

UNDERSTANDING FAITH-BASED CHARITIES

April 2016

Faith and charity have long gone hand-in-hand. But whilst research exists into the influence of faith on [giving](#), [volunteering](#) and [communities](#), remarkably little is known about the affect of faith on how charitable organisations operate and what they can achieve. At NPC we feel this lack of knowledge is an oversight—especially in the current environment of reduced funding, increasing need and shifting public opinion—so we have established a [programme of research on faith-based charities](#) to plug the gap. If faith-based charities can achieve things that other organisations can't, or can work in situations that others aren't able to, then as a sector we should understand this better and consider how we can work more effectively together to deliver for those we aim to help.

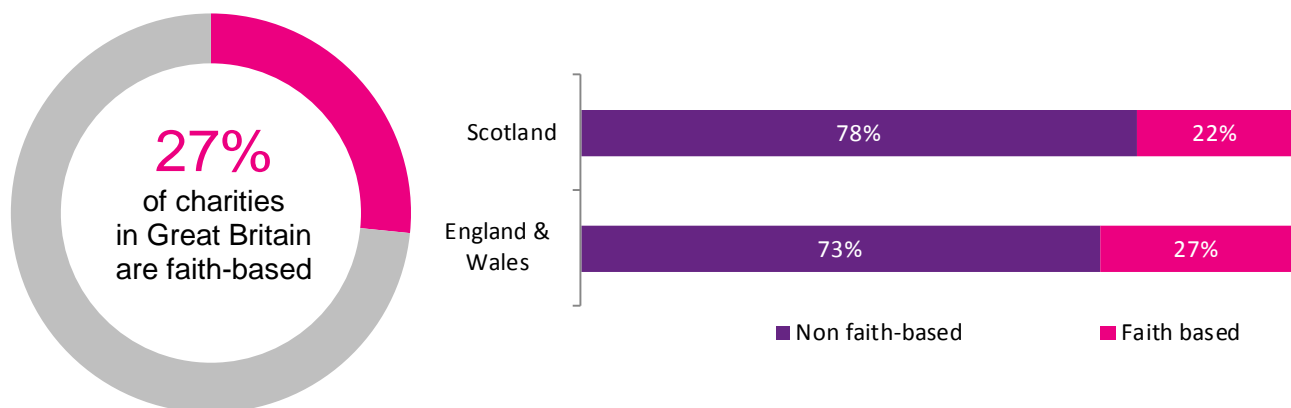
Our first step was to identify the population of faith-based charities to clarify key questions about the size and characteristics of this group. Though a variety of classifications exist¹, we realised that they all underrepresented the true numbers. Over a number of months we developed [our own approach](#), combining existing classifications with text analysis, to create a more comprehensive dataset.

We believe this is the most advanced and up-to-date analysis of faith-based charities in Great Britain.

It demonstrates what a significant proportion of the charity sector faith-based charities represent—reaffirming our belief that a greater understanding of faith-based charities is important to the sector.

We use the term 'faith-based charity' to mean a charity that embodies some form of religious belief—or cultural values arising from a religious belief—in its vision or mission, founding history or project content.

What is the size of the faith-based charity sector?

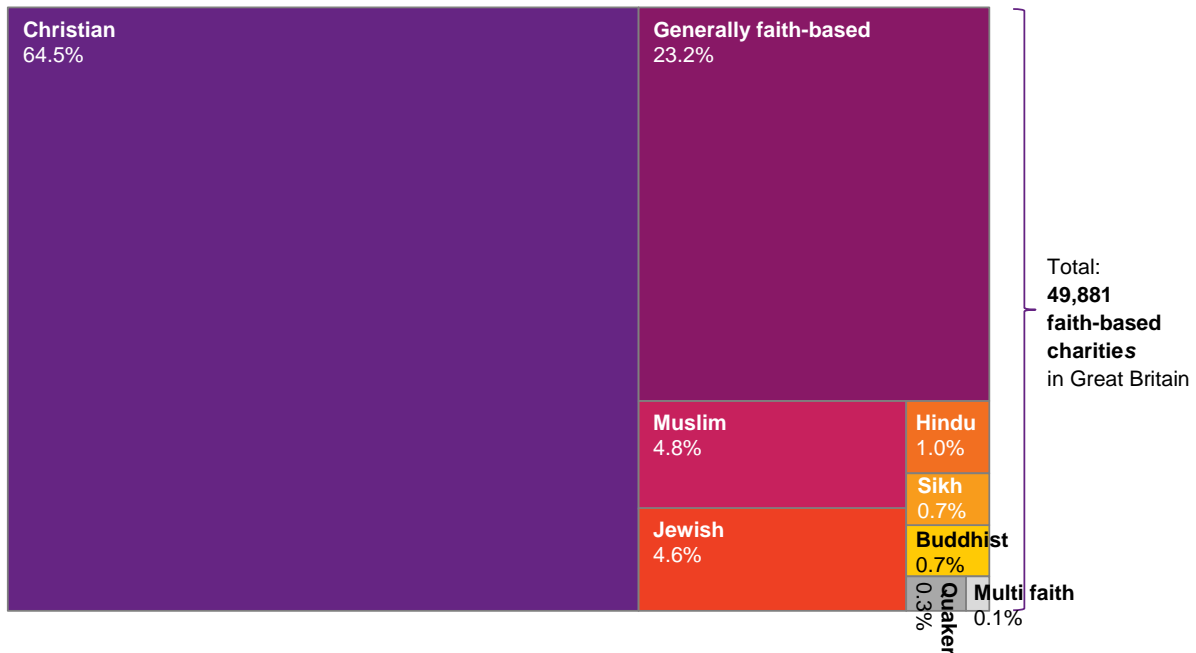


From a total population of 187,495 registered charities in Great Britain², 49,881 are faith-based—**over a quarter**. The picture is similar by region (split by the two regulatory bodies—Charity Commission of England and Wales and the Office of Scottish Charity Regulator). Of the 165,226 charities in England & Wales, 44,985 are faith-based, whilst a slightly lower proportion of the 22,269 charities in Scotland are faith-based (4,896).

¹ Charity Commission (by self-selecting 'religious activities' as purpose); the International Classification of Nonprofit Organisations (ICNPO) (used by the UN, has 'religion' group); and NCVO (method based on adaptation and application of ICNPO, further details here: <http://data.ncvo.org.uk/datastore/datasets/dataset-4-icnpo-classification-of-charities/>)

² Excludes charities based in England and Wales with an income below £5,000 and other excepted or exempt charities, see: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-register-your-charity-cc21b>. Excludes subsidiaries registered with the Charity Commission. The Charity Commission register includes charities that have not filed accounts in previous years and may be inactive.

How do faith-based charities split by religion?



Categorising the data into the seven major faiths in Britain³ we have identified the majority of faith-based charities as **Christian or of a Christian tradition**. The next largest category is ‘**Generally faith-based**’, which are organisations identifiable as faith-based but not able to be categorised as a specific faith (see [methodology](#) for more details). We categorised organisations as ‘**Multi-faith**’ if they ‘state a specific mission to work across faiths in their objectives.

Religion	Number	Percentage
Christian	32,183	64.5%
Generally faith-based	11,575	23.2%
Muslim	2,407	4.8%
Jewish	2,278	4.6%
Hindu	490	1.0%
Sikh	362	0.7%
Buddhist	347	0.7%
Quaker	174	0.3%
Multi-faith	65	0.1%
TOTAL	49,881	

Next steps

While we do not claim that our data provides an absolute ‘correct’ answer, it is a significant improvement on what was available before and ensures our research programme is based on recent statistics and a [methodologically sound approach](#). This paper presents only initial findings. The dataset provides the possibility for much further analysis, for instance examining charitable income by faith, geographical distribution of faith-based charities, comparisons of faith-based charities against population size, and trends in the size and shape of the faith-based sector. We plan to do some further analysis, which will be complemented by a survey with both faith-based and non faith-based charities, qualitative research and ongoing engagement with the sector so that we can explore different faith communities and further our understanding of faith and charity.

If you have any questions about our research, or would like to support our programme of work, please get in touch with Rachel Wharton via info@thinkNPC.org.

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 NPC worked with Jay Liu of Digital-Dandelion.com to develop the methodology and database.

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³ We acknowledge that there are other religions, as well as further denominations and traditions, but these are outside the scope and capacity of this research.