

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The inhabitants of Kreuzberg in Berlin perceive their neighbourhood as a place in which the people living there have very diverse sets of values. Yet it is also a place in which people get on well together, work to improve the neighbourhood, and help each other. This important finding runs counter to the dominant belief that shared values are necessary for successful integration. The Open Society Institute report *Muslims in Berlin* concludes that a diversity of values in a neighbourhood does not cause people and cultures to clash. The overwhelming majority of Muslim and non-Muslim respondents said that Kreuzberg is an enjoyable and safe place to live.

The study of the district of Kreuzberg highlights the success of an integrated structure and approach by citizens and policymakers to create a socially diverse environment. It is a part of Berlin in which individuals of differing ethnic and religious affiliations are able to successfully live together. The district's experiences offer lessons to European cities with large minority groups on how to meaningfully adapt and accommodate the needs and concerns of their inhabitants. For a long time, Kreuzberg has perceived its multicultural character as an asset, and has encouraged the participation in public life of all different social groups, including Muslims from various ethnic backgrounds and communities.

For many Muslim respondents, Kreuzberg offers not only safety, but also refuge from other parts of the city (as well as the country as a whole), where they often feel alienated and excluded. The attribute that gives their district this safe character is its highly diverse nature. This creates a more welcoming feeling of multiculturalism and belonging than monocultural environments elsewhere.

In Kreuzberg, unlike in other districts of Berlin, Muslim organisations have a strong presence within various political bodies. Local-government funding is distributed to Muslim groups, and district authorities and religious associations cooperate on local projects. This is particularly encouraging given the widely perceived stigmatisation and marginalisation of many religious Muslim associations in Germany.

At the city level, there are numerous measures of success, and the emergence of a progressive new approach to social inclusion. The new version of the *Integrationskonzept* (Integration Policy) is named *Vielfalt fördern – Zusammenhalt stärken* (Supporting Diversity – Strengthening Cohesion). In this new approach, the whole of society must adapt to the new demographic and social needs of an immigrant country. This challenges the traditional concept of integration in which minorities have had to adapt to the perceived majority culture. An important part of this new policy is the opening of a new administrative body (*Interkulturelle Öffnung der Verwaltung*) to shepherd the changing of important social institutions in response to a changing society. Its employment policies aim to ensure a diverse workforce and support for government institutions, meeting the needs of its non-ethnic German population.

Integration efforts on various levels of the administration, from the police to local job centres, have led to a heightened acceptance and inclusion of Muslims in Berlin society. One such initiative, the *Islamforum* (Islam Forum), consisting of representatives from Muslim communities and local politicians, has strengthened ties and built trust among its members.

Many challenges remain unaddressed. Among Muslims surveyed by this report, outright identification with Germany and their self-perception as being German was very low. The vast majority of Muslim respondents claimed that they are reluctant to define themselves as Germans not because they reject German society and its values, but because they continue to be viewed as ‘foreigners’ by the larger German society. Such attitudes make it almost impossible for non-ethnic Germans to feel like they are an integral part of German society.

This sense of exclusion, widely internalised by many Muslim respondents, has increased with the rise of hostility toward Islam. This growing discrimination and hostility toward Muslims,¹ a central concern for respondents, was especially felt in the fields of education and employment. The *Neutralitätsgesetz* (Law on Neutrality), passed in January 2005, excludes the wearing of all visibly religious signs, symbols and garments in public schools and justice sector employment. It has had a detrimental impact, especially among Muslim women who choose to wear the headscarf.

Muslim inhabitants of Kreuzberg are not immune from discrimination. Respondents report difficulties in finding housing outside the district, gaining meaningful employment and apprenticeships, and, at times, obtaining culturally sensitive health care. The perception of unequal treatment is by no means restricted to religious affiliation. Muslims often perceive the multicausal experience of exclusion as anti-Muslim. Being labelled a Muslim does not only affect those who identify with Islam and are visible Muslims. It also affects those who may be non-religious and non-Muslim, yet whose skin colour, ethnic background, and perceived origin are viewed as signs of belonging to the Islamic faith.

¹ This supports the findings of Brettfeld and Wetzels within their quantitative survey on Muslims in Germany, where 80 per cent of young Muslim respondents had experienced some kind of exclusion or negative treatment because of their attributed trait of being a foreigner. Among the respondents, 26.9 per cent reported heavy or very heavy forms of discrimination. Katrin Brettfeld, & Peter Wetzels, *Muslimen in Deutschland. Integration, Integrationsbarrieren, Religion sowie Einstellungen zu Demokratie, Rechtsstaat und politisch-religiös motivierter Gewalt; Ergebnisse von Befragungen im Rahmen einer multizentrischen Studie in städtischen Lebensräumen* (Muslims in Germany. Integration, Barriers to Integration, Religion and Attitudes towards Democracy, State and political-religiously motivated violence; Findings of Surveys in the context of a multi-centred research in urban spaces), Hamburg, 2. unveränd. Aufl. Berlin: Bundesministerium des Inneren (Texte zur inneren Sicherheit). (2nd unchanged reprint. Berlin: Federal Ministry of the Interior (texts for homeland security). Universität Hamburg, 2007, p. 241. English summary is available at http://www.en.bmi.bund.de/cn_012/nn_148138/Internet/Content/Broschueren/2008/Muslimen_in_Deutschland_en.html (hereafter Brettfeld & Wetzels, *Muslims in Germany*).

Many European cities are facing contemporary social challenges and changes as their societies are transformed by immigrant populations. However, the struggle lies in shaping this transformation in an integrated manner that seeks to eliminate the different reasons for unequal opportunities for individual citizens and groups. The strategies and policies deployed in Kreuzberg offer an inspiring example that could help transform other cities even as Kreuzberg continues to learn from positive practices initiated elsewhere.