

# Muslims in Marseille

## 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, Stoneygate, 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

- Marseille is France's second largest city with a population of 839,000 in 2006. Research suggests that about one third of the population has a Muslim background.
- In Marseille's 3rd arrondissement, where research for this report was conducted, statistics from 1999 show that 13.8 per cent of the district's residents are foreign born compared to 7.2 per cent for Marseille overall. The 3rd arrondissement's population is generally less well-off and less well educated than the city's average resident.
- This report is based on a qualitative survey of 100 Muslims and a comparison group of 100 non-Muslims, as well as six focus groups with Muslims. It also includes interviews with individuals from local government in Marseille, non-governmental organisations, and members of Muslim communities.

### Key Findings By Issue Area

"I think people here feel that their identity is more Marseillais than French. When you go to the Stade Vélodrome, you see Chinese, Arabs, everyone. This is representative of Marseille."  
– Focus group participant

### Identity, Belonging, and Discrimination

- Majorities of both Muslims and non-Muslims surveyed in the 3rd arrondissement said they enjoyed living in their

neighbourhood (67 and 86 per cent, respectively). A larger number of Muslims (32 per cent) said they did not enjoy living in the neighbourhood compared to non-Muslims (14 per cent). More than a quarter of the respondents from both groups were concerned about sanitation and lack of security.

- Among Muslims, 55 per cent said they felt they belonged to Marseille, while nearly 70 per cent of non-Muslims indicated a sense of belonging to the city.
- In this survey, a slight majority of Muslims (58 per cent) perceived themselves as French, while 42 per cent did not. Within Muslim national sub-groups, those with French citizenship (41 per cent) had the strongest sense of being French. There was a strong tendency amongst Muslims descended from Algeria to believe that others did not regard them as French (82 per cent).
- More than 60 per cent of Muslims and non-Muslims declared family as their most important defining feature followed by religion for Muslims and occupation for non-Muslims. Among both groups, 66 per cent believed that residents in their neighbourhoods shared the same values.
- More than 40 per cent of Muslim and non-Muslim respondents agreed that racial prejudice is prevalent and widespread.
- Muslims and non-Muslims generally agreed on which groups were the victims of racial prejudice, with 65 per cent of respondents from both groups listing Arabs first,

then blacks (55 per cent), Muslims (38 per cent), Eastern Europeans, and Jews (14 per cent each).

- Muslims expressed concern about unequal and selective enforcement of the long-established French policy of *laïcité* that tries to ensure that the state remains neutral towards all religions and protects freedom of faith.

## Education

“Schools have given methods, resources for understanding. But from the point of view of citizenship, zero. I feel that school excluded me from the French community rather than bringing me closer to it.”

– Focus group participant

- The research for this report suggests that the educational environment in Marseille’s north district schools stands in stark contrast with that of the city’s south districts, and contributes to the underachievement generally recorded in the city’s heavily Muslim north district schools.
- In 2008, 62 per cent of north districts pupils and 83 per cent of pupils in the south successfully passed France’s basic secondary education exam. In the north districts, 65 per cent of the candidates received the general baccalauréat degree, compared to 89 per cent in the south districts.
- Muslim respondents rarely attributed blatant racist remarks or behaviour to teachers. However, they frequently noted that they often felt that school did not give them a sense of belonging to a community of French citizens, which is supposedly a primary objective of French schools.
- Educational aspirations of children from migrant backgrounds are high. However, some Muslims mentioned that they felt teachers had low expectations for them because of their Muslim and migrant backgrounds leading to low education attainment and ambition.
- Affirmative action to improve academic achievement and quality of schools in the North districts is being implemented in Marseille. There is also an increase in teachers with a Muslim background but evidence of the success and impact of such policies is too early to determine.

## Employment

“Christmas and Easter are marked as holidays, but not Eid or the end of the fast [of Ramadan]. Every time, we need to explain why we are asking for a day off, because according to the calendar it’s a normal working day. In private firms, if you want [holiday] leave, you have to ask for a day off. Then it’s either yes or no. It’s up to the boss, if he doesn’t want it, we can’t have it.”

– Interview with trade-unionist

- A 2007 workplace survey in six locations across France, including Marseille, found that only 11 per cent of employers treated minority candidates the same as majority candidates; 70 per cent favoured candidates from the majority population, and 19 per cent favoured the minority candidates. This evidence of discrimination appears to support the perceptions of discrimination that were

described by Muslims in Marseille with Maghrebi youth feeling particularly affected.

- Efforts to address racial and religious discrimination are limited. Public funding to assist people into the labour market does not directly address discrimination as a barrier to employment and as a consequence little action to prevent ethnic and religious discrimination is taken.
- Out of six French cities, Marseilles had the highest unemployment rates for 20–24 year olds of non-European origin (58 per cent compared to second highest, Lille with 42 per cent).
- In France, case law regarding the wearing of Islamic religious signs at the workplace remains ambiguous. Discrimination by employers against displays of religion is generally perceived as something applicants have to accept, even though the law guarantees the right for anybody to freely express his/her religious beliefs (within the limits of public order).

## Housing

“A vast majority of the families who have recourse to (the guaranteed housing law) are of immigrant origin, and their requests are based notably on excessive delays for access to housing.”

– Interview with a member of the guaranteed housing law (DALO) departmental committee

- Residential segregation is a key feature of Marseille. Social and ethnic boundaries are well marked within the city, split between urban renewal areas in the North where there is a high Muslim and socio-economically deprived population, and well to do southern districts with a much lower Muslim and migrant population.
- Of Marseille households (from all backgrounds), 70 per cent have income levels that make them eligible for social housing. The majority of the Muslim population in the 3rd arrondissement has some of the lowest average income levels in all of Marseille. Across the city there are 30,000–35,000 applicants for social housing—eight applications for each vacant apartment.
- Competition for social housing in Marseille has intensified and has been exacerbated by a rise in the social housing eligibility income level that allows middle class applicants to enter this market. Interviews suggest that landlords are giving precedence to these new applicants and poorer applicants are offered worse housing or nothing at all.

## CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

**City Centre For All (Un Centre ville pour tous), a civil society organisation, provides legal assistance to low-income residents in Marseille facing eviction from unscrupulous landlords. Its actions have resulted in lawsuits, convictions of landlords, and rehousing or compensation for abused tenants. Efforts to improve social housing in Marseille have also been helped by the implementation of an enforceable right to housing law in 2008. The law makes housing or accommodation a state-guaranteed right that can be recognised and enforced by administrative courts. The law could eventually improve**

## the balance of power between tenants, landlords, and the government in the social housing disputes.

### Health

- On the whole, the Open Society Foundations' survey shows high levels of satisfaction with local health-care services among Muslim (66 per cent) and non-Muslim (71 per cent) respondents. Only a small minority identified the hospital as a place where they encountered discrimination and prejudice (3 per cent compared with 1 per cent).
- Efforts to establish a Muslim chaplaincy in the public hospital were initially welcomed by hospital authorities. But the relations between the Muslim chaplain and the hospital's managers soon deteriorated, as some hospital executives perceived the growing visibility of Muslims in a public hospital as a foreign intrusion, similar to activism and proselytising.
- When asked about halal food policies in Marseille's public hospital, Muslims indicated that hospital management did not want to cede ground on the issue of providing halal meals, which they saw as going against the French policies of laïcité. Members of the Muslim community noted that the hospitals had a well-established system for providing kosher meals to Jewish patients. Many Muslims came to see the situation as a policy of double standards encouraged by local decision-makers.

### CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

**The initiative "Health in St-Mauront/Belle-de-Mai: All United!" in a lower-class neighbourhood of the 3rd arrondissement aims to reduce inequalities with respect to health. It envisions the development of health promotion programmes and of actions to educate children, youth, and families about health in the city's disenfranchised neighbourhoods.**

### Policing and Security

"I filed a complaint with the police when my car was stolen. The officer in charge of told me: 'But Madam, those who did this, they are your cousins [Arabs like you].' He said this very calmly, without joking. It took him two hours to record the complaint. Beyond the prejudiced view that this officer held, there is a larger mental divide between ideas about offenders, who are often assumed to be of foreign origin, and the rest of the French people."

– Interview with local academic

- Muslim respondents share the same concerns as non-Muslim respondents in matters of public security, with 49 per cent from both groups saying that they do not feel comfortable in certain places in their neighbourhood.
- A similar proportion of Muslims (48 per cent) as non-Muslims (56 per cent) are dissatisfied with law enforcement in Marseille.
- The majority of Muslim interviewees want their concerns about crime and security to be recognised, and they

commonly express disappointment about the lack of efficiency of national and municipal police forces.

- A number of interviewees of postcolonial immigrant background felt the police in Marseille were improving and had family members who were police officers. Joining the police is no longer perceived as a disgrace or an act of treason, but rather as a career achievement.

### CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

**Starting in 2000, the national police piloted and developed trainings in Marseille that give police recruits basic knowledge about Islam, the history of immigration, and the sociology of the city's neighbourhoods. Sociologists, street workers, and educators take part in this training, as well as veteran police officers who share their personal field experience.**

### Participation and Citizenship

- At the start of the first decade of the 21st century, both left-wing and the right-wing parties competed to showcase Muslim candidates on their electoral candidate rolls. In the 2001 municipal campaign, out of 86 candidates of Maghrebi, African or Comorian background put forward by the various political parties in Marseille, 13 were elected in the second round ballot, and 4 sat on the city council.
- Amongst the survey respondents, exclusion from voting rights (due to the law which does not allow foreign non-European residents to vote) as well as abstention from voting meant that the level of participation in elections for Muslim respondents is lower than that of non-Muslim respondents: 40 per cent of Muslim respondents voted in the 2007 national elections, compared with 76 per cent of non-Muslim respondents. In local elections, 66 per cent of eligible Muslims voted, compared to 84 per cent of non-Muslims respondents. Only 34 per cent of Muslim respondents voted in the last municipal elections, compared with 67 per cent of non-Muslim respondents.
- Muslims in Marseille tend to have a lower level of participation in civil society activities and civil activism: 31 per cent take part in neighbourhood meetings, compared to 44 per cent of non-Muslims, and 32 per cent sign petitions, compared to 59 per cent of non-Muslims.

### Media

"In Marseille, one feels the presence of a strong Muslim community; it is right in the centre and it is visible; contrary to Paris, where they are less visible, except for a few neighbourhoods. Here in Marseille, you immediately get a sense that Muslims are central."

– Interview with a French photographer

- Unlike other French cities, Marseille prides itself on a multicultural, unifying identity that is celebrated in media discourse. Yet for some Muslims, there is a large discrepancy between the media images of multiculturalism and the editorial staff and teams of journalists that remain surprisingly white in a city lauded for its diversity.

- Muslim survey responses indicate that they primarily use mainstream media sources to get their information about community life in the 3rd arrondissement, or to learn the news about the city and France. The main sources are national television, commercial radio, the local printed press, and websites. The media habits of Muslims in Marseille do not differ markedly from non-Muslims. This finding deflates a widespread misconception that the city's Muslims consume large amounts of communal or ethnic media (Arabic radio stations, satellite TV channels broadcast from the Persian Gulf or from the countries of origin, Arabic-language newspapers, etc.).

### CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

**Med'in Marseille, a website set up in 2007, has been instrumental in changing the image of the residents of immigrant background in Marseille. The site tackles stereotypes and places immigrant populations at the heart of local citizenship. With several thousand unique visitors daily, Med'in Marseille has gradually become an institution among Marseille's media and is acknowledged as a model by local leaders. Yet obstacles remain, particularly the need to maintain funding and remain politically independent.**

### Key Recommendations

- Employers in the public and private sectors should implement the principle of laïcité, which treats all religious denominations equally and effectively protects religious practices by providing official holidays for important Islamic events such as Eid. Muslims in Marseille subscribe to the principle of laïcité but are frustrated with its inconsistent application and their inability to negotiate the observance of Muslim calendar events with schools and employers.
- The French government, the Department of Employment, and the Marseille City Council should commission research on the work histories of people from immigrant backgrounds to develop policies to address chronic unemployment and to reveal the barriers faced by particular individuals and groups.
- Marseille's housing departments should ensure the equitable distribution of social housing across the city to combat ethnic and social class segregation. Currently, the poor and ethnic minorities are concentrated in social housing in the north of Marseille.
- The Ministry of Education should assess the nature and type of education available to vocational students, with a view to offering courses, including academic ones, which go beyond vocational training. A focus on purely vocational training can lead to lower levels of integration and participation in society. This recommendation suggests a review of French educational structures, yet regional and national education authorities are urged to take the first steps to improve integration and inclusion.
- City officials, particularly Marseille's mayor, should have the patient's charter implemented in all city hospitals, especially in relation to the spiritual and religious rights of patients. Requests from patients of Muslim faith cannot go against the principles of secularism but should be met within the framework of the law.
- The mayor and the leaders of Marseille's police department should develop recruitment strategies to make the police force more accurately reflect the cultural diversity of the city. The goal should be to deploy a diverse municipal police force citywide.
- City hall representatives should move across party lines to sponsor civic consultations and awareness-raising campaigns directed at both working-class and affluent neighbourhoods that highlight the importance of treating all city residents, regardless of origin, as genuine members of the Marseille community. The Muslims of Marseille should also work to play a greater role in the city's political life and not be treated as religious or political subjects who may be manipulated by leaders co-opted by local politicians and parties.
- The Marseille School of Journalism should encourage the recruitment of qualified young journalists from diverse ethnic and social classes and support a new generation of media workers who reflect Marseille's diversity.

### For more information

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## Open Society Foundations

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