

Muslims in Rotterdam

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

- There are approximately 1 million Muslims in the Netherlands, representing 5.8 per cent of the total population of the country. Official Dutch statistics do not collect information based on religious affiliation, but data are available on allochtonen (a term referring to immigrants), who are defined as individuals with at least one parent born abroad even though they may hold Dutch citizenship.
- Thirteen per cent of the population in Rotterdam is Muslim (80,000 people). The largest of these communities are predominantly from Turkish and Moroccan backgrounds (75 per cent) and approximately two-thirds of these groups are Dutch citizens. There are also Surinamese, Pakistani, Bosnian, and Indonesian Muslim communities in Rotterdam. Almost 50 per cent of the Muslims in Rotterdam were born in the Netherlands and are second-generation.
- This report focuses on the city district of Feijenoord in the southern part of Rotterdam, one of the poorest areas in the city. It explores the daily experiences and participation in society of Feijenoord's inhabitants at the neighbourhood level and describes a number of important policy measures and initiatives taking place in Rotterdam.
- The analysis presented in this report is based on a survey that comprised 99 Muslims and a comparison group of 101 non-Muslims, as well as six focus groups with Muslims. It also includes interviews with 22 individuals from local government institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), members of Muslim communities, and other related fields.

Key Findings By Major Issue Area

Identity, Belonging and Discrimination

- Muslims in Feijenoord have a strong sense of belonging to the local area/neighbourhood and the city, which is stronger than their identification with the Netherlands: 73.7 per cent of Muslim respondents reported either a fairly strong (49.5 per cent) or very strong (24.2 per cent) sense of belonging to the city. Eighty per cent of non-Muslims expressed a strong attachment to Rotterdam.
- The sense of belonging at the national level was lower among Muslim than among non-Muslim respondents: 24.3 per cent of Muslim respondents felt a very strong sense of belonging to Rotterdam, compared with 11 per cent who felt a very strong sense of belonging to the Netherlands.
- Over half of the Muslim respondents, 56.4 per cent, stated that they did not feel Dutch. Of the non-Muslim respondents 23.3 per cent felt the same way.
- Responses to the question “Do most other people in this country see you as Dutch?” are even more striking: While 57 per cent of the Muslim respondents saw themselves as Dutch, 82 per cent felt that others did not see them as Dutch compared with 67 per cent of non-Muslim respondents. Moreover, 60 per cent of Muslims did not want to be seen by others as Dutch. These findings need further research and the reasons provided by respondents vary from experiences of discrimination to pride in ethnic heritage and feeling cosmopolitan.
- Regarding religious prejudice, the majority of Muslim respondents (65.5 per cent) and close to half (45.5 per cent) of non-Muslim respondents felt that the level of religious prejudice had increased over the past five years. The vast majority of both groups (90 per cent) felt that this prejudice was mainly directed toward Muslims.

Education

“Students come to me and complain that their teachers discriminate against them. However, if I investigate further, in all of the cases I encountered it was not so much discrimination, as inconsistent behaviour by the teacher. That is something that needs to be worked on.”

—School social worker of Moroccan descent, Rotterdam

- A majority of Muslims and non-Muslims were either very or fairly satisfied with their local primary and secondary schools. A greater proportion of Muslims (21.2 per cent) was dissatisfied with the local primary and secondary schools compared with 6 per cent of non-Muslims. Experiences of discrimination in the admissions policies of schools were highlighted.

- In the 2007-2008 school year, 50 per cent of the primary schools in Rotterdam had 0–50 per cent non-native pupils, 23 per cent of the primary schools had 50–80 per cent non-native pupils, and 27 per cent of the primary schools consisted of more than 80 per cent non-native pupils.
- High levels of segregation are also found in secondary education. Of the secondary schools in Rotterdam, 39 per cent had less than 50 per cent non-native pupils, 23 per cent had 50–80 per cent non-native pupils, and 38 per cent had more than 80 per cent non-native pupils. Muslim respondents felt that the quality of schools had decreased in schools with increased ethnic segregation.
- A number of initiatives from the Rotterdam City Council and local organisations have assisted in increasing parental involvement and numbers of Muslim children attending pre-school as well as addressing the drop out rates of young people across the city.

CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Het Centrum (The Centre) is an initiative in Rotterdam that involves parents of Muslim and marginalised children and at the same time aims to improve educational attainment levels. Funded by the local authority, the project offers after school homework support, Dutch language classes, a mentoring programme, and organises gatherings for parents both at The Centre and through home visits.

Employment

“I used to work at the state railways. But I had a problem with my back and I had difficulties moving. Finally, they said they’d retire me due to health reasons. I said to the head of personnel, ‘I don’t want to stay home. Don’t retire me. Give me a lighter job and I’ll work,’ but the man said, ‘Mister, we are going to give this job to a Dutch [employee].’ If that isn’t discrimination, what is it?”

—Focus group participant.

- Findings from the Open Society Foundations’ research point to a stronger sense by Muslim respondents that they are under greater scrutiny and must outperform their peers and other employees in the labour market in order to correct negative stereotypes of minorities and Muslims in particular.
- Among male Muslim respondents unemployment is higher than among non-Muslim males.
- A number of the female Muslim respondents reported experiences of discrimination in the labour market but were generally positive that their situation would improve over time, especially for the next generation.

CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Decisiveness (Daadkracht), a programme of the Rotterdam City Council, offers vocational degrees to men and women of im-

migrant background who have not been able to earn a diploma. Between April and September 2008, 60 people participated in the programme preparing them for the retail and catering sectors. The majority found paid work after completing the course. In September 2008, 15 women (mostly of Turkish and Moroccan descent) started training to be professional childcare providers. The project is specifically designed for employees who lack the language skills and/or technical knowledge to find work.

Housing

- Both Muslim and non-Muslim respondents lived in their local area in order to be close to their families and because of familiarity with local services and shops.
- The majority of the Muslim and non-Muslim respondents surveyed were dependent on social housing. The houses offered by the social housing corporations are mostly located in the old city districts and respondents pointed to difficulties in finding affordable rental properties, despite urban renewal projects in these districts. This fact in itself limits the chances for many Muslims to move to less ethnically concentrated areas.
- Ethnic segregation was mentioned several times among the concerns that Muslims have about their housing situation. They also expressed concern about their children growing up in an almost all-minority neighbourhood and going to almost all-minority schools. A desire for more indigenous Dutch neighbours was expressed.

Health

- The majority of Muslim respondents indicated that hospitals and medical clinics do a satisfactory job in respecting the religious customs of people belonging to different faiths.
- The Open Society Foundations' research indicates that particular ethnic groups, such as those with a Turkish background, have concerns about unequal treatment from Dutch health care establishments, especially regarding the quality and price of medicines available to them as well as higher health insurance costs.

CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

One of the School Sports Association's (Schoolsport Vereniging) objectives is to facilitate sports activities for children who live in neighbourhoods that have very few sports facilities or none at all. Rather than expecting children from these (often poor) neighbourhoods to travel long distances to a sports facility, the association goes to the neighbourhoods to provide children with sports activities and opportunities for membership in the association.

Policing and Security

- Rotterdam has witnessed increased radicalisation among native Dutch youths who are attracted to right-wing extremist groups. Following the murder of the film-maker Theo van Gogh in November 2004, a series of violent acts

were directed at Islamic and Christian institutions, mostly Muslim schools, mosques, and Christian churches. In total, 22 Muslim schools were targeted by what seemed to be mostly extreme right-wing Dutch youths. Some schools were entirely burnt down.

- The diversity policy is of high priority to the police force in Rotterdam. In 2008, police officers in Rotterdam with an immigrant background formed 10.4 per cent of the force; the police force aims to have 14.5 per cent non-native officers in the coming years.
- Levels of dissatisfaction with the local police are higher among the Muslim respondents to the Foundations' questionnaire than among non-Muslim respondents. Many of the Muslim and non-Muslim respondents alike indicated that there is not enough policing in the neighbourhood.

Participation and Citizenship

- Of the 45 members of the city council, 12 have an immigrant background. Immigrants are represented at all levels of the municipality, including aldermen, city council members, district council members, and high-placed civil servants. In January 2009, Rotterdam's citizens elected a mayor with a Moroccan and Muslim background.
- Eighty per cent of Muslim and non-Muslim respondents said that they were eligible to vote in the municipal elections. Of this number, 65.7 per cent of the Muslim respondents stated that they voted in the last municipal elections, compared with 55.4 per cent of the non-Muslim control group. The percentage of Muslim voters was particularly high for Feijenoord, where the average turnout did not exceed 58 per cent, showing a positive sign of greater civic participation amongst those of immigrant background.
- Muslim respondents who are involved in civic and political activities believe they can influence decisions at the local level. In answer to the question "Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions affecting your city?" Muslim respondents gave a strongly positive response less often than non-Muslims. Muslims also more frequently gave a strongly negative response to this question than non-Muslims.

Media

- Although improving, reporting on Muslims remains the subject of generalisations and associated or triggered by negative events such as terrorism and violence. Terms are not neutral and language matters.
- The editorial staff of the national newspapers in the Netherlands is predominantly native Dutch. Only 2 per cent of some 14,000 employed Dutch journalists are of immigrant origin.
- Nationally the proportion of those who read a newspaper on a daily basis or at least five times a week is lower among the Turkish and Moroccan population (30 per cent and 34 per cent, respectively) than among the native Dutch (57 per cent), Surinamese (52 per cent), and Antillean (45 per cent) populations.

CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Many youngsters in Rotterdam listen to the radio channel FunX, which specifically targets urban youth and has cultural diversity and urban identity as its key features. Apart from playing music that appeals to urban youth, the station features topics related to youth culture and diversity that are discussed in an informal manner that appeals to young people.

Key Recommendations

- The Rotterdam City Council and Muslim and other minority organisations should develop targeted awareness campaigns, offering accessible information about antidiscrimination legislation in the Netherlands and providing information about the public bodies and citizens' advice bureaus to which they can report all types of discrimination.
- The perception of exclusion is strong among the Muslim respondents in this report. In addition to further research on the reasons for not feeling Dutch and on experiences of discrimination, a responsibility lies with the media and public figures on how they frame the discourse on national identity and belonging.
- Muslim civil society, in cooperation with municipality services directed at youth, education, and society should continue to build partnerships with local education departments, schools, and teacher training colleges in a bid to strengthen diversity and intercultural communication training for teachers.
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- As a means to better understand how to improve reporting of crimes and increase trust in the police, an independent statutory body and/or a nongovernmental organisation, based in Rotterdam, should commission and/or increase its research into levels and type of crimes experienced by Muslims and ethnic minorities, including racially and religiously aggravated assaults.
- Public broadcasting corporations, programmes, and administrators should improve their diversity policies for recruiting and promoting ethnic-minority staff, especially locally.
- The local media should reach out to young people from all ethnic backgrounds to better inform them about careers in the media and develop their interest through informal experiences in the world of journalism and the media, such as internships and visits to local media companies (television, radio, print). Greater involvement can be developed through competitions and awards for youths to be held by local broadcasting organisations, local newspapers, and/or well-known national public broadcasting or news agencies.

For more information

To obtain more information about these findings and the At Home in Europe Project, contact:
Klaus Dik Nielsen, Advocacy Officer, At Home in Europe Project | Open Society Foundations
Work: +44 (0) 207 031 1714 |
Mobile: +44 (0) 791 769 5286 |
klaus.nielsen@osf-eu.org |
www.soros.org/initiatives/home

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