

Muslim Migrants in Europe Overcoming Social Stigma

Halina Niec Legal Aid Center Conference

Solidarity in Future Europe Project
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Dear Conference Participants!

The so called refugee crisis of 2015 has marked the beginning of a new European reality, shaped by the unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants from predominantly Muslim countries. Five years later, Europe remains gravely divided as to the future policy towards Muslim immigration while anti-Islamic sentiments are stronger than ever.

The past five years have exposed not only fundamental differences in official policies formulated by governments but also conflicting social perceptions of Muslims and Muslim migrants across Europe. In many countries the debate about refugees and migration has been biased by directly linking it to the fears of terrorist attacks, hinting that the inflow of Muslim migrants heightens the risk of hosting states. Undeniably, negative attitudes towards Muslim migrants are on the rise.


Stigmatization of Muslim migrants and negative perceptions are especially visible in Central and Eastern European countries, with significantly smaller Muslim communities than Western states. For example while France is home to an estimated 10 percent of Muslims; Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland host about 6 percent, Eastern EU-member states have often Muslim communities amounting to even less than 1 percent of population. Still, anti-Muslim sentiments have become a central issue in the course of the refugee-debate in those states and continue to shape public debate about security, multiculturalism, integration and the future of Europe.

In April 2019, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) published the report expressing interesting perspective on the role of Muslim immigration as a theme of public discourse in Europe. The report indicated that ahead of the elections for the European Parliament, 15% of the EU voters highlighted migration as one of the top threats to Europe, 22% of the EU voting population indicated the so-called Islamic radicalism as their main concern.¹

In the 2019 Annual Activity Report of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe Dunja Mijatović warned against “the growing political and societal acceptance of racism” as “Antisemitism, Islamophobia and anti-Gypsyism have reached alarming levels.”²

1 Ivan Krastev, Mark Leonard and Susi Dennison, “What Europeans Really Want: Five Myths Debunked”, ECFR, April 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/page/ECFR_What_Europeans_Really_Want_Five_Myths_Debunked.pdf

2 Dunja Mijatović, “Annual Activity Report 2019”, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, 21 April 2020.



The Eurobarometer's poll published in September 2019, reveals an overview of public attitudes, corroborating this concern: 71% of respondents said that they would feel comfortable working with a Muslim colleague, which simultaneously implies that 29% do not feel comfortable. Still, countries with a high rate of acceptance like the UK (93%), the Netherlands (91%), France, and Sweden (both 87%) stand in contrast to countries with a very high aversion like the Czech Republic (35%), Hungary (37%), and Lithuania (47%)³

Stigmatization of Muslims in the context of security risks, hinting at their inability to integrate in European countries, widespread online Islamophobia, discriminatory practices, hate crimes, openly negative public statements toward Muslim immigration expressed by political leaders and social marginalization are currently the most concerning phenomena that undermine the chance for peaceful coexistence of Muslim migrants in European societies.⁴ The crucial question is how to overcome these obstacles and how to shape policies in order to avoid a risk of conflict and lay the foundation for peaceful solutions.

We hope that our conference will provide an opportunity to discuss these issues and share ideas for a successful future Europe, where solidarity is the main guideline for practice of states and social attitudes.

You are all cordially invited to take part in our event!

Best regards,



Katarzyna Przybysławska
Halina Niec Legal Aid Center

Facebook event: @pomocprawna.org



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³ "Special Eurobarometer 493, Discrimination in the European Union", European Commission, October 2019, p. 18

⁴ European Islamophobia Report 2019, ed. Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez (SETA, 2020)