

Muslims in Amsterdam

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 country's total population. Muslims in Amsterdam make up approximately 12 per cent of the city's inhabitants or an estimated 90,000 people. Most are of Moroccan and Turkish descent. 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.
- Muslims live across the city of Amsterdam, but are concentrated in the old neighbourhoods close to the city centre, such as De Pijp and De Baarsjes, and increasingly in the western suburbs, such as Slotervaart.
- This report finds that many Muslim and non-Muslim respondents have a strong attachment to their local area, city, and country. The level of confidence in their city administrations is relatively high. However, more than 30 per cent of Muslim households in Amsterdam live on a minimum wage. With second-generation Muslims improving their education and employment positions, the percentage is likely to diminish, but the fact remains that, owing to prejudices against them, Muslims still face socio-economic difficulties which they share with other groups in society. Muslim communities in the Netherlands also face the challenge of being scapegoated due to Dutch society's anxiety about religious and ethnic diversity. Policies aimed at addressing racial and ethnic prejudice should also lead to a decrease in anti-Muslim prejudice.
- The fieldwork for this report consisted of 200 in-depth, face-to-face interviews with local residents (107 Muslims and 93 non-Muslims) living in the district of Slotervaart. Interviews were carried out in Dutch, Turkish, and Moroccan. The issues raised were further explored in six focus-group discussions held with Muslim residents. Additional interviews were conducted with local officials, practitioners such as teachers and health workers, community representatives, nongovernmental organisations, and experts engaged with integration and antidiscrimination issues. Approximately 300 people, mainly from the district of Slotervaart but including inhabitants from across Amsterdam, form the basis for this report's analysis.

Key Findings By Major Issue Area

Identity, Belonging and Discrimination

- For Muslims, local and city level belonging is stronger than national belonging. For non-Muslims, levels of national belonging are slightly greater than city or local belonging.
- Muslims and non-Muslims in Slotervaart have a strong sense of belonging to Amsterdam with over 80 per cent of both groups feeling at home. Of the 59 Muslims who stated that they do not belong or feel at home in Amsterdam, 13 referred to racism and discrimination. Of the 42 non-Muslims who answered this question, 3 stated that they do not feel at home because the city has so many people from ethnic minorities and 2 stated that they were discriminated against.
- Attachment to their neighbourhood was slightly stronger amongst Muslim respondents with 80 per cent of Muslims and 70 per cent of non-Muslims stating they strongly belonged to their local areas. More than half (55 per cent) of the respondents to the Foundations questionnaire stated that they liked the neighbourhood in which they lived.
- Cultural identification with the Netherlands was high with almost 60 per cent of Muslims considering themselves Dutch and even greater with the non-Muslims at 91 per cent. The gap between Muslims and non-Muslims is worrying when Muslims who consider themselves Dutch were asked whether others saw them as Dutch. Forty-one per cent of Muslim respondents thought that others do consider them as Dutch, while 59 per cent believed that others do not see them as Dutch.
- Visible religious identity does not have a negative effect on a person's sense of belonging to the Netherlands: among Muslims who wear visible religious identifiers, 82 per cent felt a "very strong" or "fairly strong" sense of belonging to the Netherlands. For Muslims who do not visibly show their religious allegiance, this figure is 78 per cent.

Education

- Overall, Muslim respondents were reasonably positive about their schools with 54 per cent of Muslim respondents and 42 per cent of non-Muslim respondents expressing satisfaction with the quality of primary education. Just over 50 per cent and 30 per cent of Muslim and non-Muslim respondents respectively were satisfied with secondary schools.
- Seventy per cent of Muslim and 44 per cent of non-Muslim respondents thought that schools respect the religious customs of people belonging to different religions.
- Muslim parents are concerned about the levels and impact of segregation found in secondary education. Highly segregated schools where pupils from non-western ethnic minority backgrounds are the majority raise parental concerns about inferior education quality and difficulties for their children integrating into society.

- In Amsterdam, a number of exemplary initiatives target poorly performing children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to improve their educational attainment levels. These initiatives engage private organisations, the city administration, families, and volunteers and could be instructive for other Dutch cities and across Europe.

CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

The project Campus New West brings pupils aged 8–16 years old into contact with the business sector to expose pupils to a variety of professions and increase student awareness about qualification requirements for various careers. The project aims to help students make better education choices that will increase their opportunities in the labour market. More than 200 companies participate in the project by offering one-day internships, practical assignments, or mentors and coaches. In 2007, over 6,000 pupils participated in the project.

Employment

- Recent comparative research on Amsterdam's working-age population (15–64 year-olds) found that the economic activity rate of people of Turkish (53 per cent) and Moroccan (51 per cent) backgrounds was significantly lower than that of the native Dutch (78 per cent) and people from Surinamese and Antillean backgrounds (67 per cent).
- Ethnic discrimination is believed to be a greater reason for discrimination in the labour market than religion for employed and unemployed Muslims. Employed Muslims are less likely to report discrimination than those seeking employment. Of the Muslims who faced discrimination when seeking employment, 25 per cent felt it was due to their ethnicity and 12.5 per cent attributed it to their religion.
- Both Muslim (53.3 per cent) and non-Muslim (58.5 per cent) respondents felt that there was sufficient respect for different religious customs in the workplace. A relatively large percentage from both groups answered that they "did not know" if there was sufficient respect for different religious customs in the workplace.

CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Vlam (Flame), a women's centre established in 2008 in Slotervaart, helps women pursue jobs or education by offering information, empowerment courses, and individual career counselling.

Housing

- Fifty per cent of non-Muslims and 65.1 per cent of Muslims rent their houses through a social housing arrangement. More non-Muslims than Muslims own homes (with a mortgage) or rent from a private landlord.
- Muslim respondents expressed a desire for diverse neighbourhoods where inhabitants also include ethnic Dutch families and individuals.

- Respondents raised concerns about the impact of urban renewal, long waiting lists for social housing, and high rents in Amsterdam. Some Muslim respondents interpreted policies to relocate families following urban regeneration schemes as exacerbating segregation in certain parts of Amsterdam and increasing divisions among different groups in society.

Health

- Large majorities of Muslim and non-Muslim respondents were satisfied and appreciated Amsterdam's public health services.
- Most people (67 per cent of Muslims and 55.3 per cent of non-Muslims) felt that hospitals respected the customs of people belonging to different religions.
- Despite the overall positive response to the health sector, people belonging to ethnic minorities face barriers in accessing and receiving culturally sensitive health care, including language and religious requirements. These issues are of particular concern for older Muslims.

Policing and Security

- Non-Muslims who have been the victims of crime are more likely to report this to the police in comparison to Muslims. In focus groups, some Muslim participants who had been victims of crime described getting slow responses or no response at all when they reported the crimes.
- Of those who had contact with the police over the last 12 months, the majority of both Muslim (71.4 per cent) and non-Muslim (62.5 per cent) respondents were satisfied with the interactions. People who were not satisfied often reported that police had treated them rudely or not taken them seriously.
- In 2007 and 2008, 12 per cent of the police covering Amsterdam and five nearby municipalities were members of ethnic minorities. This is an increase compared with the previous years. However, in Amsterdam and elsewhere, ethnic minorities are over-represented in the lower echelons of the police force. The Interior Ministry is addressing this by aiming to fill 30 per cent of the force's higher ranks with women and ethnic minorities by 2011.
- A relatively large part of the Moroccan participants in the focus groups declared that security in their neighbourhood was "not that bad" and that negative images of their community were largely created by the media.

CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

"Street coaches" have been active since November 2006 in combating conflict and maintaining order. They patrol selected neighbourhoods on bicycle and report problems to "home teams" who make home visits to individuals and the families of those perceived as "trouble-makers." A significant proportion of "home team" members are of Moroccan descent. This system of increased surveillance is seen as helping reduce trouble caused by youngsters in Slotervaart.

Participation and Citizenship

- Almost 40 per cent of Muslim respondents and 21 per cent of non-Muslim respondents said they were eligible to vote in national elections. Of these, 76.8 per cent of the Muslims and 70.6 per cent of the non-Muslims voted in the last national election (2006). Many more were eligible to vote in local elections: 83.8 per cent and 89.4 per cent, respectively.
- Elected officials with a Muslim background can be found at the national as well as local level. This includes members of Parliament, senior government ministers, and a number of members of Amsterdam's municipal council. In Slotervaart, the previous and current council president and a number of council members are Muslims.
- Political participation is not limited to voting. A greater proportion of Muslim respondents (40.6 per cent) than non-Muslim (19.4 per cent) have taken part in a consultation or a meeting about local services or problems in their area in the previous 12 months. This is much higher than the percentage for Amsterdam as a whole (13 per cent) reported in 2007.
- A similar proportion of Muslims (41 per cent) and non-Muslims (43.6 per cent) think they can influence decisions at the local level. A more pronounced difference emerges in relation to national politics, with Muslims (22.6 per cent) less likely than non-Muslims (35.5 per cent) to believe they can influence national decision-making.
- Both Muslims and non-Muslims have a greater degree of trust in the courts than in the national government or Parliament with over 70 per cent of Muslims in comparison to 55 per cent of non-Muslims having "a lot" to a "fair amount" of confidence in the judicial system. The sense of confidence in local government was much higher from both groups when compared to national government.

CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

In response to the 2004 murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh, the Amsterdam municipality initiated the action programme "Wij Amsterdammers" ("We, the Citizens of Amsterdam"). The programme stresses the development of a common, shared identity and emphasises the local identity of citizens as residents of Amsterdam over national identity. Public campaigns depicting both the diversity and unity of the Amsterdam population have been central to this approach.

Media

- A 2008 study by a Dutch organization found that while 80 per cent of native Dutch people read a Dutch newspaper once a week, the figure is 60 per cent for Moroccans and 39 per cent for Turks. Among the Turkish community, 8 per cent read only Turkish newspapers, and 19 per cent read both Dutch and Turkish newspapers.
- The focus groups indicated that many second-generation Dutch of Turkish and Moroccan descent read Dutch newspapers, including De Telegraaf, whose coverage of Islam and Muslims is largely negative.

- Apart from newspapers such as De Telegraaf, and commercial television channels such as SBS6, news coverage of Dutch Muslims and of issues related to Islam in the Netherlands has improved and is viewed as less negative or one-dimensional by Muslims.
- The Amsterdam City Council promotes diversity and a positive representation of its various populations through public events and media efforts, including running public campaigns featuring diverse populations, sponsoring multicultural series on local TV, and supporting media initiatives involving young Dutch Muslims.
- Municipal authorities should monitor policies targeting neighbourhoods that are part of physical rehabilitation or urban renewal plans. The planning and implementation should consider the social, economic, and cultural demands of the neighbourhood. The municipal authorities and housing corporations should ensure that up-to-date and better information about housing schemes and opportunities are widely available and easily accessible to populations living in deprived and/or isolated circumstances. Information should be made available in different languages and in suitable spots, like religious and cultural locations such as mosques.

Key Recommendations

- The municipality of Amsterdam should undertake steps to address the experiences and perceptions of exclusion of Muslims in the social, economic, and political spheres. Evidence based policy responses require capturing the specific experiences of Muslims through frequent and comprehensive monitoring and data collection.
- The municipality of Amsterdam should continue to support opportunities for better engagement and greater interaction among its diverse populations. For example, sub municipalities of Amsterdam should work with other actors, such as sports clubs and social centres, to develop projects that promote and stimulate interfaith and interethnic engagement through the use of sports, exchange visits, and other leisure activities.
- The municipality and submunicipalities in Amsterdam should develop specific programmes to counter ethnic segregation in education. The municipality and submunicipalities should stimulate and support schools and parents to develop initiatives to counter educational segregation. Furthermore, schools should organise sports and education exchange programmes with other schools to stimulate contacts between pupils of different backgrounds. This should include pupils from comprehensive and private schools as well as from faith-based educational establishments.
- Language courses should offer training adapted to people's levels of proficiency, needs and aspirations, and personal situations. Such an integral approach may be more costly and difficult to organise, but will be more effective. The municipality, in collaboration with the Centre for Work and Income, should provide an incentive for learning by integrating language training for unemployed people into a comprehensive approach to help them find work.
- The Amsterdam police should maintain and expand projects in other areas of the city based on the Slotervaart model that builds trust between the police and communities. This model fosters dialogue and involves Muslim actors, such as the mosque, in their communications with the neighbourhood. Involving Muslim actors should not be instrumental for reaching goals predefined by the municipality, police, and other decisionmakers but should be done with the intention of building greater understanding for all concerned.
- The Antidiscrimination Bureau and police should develop a concerted awareness and information campaign which encourages people who have experienced discrimination by police officers to report their concerns. The police should establish a reasonable period within which a complaint will be dealt with, as the current procedure taking between one and a half to three years is unreasonably long.
- Muslim civil society, mosques, and leaders should promote the importance of citizenship more strongly and encourage individuals to play a larger role in civic forums and platforms in the city, for instance as parent governors, and have greater engagement with organisations such as museums, libraries, and neighbourhood groups.

For more information

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