



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



EURISLAM. Finding a Place for Islam in Europe: Cultural Interactions between Muslim Immigrants and Receiving Societies

Answers were sought to the questions how different traditions of identity, citizenship, and church--state relations have affected European immigration countries' incorporation of Islam, and what the consequences are of these approaches for interactions between migrants, their offspring, and the receiving society?

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INTRODUCTION

The research aimed to provide a systematic analysis of cross-national differences and similarities in countries' approaches to the cultural integration of immigrants, and of Muslims in particular, and by relating these policy differences to cross-national variation in cultural distance and interaction between Muslims and the receiving society population. The results presented here concern the final integrated report, especially the interviews with Muslim leaders and transnational families (that are families who lived in two or more of the countries included in our study) and the results of our surveys conducted in six countries (Belgium, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom). A full discussion of the EURISLAM policy implications can be found in the final chapter of the integrated report (see: : www.eurislam.eu/page=site.documents).

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

With respect to the Muslim leaders/organizations: (1) A religious identity as a Muslim or Islamic organisation remains the most important form of identification for the organisations and the leaders. (2) Among the organizational practices, core religious practices are mentioned as being most important most frequently. (3) On average one fifth of the organisations does not identify any substantial barriers between the Muslim population and the majority. Those that do identify some issues, tend to focus on symbolic rather than structural issues. (4) With respect to public debate strategies: on average there appeared to be an almost equal distribution of evasive, defensive, and

discussion debate strategies among organisations and their leaders. (5) The representatives of the organisations present stronger religious convictions than the people interviewed in the survey, but tend to be more 'liberal' than the people in the survey when it comes to democratic principles and women's rights. The organisational leaders tend to present a viewpoint of a modern integrated Muslim in the Western world.

With respect to the transnational families: (1) Generally, we found that there were similarities across the three types of groups studied, Pakistanis, Moroccans and Turks, in the way that they viewed their experiences as a transnational family. (2) The reasons behind original migration choices to move to specific countries seem to be related mainly to a chain migration phenomenon, that is to say the availability of networks on which the migrant can rely for entering the work force or for emotional support. (3) Belonging was often described in contextual way, and identity was context-dependent. Being part of the family unit was important. However, individual respondents described their sense of belonging to be related mainly to their social networks and lifestyle choices they had been socialized into. (4) Respondents tended to wish to stay where they are already based because of a sense of belonging and family. (5) With respect to marriage and intermarriage Pakistanis seemed less open to the idea of intermarriage with the native population than Moroccans. Indeed marrying with someone from 'back home' (country of origin) was seen as a possible source of psychological support and continuity for the family unit in the face of stresses presented by migration. Turks were ambivalent concerning this aspect.

With respect to the survey: overall, educational attainment, labour market position, religious identification, and bridging social capital (networks between Muslims and Non-Muslims), are steady factors in explaining the social-cultural integration of European Muslims. However, the impact of these factors is relatively small compared to the effect of belonging to a specific group, i.e. belonging to the Turkish or Moroccan community. Differences between countries exist but these are again usually smaller than the differences observed between the different groups.

The interviews with Muslim leaders were organised around the following research questions:

- (1) How do leaders present the Identity of the organisation – is that as a Muslim organisation, as a specific Muslim grouping, as homeland or as anything else and how is the Muslim aspect of the identity of the organisation presented, and why?
- (2) Which religious practices do community leaders consider important for the members of the community they represent?
- (3) What are the difficult issues that divide the ethnic community from the majority society, particularly on gender, according to leaders?
- (4) Which public debate coping strategies can we distinguish among Muslim leaders?

The finding of the interviews for each of the four topics were as follows:

- **Identity:** A religious identity as a Muslim or Islamic organisation remains the most important form of identification for the organisations and the leaders.
- **Religious practices:** Among the religious practices, core practices are mentioned as being most important most frequently. There are no noticeable cross-national differences. Between different denominations, non-specific/Multi-ethnic, Pakistani, and Turkish denominations more frequently mentioned issues outside of the core Islamic practices, whereas Moroccan and ex-Yugoslavian denominations only mentioned additional practices occasionally. These organisations appear to stay more focussed on their core role as a religious organisation.
- **Observed differences:** On average one fifth of the organisation does not identify any substantial barriers between the Muslim population and the majority. Those that do identify some issues, tend to focus on symbolic rather than structural issues.
- **Public debate strategies:** On average there appeared to be an almost equal distribution of evasive, defensive, and discussion debate strategies among organisations and their leaders.

With respect to the **transnational families**, we found that there were similarities across the three types of groups studied by EURISLAM, Pakistanis, Moroccans and Turks, in the way that they viewed their experiences as a transnational family. It seems that receiving country experiences with regard to issues of cultural distance were relatively more important in shaping perceptions than the type of ethnic group. Being part of a transnational family unit seems to have been the main decisive factor in shaping perceptions. At the same time, the Pakistani, Moroccan and Turkish families' respective views comparing the European countries of settlement, especially with regard to the performance of policies for cultural pluralism and accepting Islam, did not match onto a simple preference structure prioritizing countries - e.g., France always 'bad'; UK always 'good' – but were shaped by country of residence. For example, both the Pakistani family members resident in the UK, and the Moroccans resident in Belgium, emphasized the perceived cultural advantages of their own respective societies of settlement. By comparison, Turks resident in Germany were more likely to point to perceived difficulties and differences relative to the native population in Germany, though this difference was relative rather than absolute.

With respect to the **survey** we observed that naturalization rates for ethnic minority groups of Muslim descent were consistently lower in Germany and Switzerland than in other countries. They are the highest in the Netherlands and Belgium. It was striking that, with the exception of the UK, in all countries members of the national majority group had very little likelihood to have had Muslim pupils in their class. Furthermore, a substantive part of all ethnic minority groups lacked contact with the majority outgroup, thus attesting to the high level of school segregation in most countries. Nevertheless, it is also in the UK that perceived distance to the outgroup is the highest, thus showing that mixed schools do not automatically foster mutual understanding.

Support for free speech in most countries is – in contrast to the general stereotype - higher among the ethnic minority groups of Muslim descent than among the national majority group.

Our multivariate analysis focussed on language competencies, religious identification, bridging social capital, mutual identification and acceptance, and shared core norms and values. Overall, educational attainment, labour market position, religious identification, and bridging social capital, are, when included, all steady factors. However, the impact of these factors is relatively small compared to the effect of belonging to a specific group, i.e. belonging to the Turkish or Moroccan community. Differences between countries exist but these are again usually smaller than the differences observed between the different groups.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In promoting the social-cultural integration of European Muslims (that is, language competencies, religious identification, bridging social capital, mutual identification and acceptance, and shared core norms and values), policies have to be directed toward individual characteristics such as education, labour market position and bridging social capital. Also, since differences between various ethnic groups are relatively big, policies have to be directed towards specific ethnic groups. Policies on the national level are *not* as important as one would expect.

From the qualitative findings the following key messages can be deduced:

- Leaders and representatives of Muslim organisations tend to be (more) liberal when it comes to democratic principles and women's rights. This makes them a good partner and vocal point for the integration of Muslim minorities in Europe.
- The need for national and perhaps even a supra-national umbrella organisation, representing Islam as a faith and Muslims as believers should be discussed.

From the survey findings the following key messages can be deduced:

- To stimulate good relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in European societies, it is important to maintain interreligious dialogue and stimulate bridging social capital for religious groupings. The role of civil society actors is important here.
- Policies to stimulate dialogue should not only target Muslims, but also the majority population, since they perceive far more cultural distance than the Muslim groups in our study and have lesser bridging social capital than the Muslim population.
- To promote social-cultural integration policies have to be directed toward individual characteristics such as education, labour market position and bridging social capital.
- Differences between various ethnic groups are relatively big; in addition to the individual characteristics outlined above policies have to be directed towards specific ethnic groups (see: www.eurislam.eu/page=site.documents)
- Policies on the national level are *not* as important as one would expect. This is an important outcome of the EURISLAM project. Policy efforts therefore should focus on 'lower' levels of (ethnic) communities.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

In the qualitative part of the EURISLAM project we (1) interviewed representatives of Muslim organizations and (2) interviewed transnational families.

In addition to our target Muslim populations, we aimed also to gather information on their community leaders. Here we had the specific objective to compare between leaders of religious organisations, and those of organisations which mobilise using 'Muslim' as a label for an 'ethnic' group, and/or 'homeland' labels (e.g. 'Turkish'), which maybe more secular in their political orientation. This allowed us to examine variations in different community leaderships' views of strategies for cultural interaction. A further possibility that we were able to investigate whether community elite positions vary significantly from those held by their communities according to their survey responses. Potentially, this is important information to provide as feedback to the organisations as well as more generally to the public domain and the policy community.

The objective of the transnational families interviews was to organise a number of interviews with members of transnational families who lived in two or more of the countries included in our study. This enabled us to analyse in more detail the causal mechanisms linking policies dealing with the Muslim population, on the one hand, to outcomes in terms of cultural distance and patterns of interethnic and interreligious interaction, on the other. This will allow us to set up a quasi-experimental design in which the background of the people was held constant, but the context in which they live varied systematically. Our aim was to let members of specific families of migrants compare their experiences by focussing on specific topics that had arisen from our survey findings, as well as from the results of our work on institutional and discursive opportunity structures.

In the EURISLAM project a survey questionnaire was developed which enabled a study of the individual characteristics of Muslim immigrants, focusing on attitudes, norms, and values, particularly those relating to democratic norms, gender relations and family values, ethnic, religious, European and receiving society identification, and attitudes towards relations across ethnic and religious boundaries. We also looked at cultural and religious resources and practices (language proficiency, adherence to various religious practices, interethnic and interreligious partnerships and marriages, the frequency and quality of interethnic and interreligious relationships with neighbours, friends and colleagues) as well as membership in social and political organisations both of the same group and of the receiving society.

The research combined different methodologies, allowing for a triangulation of research findings and a combination of quantitative and qualitative insights.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	EURISLAM. Finding a Place for Islam in Europe: Cultural Interactions between Muslim Immigrants and Receiving Societies
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