

Muslims in Leicester

Findings and Recommendations

THIS CITY REPORT WAS PREPARED as part of a series of monitoring reports titled *Muslims in EU Cities*. The series focuses on eleven cities in the European Union with significant Muslim populations.

Within the city reports, the following neighborhoods were chosen for more in-depth study: Slotervaart, Amsterdam; Borgerhout, Antwerp; Kreuzberg, Berlin; Nørrebro, Copenhagen; Hamburg-Mitte, Hamburg; Evington, Spinney Hills, and Stonegate, Leicester; Borough of Waltham Forest, London; 3rd Arrondissement, Marseille; 18th Arrondissement, Paris; Feijenoord, Rotterdam; and Järfvåltet, Stockholm.

This body of work comes in response to major trends with regards to Muslims living in Europe: whether citizens or migrants, native born or newly-arrived, Muslims are a growing and varied population that presents Europe with one of its greatest challenges, namely how to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all in a climate of rapidly expanding diversity.

Background

- Leicester has one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the United Kingdom outside London.
- The Muslim communities in Leicester hail from predominantly Indian (mainly Gujarati), Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Somali, and Turkish backgrounds.
- According to the 2001 Census, Leicester's population was 279,921, of which just over 30,000 (11 per cent) were Muslims, making them the third-largest faith group in Leicester after Christians and Hindus.
- Leicester is predicted to become the country's first "plural city" with no overall ethnic majority.
- Seventeen of the 54 councillors for the city (31 per cent), including the previous lord mayor, are of ethnic-minority background.
- The most detailed study of Muslims in the city to date, the Leicester *Muslims in EU Cities Report* provides views from diverse Muslims and non-Muslims on their neighbourhoods and local area relations and the influence of the media on people's perceptions of Muslims.

Key Findings By Major Issue Area

Identity

- The majority of Muslims in Leicester possess a strong British identity and sense of belonging to the city as well as the country, holding many values in common with non-Muslims.
- While Muslims have a strong sense of religious identity, a similar and high proportion of both Muslims (82.4 per cent)

and non-Muslims (81.6 per cent) see themselves as British and want to be seen as British (69.6 per cent and 71.4 per cent, respectively).

- While the majority of non-Muslims (75 per cent) felt they were viewed by others as British, the majority of Muslims (60 per cent) did not feel that others viewed them as British.

I do define myself as British, not just as a Muslim, because I was born in England, I was brought up here on fish and chips, you know, the culture is everything. It has defined me so I've become the person that I am because of Britain, because I've been born and bred here, so it's not just that I come from a Muslim family; everything else has defined me as well.

[focus group participant, Leicester.]

Education

- High pupil mobility is identified as one factor contributing towards low attainment levels in Leicester. This was mainly attributed to a regular influx of various communities into Leicester, and the time taken for them to be settled and allocated housing and schooling.
- Although the vast majority of Muslims (60 per cent) and non-Muslims (51 per cent) indicate that they are happy with the way schools respect the religious customs of others, twice the number of non-Muslims (over 12 per cent, compared with 5.9 per cent Muslims) indicated that perhaps too much was being done in this area.

CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Aqoon Education and Training Services is one of a number of community organisations that the city's ethnic and faith groups are turning to for educational advice. Aqoon was set up by a group of Somali professionals to help identify and address the specific educational and training needs of Leicester's new Somali community.

Employment

- One-third of Muslim respondents worked in clerical or intermediate occupations (such as secretary, administrator, and personal assistant). The majority of non-Muslims in the sample and 20 per cent of Muslims worked in modern professional occupations, such as teachers, social workers, and welfare officers.
- Very few Muslim respondents worked in technical and craft occupations such as motor mechanics, plumbers, and gardeners.

Housing

- Of the Muslims interviewed by the At Home in Europe Project, 40 per cent were owner-occupiers, with just under half of those still paying a mortgage and just under 15 per cent living in social housing.
- Over half of the non-Muslims interviewed owned their homes, with nearly a third owning them outright (without a mortgage) and only 10 per cent living in social housing.

CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Police officers in Leicester are encouraged to engage with community media through regular appearances on local community radio and participation in bodies such as the Leicester Multicultural Advisory Group.

Policing and Security

- Relations between police and Muslim communities in certain wards in Leicester are among the strongest in the UK.
- Recruitment levels of minorities into the police remain low, reflecting serious issues of mistrust and image that the police must overcome.
- Approximately 50 per cent of Muslims and non-Muslims believe racial discrimination is still very much alive in the UK. An even larger number (over 70 per cent of both groups) feel that there is 'a fair amount' of religious prejudice in the country today and that it has increased over the last five years. Muslim respondents felt that attitudes towards them had become more negative.

Participation and Citizenship

- Muslims play an active role in civic and political engagement and they generally have greater trust in local authority than in the central government.
- While ethnic minorities are well represented in elected positions in the city, they remain under-represented, though not absent, in higher positions in the police, council, and National Health Service (NHS).

Media

- Respondents were much more positive about depictions of and reporting on Muslim communities by the media in Leicester in comparison with the national media.
- Both Muslim and non-Muslim interviewees commented that the *Leicester Mercury* should be used as a model for local and national media in the UK. The paper initiated a multicultural advisory group that helps local media work with and understand different communities.
- Muslims in Leicester are increasingly acknowledging that Muslims must engage with media outlets and journalists; they need to interact more with journalists and encourage individual members of the Muslim community to write letters or articles for local papers. Negative stories and perceptions can be counteracted by community members bringing the media's attention to examples of Muslims in the community being good citizens or giving something back to the city.

Key Recommendations:

- The Leicester City Council and the Leicester Partnership should initiate more research and activities relevant to addressing the issues and managing the policies that arise as Leicester's changing demographics make it an increasingly plural city.
- Raise awareness and hold discussions about sensitive aspects of policing, such as stop-and-search and anti-terror raids, and clarify the guidelines for these procedures.
- More focused local research is needed to examine the economic inactivity of Muslim women and ways to increase their engagement with the labour market.
- Forge more partnerships between schools and colleges, universities and career services agencies to help widen career choices and mentoring opportunities for young disadvantaged people
- The Leicestershire constabulary should actively recruit more Muslims into Police Community Support Officer positions. An increase in the number of Muslims working across the city as support officers will help combat cultural tensions around Muslim officers and create a more relaxed and positive environment for the communities and the police force.
- The Leicester City Council should emphasise that community cohesion is all inclusive and not limited to relations between whites and Asians, or Hindus and Muslims. Efforts need to be developed to build better relations between different Muslim groups such as the Somali and Pakistani communities and, more importantly, to develop stories about the commonalities of all citizens.
- Local media organisations should hold open days for higher-education colleges, schools, and mosques. These could include a tour, question and answer sessions, and discussions where young people share their views on how they feel the local media portray them, as well as listening to presenters and journalists.
- Muslim organisations, mosques, and leaders should promote the importance of citizenship more strongly and encourage their constituencies to play a larger role in the city's civic forums and platforms, for instance as parent governors.

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