explained that legitimacy, which was once derived from society – where scholars negotiated on behalf of society with authority – has collapsed over the centuries. More than one interviewee mentioned that the scholar now often derives legitimacy from the banking sector, and upholds market logic over Zakat's larger political and economic context.

Within this analysis was the view that scholars were not defining and articulating core concepts and theories, such as Islam's value theory, impeding a fuller understanding and application of Zakat.

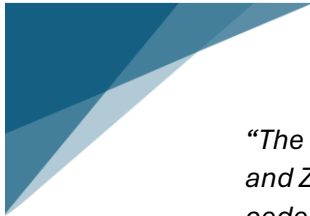
Interviewees provided some specific practice related examples where they perceived scholars to have hindered the impact of Zakat:

- Where scholars have not permitted the building of wells where wealthy people will also benefit from access, to the detriment of the entire community.
- When certain crops are not deemed Zakatable that should be.
- When scholars maintain a traditional reading of the eight categories and do not permit certain expenditure that consider and accommodate contemporary concerns, for example education under *Fi Sabilillah* (see page xxx)

Suggestions

"We have too many people who know but just don't talk, or are afraid to talk, or don't know how to package the information in such a way that people could more easily realise, 'Wow, this is Islam, this is not some innovation in Ibadah that has no precedence.' But we need people who have the tools of Usool (Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence), Qawaid (Maxims of Jurisprudence), and, Maqasid (Objectives of Islamic Law). You know these principles of Ijtihad and know how to triangulate with the realities and professionals on the ground." (Sheikh Muhammad Nuruddeen Lemu)

"Not everyone is looking at the big picture. Some people are zoomed in on very specific issues. The question is: How do we bring these different perspectives together in a way that sparks cross-sectoral conversation?" (Dr. Sandra Pertek)



“The moment we sort of seed ground out of fear, we have lost one of the central pillars, and Zakat is lost as it is. Then it's just money, that it's not Zakat anymore. The moment we cede that, then let's stop calling it Zakat, then let's just call it a bunch of money that Muslims give to this cause. It's no longer Zakat. Because there is no Zakat without a centralised institution of Zakat.” (Dr. Shariq Siddiqui)

A key general suggestion to address some of these challenges, shortcomings and issues, was the call for cross-sectoral knowledge sharing and awareness raising. Interviewees felt that it was important for there to be better understanding across stakeholder groups, and to learn from each other's perspectives, experiences and knowledge.

Another suggestion posed by several interviewees was to find ways to bridge micro- and macro-perspectives, and to address the administration of Zakat with a structuralist and long-term perspective. It was considered important to develop mechanisms and approaches that address this longer-term picture (without neglecting immediate needs) and to take control of shaping the picture.

The interdisciplinarity of any Zakat-related effort was important to many interviewees, who made suggestions such as: convening interdisciplinary stakeholders periodically to identify and resolve issues; linking scholarship and *ijtihad* with practical implementation; and ensuring inclusive engagement with a range of stakeholders, including media professionals, accountants, academics, scholars, rights holders, and organisations of all sizes.

A number of interviewees shared the opinion that discussing and resolving issues did not have to be a “global” effort. They felt it was of value to recognise a plurality of approaches, respecting national efforts and contexts and appreciating that there is not one Ummah. For example, one administrator interviewee suggested a UK specific collective effort that looked at Zakat structures and mechanisms focused on UK-based organisations.

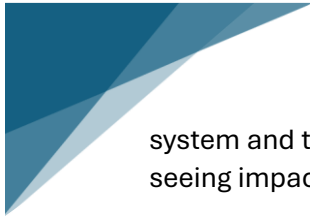
It was, furthermore, suggested that approaches be inclusive and balanced, ensuring the involvement of women, of givers and of rights holders.

Specific suggestions for administrators

The suggestion most frequently raised with regards to the role of administrators was to build more awareness and to help educate givers. Interviewees explained that better awareness, and education on specific requirements and calculations would empower givers. Beyond calculations, it was important to help givers understand concepts of community solidarity and responsibility, and to feel connected. Focus should also be on educating givers on Zakat's mandate beyond immediate emergency relief, and its longer-term developmental dimensions. One interviewee pointed out that educating givers on matters of faith was also relevant, because the pool of Zakat payers will diminish if individuals leave Islam.

*Of those who responded to the survey, a majority (80%) left it **blank** when asked if there was anything they would like to learn more about or better understand in relation to Zakat. Those that answered expressed an interest in conditions and calculations (nisab), as well as some curiosity about digital tools and integration with Waqf.*

It was also suggested for administrators to: establish a cooperative and collaborative way of working together; to develop a centralised institution; to be strategic; to think outside of the



system and to lead the conversation; to have sustainable implementation plans with the idea of seeing impact.

Reconnecting with Islam's moral economy and ethical imperatives was also deemed important, in order to explore what fulfilling rights and social justice means from an Islamic perspective, and to think about where certain principles, such as neutrality, may be at odds with Zakat's principles.

Specific suggestions relating to scholars

"For the Scholars to encourage donors to donate throughout the year. Because for now, everyone thinks I should give my Zakat during the holy month of Ramadan because the rewards are higher. This is when we end up with a huge amount of money or more money than usual, and then we have to ration it for the next 11 months. But if (scholars) encourage Zakat to be paid throughout the year, I think the organizations would have access to Zakat funds throughout the year." (Fadi Al-Dairi)

A significant number of interviewees discussed the role of scholarly engagement in relation to the need for decisions and rulings for Zakat's appropriate application today. Five interviewees explicitly referred to *Ijtihad* and its role in bridging historical and contemporary interpretations, as well as jurisprudence with practical context. Suggestions included: practical *Ijtihad*, the reconsideration of outdated or overly historical rulings, and context sensitivity for jurisprudential solutions. Numerous interviewees called for the expansion or reconsideration of the eight categories in order to address societal issues within contemporary realities. The differences between historic and contemporary times were frequently stated, calling for new interpretations considering these changes.

One interviewee suggested "*Ijtihad-based scholarly workshops*", making the case that *Ijtihad* is not only the responsibility of scholars that specialise in *fiqh*. Rather the workshops should be part of interdisciplinary "*collective ijtihad councils*" to include fields related to Zakat, such as sociology, political science, economics amongst others. These workshops and collective scholarly efforts would help translate proposals into realities on the ground, through strategic *fatwas* for the *Ummah*. Suggestions also included decision-making authorities, or councils for guidance and rulings; interdisciplinary committees; and international committees.

The above was seen as alternative to what was considered to be the current situation of 1.8 billion Muslims engaged in personal *lived Ijtihads* that might be incompatible with Zakat's macroeconomic objectives. Some interviewees also suggested scholars, or the *Ulama*, renew a focus on Zakat's macroeconomic aims, rather than micro-issues such as overhead costs, in order to better address impact and strategy.

Interviewees also advocated for scholars to engage more with operational and practical realities, so as to better understand the needs of society. Improved connection was seen as a pre-requisite to understanding the contemporary needs of society, and how Zakat can be used to address them.

Scholarly engagement was deemed important to help resolve issues around the theory of the NGO in jurisprudential terms, to understand better the role of states, to help reach consensus on secular administration, to advise on the integration of Zakat's community and faith-building mandate into its administration, and to help resolve a multitude of practical questions and

challenges. Connecting Zakat's mandate with that of *Waqf*, and within Islam's political and moral economy, was also highlighted. Further, scholars were called on for their help to encourage donations throughout the year and to support the resolution of ethical debates. Within these calls for clarity and input, some interviewees called for flexibility over rigid *fatwas*.

It was advised that when issuing *fatwas* or making endorsements, scholars should do so through a conference of Islamic leaders, or an *Ijtihad* council, rather than acting alone. This would ensure transparent and open processes. Additionally, a prevailing theme was considerations on the derivation of legitimacy, and that scholars guiding Zakat administration should be those trusted by society.

Suggestions for the eight categories

"If Muslims believe, as I do, that God gave Zakat to us 1,400 years ago as a contemporary, ongoing, consistent solution to society, and gave us eight categories that arguably are broad, then I think you can look at society today, economic and social justice issues, as you define them, and then find within those eight categories solutions within that." (Dr. Shariq Siddiqui)

"The categories of Zakat recipients (masarif al-zakah) are known to us—they are clearly outlined in the Quran and the Sunnah. Traditionally, they have been followed. But I believe that, in light of today's humanitarian conditions, we need to adapt this understanding to better respond to the needs of the current context." (Dr. Lobna Abdelaziz Mohamed)

As described, some interviewees advocated for the eight eligible categories to be more flexibly interpreted in order to address contemporary and context-specific realities and needs. Some suggested that the breadth of the eight Zakat categories can sufficiently accommodate modern challenges, including economic and social injustice, climate issues, and other societal problems. Others were more cautious when it came to challenging strict historical readings, preferring to adhere to classical interpretations.

Those advocating for contemporary considerations, suggested convening regular, interdisciplinary discussions involving religious scholars, economists, security experts, and others to collectively determine how the categories should be defined and applied in a given context and period. This process should be grounded in the Quranic principles of "*maslaha*" (The principle of public good or welfare used in Islamic jurisprudence to ensure rulings serve the broader benefit of society), rather than relying solely on traditional interpretations. Interviewees also discussed practical considerations and rulings, such as the permissibility of using Zakat funds for administrative costs, prioritisation considerations, and calculations.

Examples included:

Category	Suggested examples of what the category might also include:
<i>Al-Fuqara'</i> The poor	Orphans: traditionally understood as when a child's father passes away. Also includes for children whose mother has passed away if she was the one earning.
<i>Al-Masākīn</i> The needy	The protection of natural resources: understanding that this will impact the poor positively.
<i>Al-Mu'allafati</i> QulūbuhumThose	Non-Muslims. Originally it was not only for converts but also given to non-Muslims to prevent hostility towards Muslims, for example to prevent conflict.

whose hearts are to be reconciled	• Interfaith bridge building.
<i>Ar-Riqāb</i> Those in bondage	• A contemporary understanding of enslavement: for example, enslavement by alcohol and drugs • To pay for freedom: for example, settling a court case or paying for bail.
<i>Al-Ghārimūn</i> Those in debt	• To help clear educational loans, for people who cannot afford their education.
<i>Fi Sabīlillāh</i> In the cause of Allah	• To address Islamophobia. • For lobbying and advocacy in politics for the defence of Islam. • To include education, <i>Dawah</i>, particularly related to countering people leaving the faith. • Linked to the above, tending to the needs of new Muslims. • To counter extremism and preventing violent extremism. • To build schools and wells in communities where it is needed, even if wealthy people also benefit. • Institutional work. • For surgeries.
<i>Ibn as-Sabīl</i> The wayfarer	• Internally-displaced people, as well as refugees. • Stateless or border-stranded people

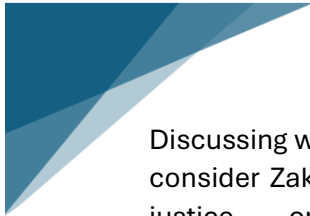
Fi Sabīlillāh was mentioned the most frequently, and considered as the category that permitted a broad reading. *Ibn as-Sabīl* was mentioned as being inaccessible to many people who need it. The first two – for the poor and needy – were mentioned as those most frequently considered, perhaps sometimes overshadowing the other categories.

Administering Zakat for social and economic justice

“I think the value of the meaning of Zakat, it has a social justice value. That’s the obligation on who administers Zakat. Really for social justice.” (Prof. Amelia Fauzia)

Some interviewees discussed how Zakat funding can be utilised as a proactive way to achieve social and economic justice objectives, and to address social and economic injustice. NGO administrators in the sector could for example shift from charity to justice framing, reconnecting with Islamic values of **‘*adl*, *ihsān*, *mīzān***, and design interventions accordingly. The distinction between “distribution” and “allocation” was emphasised, where the latter strategically pursues economic justice and development. One interviewee noted that what Zakat can achieve *“depends on the craftiness and the intention of the manager.”*

Other interviewees discussed cash-based giving as an important empowering modality, aligned with transferring ownership, and upholding the ownership over decision making. Also, on modalities, the opinion was shared that only institutionalised, collective and organised approaches could ensure Zakat was given fairly, without discrimination, and able to systemically address social and economic justice. At the same time, interviewees maintained that individual-to-individual giving also had considerable benefits, fostering the relationship between giver and receiver, and maintaining the *“sincerity”* and *“purity”* of giving that institutionalisation could damage



Discussing what Zakat programming might look like in the international aid sector – if it were to consider Zakat as a political economy tool with the objective of macro-social and economic justice – one interviewee hypothetically discussed Zakat intentionally addressing inequality in global food systems. For example, where IMF interventions have deregulated local markets and enforced dependency, Zakat could fund food distribution programmes independent of IMF constraints, support grain storage, and reduce dependence on foreign aid. It could also offer microfinance, thus freeing farmers from exploitative supply chains; and empower investment in climate-resilient agriculture, rather than being forced into cash crop exports.

The interviews, therefore, reflect a broad consensus that Zakat is a divinely-mandated mechanism for justice, and that the aid sector is falling short. It is failing to uphold Zakat's moral economy and is treating it simply as another funding stream. There is strong appetite for reform—institutionally and strategically—to ensure Zakat upholds its full role as a pillar of social and economic balance.

Best practices

Whilst interviewees tended to focus on the aspects of administration that they considered lacking, several best practice examples were also shared. On a few occasions, administrators discussed benchmarking their frameworks and policies against organisations such as Islamic Relief and The National Zakat Foundation, as they were cited as having leading practices, policies and models. Interviewees also discussed the learning they were garnering from different parts of the world, with one interviewee at the time of the interview attending a 10-day event in Indonesia, which he described as providing space to strategise and learn about leading approaches. Another interviewee credited the Zakat Foundation Institute for supporting higher education on the subject of Zakat. Malaysian and Indonesian Zakat models were mentioned as leading global examples.



The National Zakat Foundation (NZF)

The National Zakat Foundation (NZF) is a Muslim-led organisation that administers Zakat in six national contexts. Founded in the UK in 2011, NZF now has member affiliates in the Netherlands, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Germany. Whilst NZF branches collect and distribute Zakat locally, they have a notable global ambition to support the standardisation of Zakat administration by seeding the establishment of new National Zakat Foundations.¹

NZF describe their vision for the UK as an endeavour that: “all Muslims in the UK will feel comfort from knowing that a community is there to care for them, that they have a right to Zakat support if they fall on hard times, and that they have easy access to it.” Further outlining the necessity for a localised approach “where communities and community centres are empowered to care for their neighbours in faith and provide hubs for Zakat support.”¹ NZF’s UK 2023 impact report showed that recipient feedback determines impact on: community closeness; faith strengthening; and economic relief and empowerment.¹ In an interview for this consultation, the NZF UK’s CEO, Dr. Sohail Hanif, described Zakat as an “*institution with an intrinsic vision*”, which he emphasised is more than a movement of wealth, but a system of giving for community building – requiring decentralisation and community ownership.

Numerous interviewees, both administrators and academics representing different countries, mentioned NZF explicitly as an example of best practice, indicative of the broad leadership legitimacy they have achieved. The objectives that NZF embed into their approach to Zakat administration, their systemic institutionalised model and their community-building focus are all themes interviewees have widely raised as necessary for Zakat’s international administration. Leaving an open question as to what the international administration of Zakat can learn from NZF’s approach, and moreover, where there may be room for strategic collaboration.



10. Conclusion: Towards a collective, strategic organisation of Zakat

Participants defined Zakat's holistic mandate as threefold: spiritual, social and economic, equally underpinned by Islamic principles. Justice and balance, as part of Islam's moral economy, was widely appreciated as integral to Zakat's mandate. Some participants called for situating Zakat within Islam's political and moral economy (including its relationship to *Waqf* and *Sadaqah*) and for the revival of core Islamic concepts, for example Islam's value theory, as a foundation to understanding the significance and breadth of Zakat's potential.

Zakat was viewed to have benefits for the giver, the rights holder and society. Perceptions on the extent of economic impact varied, ranging from relief, to liberation from need – with a strong majority across all groups focused on empowerment objectives and calling for Zakat to be administered in such a way that recipients do not stay recipients indefinitely.

The overwhelming sentiment across all groups was that Zakat's full potential, role and objective – and, therefore, its correct administration – is not being realised. Owing to a treatment of Zakat in its international administration as transactional, by both Muslim and secular actors, where a delivery focus takes precedence over transformative empowerment for individuals and communities. With regards to Zakat's social justice mandate, which was widely perceived as integral to Zakat, it was pointed out that integrating justice considerations was largely missing in the sector.

Participation in Phase 1 has, therefore, pointed towards:

A desire to reclaim Zakat's transformative and justice-oriented mandate

Participants emphasised that Zakat is too often treated as a transactional aid mechanism rather than a transformative institution of redistributive balance and justice, articulating that it is falling short of its full potential economically, socially and spiritually. They called for administration that strengthens communities, restores solidarity, and uplifts both givers and recipients.

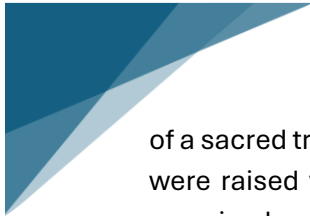
The need for collective vision, leadership, and systemisation

Participants noted the absence of shared leadership or coordinated systems for the international administration of Zakat. They pointed to the need for structured, transparent, community-driven mechanisms and Muslim-led collaboration that reclaims the moral and institutional leadership of Zakat. Participants discussed how an organised, systematic approach would enable strategic focus on longer-term impact, set a standard for upholding Zakat's mandate in its international administration, and regulate the same. It was argued that the scope of leadership and systemisation does not need to be global in nature, but locally and contextually grounded.

The need to reframe Zakat as for both immediate relief and long-term empowerment Across interviews and surveys, participants sought a balance between emergency relief and sustainable empowerment – not seeing a contradiction between the two. They pointed to the need for strategies that move recipients from dependence toward self-sufficiency and dignity, balancing relief with structural empowerment. Participant insights pointed towards a need to bridge micro and macro perspectives, and academic concepts with administrative realities.

The importance of re-examining questions of legitimacy and trust in administration

Trustworthiness emerged as the defining criteria of legitimate administration, encompassing principled and professional competence. Participants described administrators as custodians



of a sacred trust—responsible to Allah, givers, rights holders and the Ummah broadly. Questions were raised with regards to the underpinning assumptions and norms of legitimacy currently exercised, making the case that legitimacy should be derived from transparent, community-based accountability.

Within these findings, **the question of secular administration** might better be framed as symptomatic of a larger gap. While views differed, many saw the issue less as whether secular actors can administer Zakat, and more as why Muslim institutions are not leading collectively to uphold Zakat's mandate. It was evident that not all shared the same assessment of the risk posed by secular administration, acknowledging that better understanding would enable more informed opinions on the same. This points towards a need for greater shared understanding of what the perceived risks are. Further, it is important to note that in comparison to the interviews, a larger majority of respondents to the donor survey responded that it was essential or very important that administrators are Muslim. Given the aforementioned centrality of trust in the relationship between administrator and society, that some Muslim organisations are also funding UN Zakat instruments is a notable contradiction.

Central to all of the findings, however, is the need to acknowledge and resolve **the tension between Zakat's mandate and the mandate of the aid sector**. Whilst the consultation started intentionally broad, both geographically and conceptually, in order to not limit a religious framework to the constraints (self-imposed and/or externally-imposed) of the sector, it is nevertheless important to understand how situations within the mainstream system challenge the ability of international administrators to uphold Zakat's mandate. Perhaps asking, which one should be constrained or expanded to accommodate the other?

Indeed, that many of the sector's critiques (notably on power imbalance and the lack of an impact or justice orientation) are addressed within Zakat's framework, positions Zakat as a potential opportunity and vehicle with which to present an alternative approach to aid. An approach that speaks of the right of rights holders to what should be returned to them, rather than the victimising narrative of beneficiaries to be grateful for the charity they receive from a system resistant to asking why that need exists in the first place. These conversations include grappling with what Zakat's tie to the local offers for localisation efforts in the sector.

Participants advocated **for renewed scholarly engagement**, or *Ijtihad*, as part of an interdisciplinary engagement that would connect scholarship with social realities, bridging classical principles with contemporary needs. Collaboration across scholars, academ

ics, practitioners, and communities was seen as essential. The guidance of scholars was considered crucial to resolving the theory of the administrator, defining Zakat's "real" mandate, addressing the question of secular administration, and defining and integrating Zakat's faith and community-building objectives.

Where academic insights offered the theoretical scaffolding that gave the conversation breadth of perspective and principled depth, administrators expressed nuanced understandings of operational application and realities including reflections on the power dynamics within the



international aid system. It should be noted that the two perspectives are complementary and indeed there was a strong call for **greater learning and exchange across stakeholder groups**, a process that should be comprehensive and intentionally inclusive of women, givers and rights holders.

In sum, the consultation points toward a collective reimagining of the international administration of Zakat - from fragmented, delivery-focused aid to a strategic, justice-oriented institution grounded in balance and empowerment.



Annex1 - Glossary of terms

This glossary provides definitions of key terms used throughout the report. Many of these terms originate in Arabic and Islamic jurisprudence. They are included here to support clarity and ensure consistent understanding for diverse readers. The glossary is not exhaustive, but highlights concepts central to the discussion of zakat, justice, and social solidarity.

Zakat (الزكاة)

An obligatory pillar of Islam and a financial act of worship. It requires eligible Muslims to give a fixed portion of their wealth to specified categories of recipients, serving both spiritual purification and social justice.

Nisab (نصاب)

The minimum threshold of wealth a Muslim must possess before becoming liable to pay zakat. It ensures zakat is only obligatory for those with sufficient means.

Zakat al-Fiṭr (زكاة الفطر)

A form of zakat paid by Muslims at the end of Ramadan, usually in the form of staple food, to purify fasting and provide for the poor during Eid.

Ṣadaqah (صدقة)

Voluntary charity given by Muslims outside the mandatory zakat system. It reflects generosity and can be offered at any time for any cause.

Waqf (وقف)

An endowment in Islamic law where assets are donated or set aside for religious or charitable purposes, creating lasting community benefit.

Barakah (بركة)

Divine blessing that brings increase, prosperity, or spiritual enrichment beyond material calculation. Often associated with giving zakat and charity.

‘Ibādah Mālīyya (عبادة مالية)

A “financial act of worship.” Zakat is considered this type of worship, combining devotion with economic responsibility.

Fiqh of Zakat (فقه الزكاة)

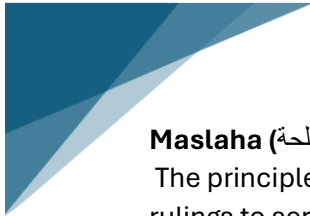
The Islamic jurisprudence governing the rules, calculation, collection, and distribution of zakat, derived from Qur’an, Sunnah, and scholarly interpretation.

Ijtihad (اجتهاد)

The process of scholarly reasoning and interpretation used to address new or evolving issues in Islamic law, including contemporary zakat applications.

Fatwa (فتوى)

A non-binding legal opinion issued by a qualified scholar (mufti) on a point of Islamic law, often guiding zakat administration and eligibility.



Maslaha (مصلحة)

The principle of public interest or common good in Islamic jurisprudence, used to adapt zakat rulings to serve contemporary societal needs.

Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah (مقاصد الشريعة)

The higher objectives and moral purposes of Islamic law—such as justice, welfare, dignity, and preservation of life. Discussions in the report refer to aligning Zakat administration with these overarching aims.

Qawā‘id (قواعد)

Legal maxims that summarize broad patterns in Islamic law. They help administrators and scholars apply general jurisprudential principles to new and complex situations in Zakat administration.

Social Solidarity (Takaful / تكافل)

The collective commitment to protect and support one another, ensuring community resilience and equity.

The Eight Recipient Categories of Zakat (Quran 9:60)

Al-Fuqara’ (الفقراء)

The poor — individuals with little or no wealth who cannot meet their basic needs.

Al-Masākīn (المساكين)

The needy — people with some resources but still unable to cover essential living expenses.

Al-‘Āmilīna ‘Alayhā (العاملين عليها)

Administrators of zakat — those appointed to collect, manage, and distribute zakat, entitled to a share as compensation for their work.

Al-Mu‘allafati Qulūbuhum (المؤلفة قلوبهم)

Those whose hearts are to be reconciled — new Muslims or individuals supported to strengthen their faith, sometimes extended to interfaith trust-building.

Ar-Riqāb (الرقاب)

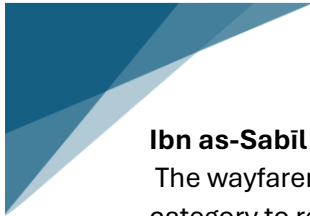
Those in bondage — historically slaves or captives; contemporary interpretations extend this to victims of human trafficking, modern slavery, or unjust imprisonment.

Al-Ghārimūn (الغارمون)

Debtors — individuals burdened with debts they cannot repay due to hardship or unforeseen circumstances.

Fi Sabīlillāh (في سبيل الله)

“In the cause of Allah.” Traditionally linked to defence of the community, but broadly interpreted to include education, da‘wah, advocacy, or projects serving Islam and the public good.



Ibn as-Sabīl (ابن السبيل)

The wayfarer — a traveller or displaced person stranded without resources. Some extend this category to refugees, stateless persons, or migrants in need.

Conceptual and Ethical Terms

‘Adl (عدل)

Justice; the foundational Islamic principle of fairness and balance in social and economic relations.

Qist (قسط)

Equity; ensuring fairness in distribution and rights, closely related to justice but emphasizing proportion and fairness in outcomes.

Mizān (ميزان)

Balance or scale; symbol of justice and accountability in Islam, also used metaphorically for societal and economic equilibrium.

Ta‘āwun (تعاون)

Mutual support and cooperation; the principle of social solidarity underpinning zakat and community welfare.

Ummah (أمة)

The global community of Muslims, bound by shared faith and responsibility for collective well-being.

Rights Holders

A term emphasizing that zakat recipients are not passive beneficiaries but holders of a divinely ordained right over the wealth of the rich.

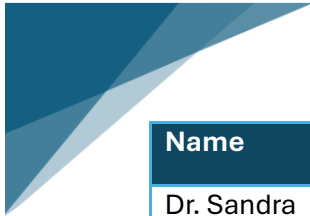
Amanah (أمانة)

Trust or custodianship. Zakat administrators are described as holding a sacred trust before God, donors, and rights-holders.

Annex2 – List of Interviewees

Category: Academic

Name	Role	Organisation	Country
Dr Shariq Siddiqui	Assistant Professor & Director of Muslim Philanthropy Initiative	Indiana University Indianapolis	USA
Prof Amelia Fauzia	Professor in Islamic history and culture	Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta	Indonesia
Mohammed Fawzi Amadu	Islamic Finance Advocate and advisor	Dar al Isthmar	Ghana
Saqib H. Khateeb	Researcher in Islamic finance & Doctoral Candidate in Religious Studies	University of Ottawa	Canada / India
Dr. Mehmet Asutay	Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Political Economy & Finance.	Durham University Business School	UK
Imam Sa-id Mukhtar Abubakar	Executive Director	S.A.I.D Academy	Ghana
Sheikh Muhammad Nuruddeen Lemu	Director of Research and Training	Dawah Institute	Nigeria
Dr. Abdul-Rahim Adada Mohammed	Economist, head of planning, implementation and evaluation	Lakeside University College	Ghana
Prof. Aliyu Dahiru	Professor at Department of Economics/International Institute of Islamic Banking and Finance	Bayero University Kano	Nigeria
Dr Saif El-Din AbdulFattah	academic and a Professor of Political Science	Cairo University	Egypt



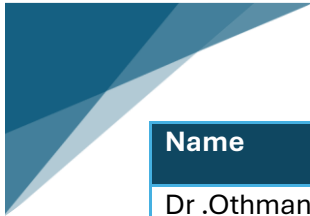
Name	Role	Organisation	Country
Dr. Sandra Pertek	Researcher and social development specialist	University of Birmingham	UK
Dr. Namungo Hamzah	Lecturer at the College of Economics and Management	Kampala International University	Uganda

Category: Administrator (Global Majority country)

Name	Role	Organisation	Country
Faiza Yusuf	MEAL officer	Zamzam Foundation- Somalia	Somalia
Mukhtar Bihi	Head of Hargeisa office	Africa Relief Committee	Somaliland
Dr. Llobna Abdelaziz Mohamed	Regional director of West Africa	Islamic Organisation Dawa	Gambia
Nuhu Alimatu Sadia	Executive Director	Hereafter Ghana (MHP)	Ghana
Sherif Shaban	Director of Training & Development	The Zakat and Sadaqa Trust Fund of Ghana	Ghana
Farhia Ahmed	Programs Manager	Zamzam Foundation – Kenya office	Kenya
Dr. Talioua Brahim	President of the National Office	Assalam Foundation	Morocco
Dr. Muhammad Lawal Maidoki	Executive chairman	Sokoto State Zakkat and Endowment (Waqf) Commission (SOZECOM)	Nigeria
Yusuf Biligin	Vice president	IHH	Turkey

Category: Administrator (UK based)

Name	Role	Organisation	Country
Adil Bader	Zakat Lead	Islamic Relief Worldwide	UK
Shahin Ashraf	Head of Global Advocacy	Islamic Relief Worldwide	UK
Fadi Al-Dairi	Regional Director	Hand In Hand for Aid & Development	UK – Syria



Name	Role	Organisation	Country
Dr .Othman Moqbel	Chief Executive Officer	Action for Humanity	UK
Lamees Hafeez	Director of strategy and communication	Muslim Aid	UK

Category: Hybrid

Name	Role	Organisation	Country
Dr. Hany ElBanna	President	World Humanitarian Action Forum - WHAF	UK
Dr. Sohail Hanif	Chief Executive	National Zakat Foundation	UK
Naser Haghamed	Chief Executive	Ex-CEO of Islamic Relief Worldwide, CEO of AIC Ltd	UK
Naila Farouky	CEO and executive director	Arab Foundation Forum	Jordan
Fadi Itani	Chief Executive	Muslim Charities Forum (MCF)	UK



World Humanitarian Action Forum
Charity Number: 1130399