

Muslims in Copenhagen

Findings and Recommendations

THIS CITY REPORT IS PART OF A SERIES of monitoring reports titled *Muslims in EU Cities* that examine 11 cities in the European Union with significant Muslim populations.

Each report focuses on the following neighbourhoods or boroughs within each city for more in-depth study: Slotervaart, Amsterdam; Borgerhout, Antwerp; Kreuzberg, Berlin; Nørrebro, Copenhagen; Hamburg-Mitte, Hamburg; Evington, Spinney Hills, Stonegate, Leicester; 3rd Arrondissement, Marseille; 18th Arrondissement, Paris; Feijenoord, Rotterdam; Järvafältet, Stockholm; and Waltham Forest, London.

These reports are a response to major trends regarding the situation of Muslims living in Europe. Whether citizens or migrants, native born or newly-arrived, Muslims are a growing and varied population that presents Europe with the major public policy challenge of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all in a climate of rapidly expanding diversity.

Background

- Out of Denmark's total population of over five and a half million, 175,000 to 200,000 of the country's inhabitants are immigrants and their descendants who originate from non-western, predominantly Muslim countries. Muslims represent 3.6 per cent of Denmark's overall population.
- Denmark is divided into 98 municipalities. The largest concentrations of Muslims are settled in Copenhagen, followed by Aarhus and Odense. This report focuses on the Copenhagen district of Nørrebro (72,887 individuals) where 21 per cent (or 15,306 individuals) are immigrants and Danes with immigrant backgrounds from "non-Western" countries. The overwhelming proportion of this population is believed to have a Muslim background.
- Nørrebro is a traditionally working class area with a dynamic and multiethnic population; regeneration programmes and slum clearances, started in the 1970s, have led to changes in Nørrebro's demography by making new social housing available and allowing for students and immigrant families to move into the area.
- The analysis presented in this report is based on a survey of 100 Muslim respondents and a comparison group of 100 non-Muslims as well as six focus groups with Muslims. It also includes in-depth discussion with 15 individuals from various communities, local government, civil society, and relevant experts engaged with integration and inclusion issues.

Key Findings By Major Issue Area

Identity and Belonging

“One of the main reasons I like the area is that it is multicultural and you do not stand out.”

–Questionnaire respondent

- Muslims (80 respondents) and non-Muslims (81 respondents) felt a very strong or fairly strong sense of belonging to Nørrebro. At the city level, a high proportion of both Muslims (81 respondents) and non-Muslims (86 respondents) reported a very strong or fairly strong sense of belonging to Copenhagen.
- The majority of respondents (69 Muslims and 78 non-Muslims) agreed that people from different backgrounds could get along well together in their local area, challenging the perception that some residential areas in Denmark, including Nørrebro, have developed into “ethnic enclaves.”
- Family emerged as the most important aspect of individual identity for both Muslims (70 respondents) and non-Muslims (48 respondents). Seventeen Muslim respondents identified religion as an important factor. This was the case for only one non-Muslim respondent, challenging the popular conception that Muslims can place “too much” importance on religion.
- Almost half of non-Muslims selected “tolerance towards others” as an important Danish value, while 63 per cent of Muslims emphasised respect for the rule of law.
- Only 38 Muslims reported that they considered themselves to be Danish, while the majority (58 respondents) indicated that they did not. It should be noted, however, that a high proportion (50 per cent) of the Muslim respondents are naturalised Danish citizens. Eighty-seven non-Muslim respondents viewed themselves as Danish.

Education

“I think one should do more to open things up for children [...] to put into people’s minds that maybe Muslim children also have something to offer, also have something to contribute. But this is not remembered in public schools.”

–Focus group participant

- Education services marked by poor quality and low standards provided by the Copenhagen municipality emerged as the service with which both Muslim and non-Muslims respondents were least satisfied, second only to street cleaning services.
- At the lower-secondary level, a majority of Muslims (54 respondents) were very or fairly satisfied with local schools. At the upper-secondary level, 48 Muslims and 24 non-Muslim respondents indicated that they were fairly or very satisfied with local upper-secondary schools and vocational colleges.

- Concerns were raised by Muslims about low expectations and little support from teachers towards their minority and Muslim pupils. Respondents’ fears focused on how these attitudes would result in low motivation and self-esteem leading to an increase in school dropout rates.
- Muslim women who participated in the focus groups highlighted the rising sense of “white flight,” namely the tendency for Danish parents to avoid sending their children to schools in the local area if there are “too many” pupils with a minority background in these schools.
- A majority of respondents (56 Muslims and 49 non-Muslims) reported that schools did respect the religious customs of their pupils (“too much” or “about right”). However, a significant minority (29 Muslims and 17 non-Muslims) were of the view that schools did not give enough respect to the religious customs of their pupils.

CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

The “Library Project,” in Nørrebro and three other districts in Copenhagen aims to attract more library employees with an ethnic minority background, to establish innovative learning centres, and to develop library services targeting ethnic minorities. In 2009, more than 12,000 people participated in activities within the framework of this project—three times more than expected.

Employment

- The majority of ethnic minorities from a non-western background are found in the unskilled/skilled sector of the labour market and Muslims are amongst the most marginalised in the employment field. Research suggests that young people from minority backgrounds develop low expectations of gainful employment during their school years which has an impact on their ambitions for the future.
- A greater proportion of Muslims (14 respondents) than non-Muslims (3 respondents) were self-employed. This corresponds to the general employment situation of immigrants and refugees, both at the national level and in Copenhagen.
- More Muslims than non-Muslims had full-time employment at the time the survey was conducted (28 responses and 34 responses, respectively); while a similar number (14 respondents in each group) had part-time employment.
- A slightly higher proportion of Muslims (10 respondents) than non-Muslims (6 respondents) were unemployed and looking for work. Muslims were also more likely than non-Muslims (10 respondents and 3 respondents, respectively) to be permanently out of the labour market due to sickness or disability.
- Among those surveyed who indicated they had been refused a job in the past five years (36 Muslims and 34 Non-Muslims) the highest number of non-Muslims indicated a lack of general skills or education (12 respondents). By contrast, the highest number of Muslims indicated that their ethnicity had been the most important factor in the refusal.

- The survey revealed the importance of networks and social contacts for both Muslims and non-Muslims in seeking employment. A sizable proportion of the overall respondents had found employment through these means and a general concern was expressed about the paucity of such networks for ethnic minorities and immigrants in the wider Danish society.

Housing

- The vast majority of survey respondents (90 Muslims and 94 non-Muslims) indicated that they were satisfied with the multicultural and multiethnic neighbourhood in which they lived.
- A very small number of respondents (9 Muslims and 12 non-Muslims) were owner-occupiers of their property. Sixty-nine Muslim respondents and 37 non-Muslims lived in social housing or rented council owned housing.
- Of Muslims, 21 respondents stated they had no choice in their place of residence, while 15 respondents indicated that they lived where they did because they had been offered social housing.

Health

- In general, and despite worries about care for the elderly, participants expressed a positive overall impression of minorities' ability to access health care.
- The majority of respondents (77 Muslims and 50 non-Muslims) felt that the respect accorded by hospitals to different religious customs was "about right" or "too much."
- A majority of responses (45 from Muslims and 32 from non-Muslims) indicated either that medical staff respect the customs of others, or that the respondents had never experienced any discrimination in accessing health care.

CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

The "Young and Healthy Students" project ("Ung og Sund i uddannelse") targets vulnerable young people attending vocational schools. Through the promotion of sports activities and developing health-oriented policies at schools, the project aims to provide strategies for immigrant students to complete their education and develop healthy living habits.

Policing and Security

"We should be treated just like any other group. Our criminals, yes, they should be punished, of course! And the more severe the crime they commit, the more harshly they should be punished. But they should not have a double punishment, because they are immigrants."

–Focus group participant

- The survey revealed high levels of trust in the police, with the majority of respondents (73 Muslims and 70 non-Muslims)

indicating that they had a lot, or a fair amount, of trust in the police.

- However, a significant minority (20 Muslims and 37 non-Muslims) indicated that they were fairly or very dissatisfied with the police.
- A majority of both Muslims (25 out of 39 respondents) and non-Muslims (37 out of 58 respondents) indicated that they were satisfied with the conduct and outcome of their contact(s) with the police. These results point to trust in the police as an institution rather than satisfaction with their work at the local level.
- There was unanimous consensus in the focus group discussions that ethnic profiling by the police was a matter of grave concern. The regular police were reported by some participants to respond disproportionately and disrespectfully towards young people, irrespective of whether they were dealing with a normal law-abiding individual or somebody who had been acting suspiciously or appeared to be involved in illegal activity.
- Hate crimes and ethnic-based discrimination were raised by Muslim respondents as serious concerns which required urgent action by the police and government.
- In response to a question asking which services needed the most improvement, the highest number of responses, for both Muslims and non-Muslims, was for greater attention to be paid to the development of more youth services. Focus group participants related this need to recent tensions between youth and police in the area.

CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

In 2008, to address the problem of a lack of reporting of hate crimes and cases of discrimination, the city council established a special website – "Register Discrimination" – where victims can register such incidents. The web pages are available in Danish and seven other languages.

Participation and Citizenship

"The possibilities for participation in the democratic process are there. [But] You should not believe that you are [on a par with] a Dane. What I have experienced through the years is that 'you are welcome to participate, but you have to play the game by our rules.' It has always been like that."

–Focus group participant

- The survey results reveal that the majority of both Muslims (53 respondents) and non-Muslims (62 respondents) showed very little or no trust in the national government.
- By contrast, there was a far greater level of trust in the Copenhagen City Council among both Muslims and non-Muslims. A majority of Muslims (55 respondents) and non-Muslims (49 respondents) replied that they had a lot or a fair amount of confidence in the city council. This may reflect a greater sense of political identification with local government due to its diverse and inclusive political makeup.

- A slim majority of Muslim interviewees (52 respondents) were eligible to vote in national elections. Of these, the majority (42 respondents) did actually vote in the last national election (in 2005).
- A much higher proportion of Muslim interviewees (82 respondents) were eligible to vote for their local and regional councils. Again, the majority of those eligible to vote (61 respondents) did actually use this right in the last local council election (in 2005).
- The survey results reveal a clear difference between Muslims and non-Muslims, with respect to their perceived influence on decisions at the national level. While a majority of non-Muslims (61 respondents) agreed that they could influence such decisions, a majority of Muslims (61 respondents) disagreed. While it is difficult to interpret, this finding could reflect the socioeconomic status of the Muslim respondents and their perception of belonging on the national level.

Media

“The media never say anything good [about ethnic minorities]. They don’t say ‘now you will hear about this good family that does this, and the dad works in a good job.’ No, you don’t hear about them. You only hear about the bad ones.”

–Focus group participant

- Mainstream national media play an important role in the formation of public perceptions and the discourse towards minorities which, over the last two decades in Denmark, have become increasingly negative towards Muslim citizens and residents. The local media are found to be fairer towards ethnic minorities and Muslims but are also considered far less influential in shaping societal attitudes towards these groups.
- The surveys and research revealed that both groups viewed newspapers and magazines as an important source for local information—49 non-Muslims and 30 Muslims. Television and radio were the primary sources from which news on a national level and about Denmark were consumed. The Internet was cited as a media source by more non-Muslims than Muslims, both for local and national news.

Key Recommendations

- The Copenhagen City Council should ensure a regular exchange of information between municipal and education policymakers in order to ensure that information about the academic achievements of schools is up-to-date and accurate.
- The Copenhagen City Council and district councils should speak out against all forms of discrimination.
- The Copenhagen City Council should enhance its antisegregation measures, based on positive incentives that improve access to housing for low-income families in areas other than the most deprived neighbourhoods.
- The Copenhagen Police should develop clear regulations and written operating standards for how police officers conduct stops and identity checks. These standards should stress that ethnicity, religion, and other superficial personal characteristics do not provide a sound basis for stops and searches.
- The Copenhagen Police, in collaboration with the Copenhagen City Council, should further develop community policing initiatives that prioritise the police working in partnership with young people and community representatives, rather than aggressively and conspicuously patrolling areas.
- The Copenhagen City Council should devise more efficient information campaigns and capacity-building activities focussing on migrant communities, the city’s administrative and political structures, the rights and obligations of citizens, and where to lodge complaints in the case of a problem.
- The Copenhagen City Council should support local media initiatives that reflect the cultural diversity of the city and promote integrative and alternative voices and communications across ethnic boundaries. These initiatives could include the provision of financial assistance, the encouragement of active local media involvement in integration projects, and the launching of special thematic programmes (addressing topics such as crime prevention, health, and culture).

For more information

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