

Report Part Title: Introduction

Report Title: Muslims in London

Report Author(s): Open Society Foundations

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report sets out to analyse the everyday experiences of Muslims living in the London borough of Waltham Forest, with a particular focus on public policies aimed at improving integration and social inclusion. Integration in this report is understood as a two-way process that requires both engagement by individuals and opportunities for participation.

A report that places its focus on Muslims as a group faces the challenge that Muslims are not a fixed group with defined boundaries, but rather a diverse set of individuals with different religious practices, ethnic attachments, and linguistic and cultural backgrounds, who are currently defined and marked as such mainly from the outside. It can include those who adhere to the religion of Islam as well as those who, because of their cultural or ethnic background, are perceived as Muslims by others in society, even if they are, in fact, adherents of other religions. In the context of this report the identification of a person as Muslim has been left to the self-perception of the interviewee and has not been associated with any prefixed religious or cultural definition.

The identification of a person – whether by self- or external ascription – as Muslim is not a neutral matter, as it can entail identification with a group that is at times stigmatised in public discourse. In social and public policy Muslims are increasingly viewed as a potential security threat or a group that is unwilling or unable to integrate.

A focus on action and social realities at the local level allows for a closer examination of the interaction between residents and policymakers in boroughs such as Waltham Forest in London. In contrast to other recently published studies¹ on Muslims, this study focuses on policy implications and looks in-depth into a wide range of aspects of daily life for ordinary Muslims in Waltham Forest, a district which has undergone fundamental change and is home to large Muslim communities in London. It looks into Muslim identities and their feelings of belonging, of interactions between groups in Waltham Forest, their situation in relation to education, employment, housing, health and social protection, policing and security concerns, their levels of participation as citizens and how they do so, and the role the media play in shaping perceptions and opinions.

By monitoring at the local level, this report also examines whether these demographic circumstances at the district and neighbourhood levels have encouraged the development of practical solutions to social policies which respond to the needs and views of local Muslim populations.

While the research at the district level is meant to be comparable with other boroughs in British cities and in other countries, the specific context of Waltham Forest and

¹ Institute for Community Cohesion, *Breaking Down the Walls of Silence*, Coventry: 2008.

London has nevertheless to be kept in mind. Care is therefore needed before findings can be transferred to different contexts.

1.1 Methodology

This report provides an analysis of findings based on fieldwork and existing literature on research and policy in the London borough of Waltham Forest undertaken from 2008 to 2010, with additional follow-up conducted in 2011.

The fieldwork consisted of 200 in-depth, face-to-face interviews with local residents (100 Muslims and 100 non-Muslims) in the three areas. Each group was evenly split between male and female respondents from differing social and religious backgrounds. The questionnaires were then expanded in six focus groups with approximately 50 Muslim residents in 2008–2009, and three additional focus groups convened in 2010. There was a further range of in-depth interviews conducted with local politicians, members of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), practitioners such as teachers and health workers, community representatives and anti-discrimination and integration experts, including 20 with staff working in the borough in the areas of health, education, employment, policy and media, and those working in the local voluntary sector. This final version of the report incorporates feedback on an earlier draft, presented at a roundtable meeting in London in March 2010. Participants at the roundtable included a diverse range of stakeholders, again representing civil society, local administration, faith-based groups and other institutions.

The 200 interview respondents were a non-random cross-section of individuals chosen from specified subgroups of the population in Waltham Forest (see Table 1). The characteristics (age, ethnicity and gender) of the selected respondents were extrapolated from the available national population figures for the city.

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents (by age)

Age		Muslim male %	Muslim female %	Non-Muslim male %	Non-Muslim female %	Total %
<20		23.9	22.6	13.3	18.2	19.6
20–29		26.1	37.7	31.1	25.5	30.2
30–39		17.4	9.4	6.7	21.8	14.1
40–49		8.7	15.1	17.8	16.4	14.6
50–59		13.0	13.2	22.2	12.7	15.1
60>		10.9	1.9	8.9	5.5	6.5
Total	%	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.0
	Number	46	53	45	55	199

Source: Open Society Foundations

The ethnic origin of respondents was obtained through interview questions on nationality, place of birth and self identification of ethnic and/or cultural background. The nationalities of the Muslim interviewees are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Nationalities of Muslim respondents

Nationality		Male %	Female %	Total %
Bangladeshi		2.1	1.9	2.0
British		76.6	86.8	82.0
Congolese		2.1	0	1.0
German		0	1.9	1.0
Indian		2.1	0	1.0
Pakistani		6.4	1.9	4.0
Somali		4.2	5.7	5.0
Turkish		6.4	1.9	4.0
Total	%	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Number	47	53	100

Source: Open Society Foundations

The nationalities of non-Muslim interviewees are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Nationalities of non-Muslim respondents

Nationality		Male %	Female %	Total %
Bangladeshi		2.2	–	1.0
British		77.8	81.8	80.0
Dutch		–	3.6	2.0
French		–	3.6	2.0
German		–	1.8	1.0
Irish		6.7	1.8	4.0
Japanese		–	1.8	1.0
Kurdish		4.4	–	2.0
Lithuanian		–	1.8	1.0
Nigerian		2.2	1.8	2.0
Romanian		–	1.8	1.0
South African		4.4	–	2.0
Ugandan		2.2	–	1.0
Total	%	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Number	45	55	100

Source: Open Society Foundations

The birthplaces of Muslim and non-Muslim respondents are shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4. Birthplace of Muslim respondents

Country of birth		Male %	Female %	Total %
Did not answer		–	1.9	1.0
Bangladesh		6.4	7.5	7.0
Democratic Republic of Congo		2.1	–	1.0
India		4.3	3.8	4.0
Pakistan		23.4	22.6	23.0
Somalia		6.4	13.2	10.0
Turkey		6.4	1.9	4.0
United Arab Emirates		–	1.9	1.0
United Kingdom		51.1	47.2	49.0
Total	%	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Number	47	53	100

Source: Open Society Foundations

Table 5. Birthplace of non-Muslim respondents

Country of birth	Male %	Female %	Total %
Bangladesh	2.2	–	1.0
France	2.2	3.6	3.0
Germany	–	1.8	1.0
Gibraltar	–	1.8	1.0
Guyana	–	1.8	1.0
India	–	3.6	2.0
Ireland	4.4	–	2.0
Japan	–	1.8	1.0
Lithuania	–	1.8	1.0
Netherlands	–	1.8	1.0
Nigeria	4.4	3.6	4.0
Romania		1.8	1.0
South Africa	4.4	–	2.0
Sri Lanka	2.2	–	1.0
Suriname	–	1.8	1.0
Turkey	4.4		2.0
Uganda	2.2	3.6	3.0
United Kingdom	71.1	70.9	71.0
Caribbean islands	2.2	–	1.0
Total	%	100.0	100.0
	Number	45	100

Source: Open Society Foundations

Table 6 shows the diverse identities of Muslim respondents in the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

Table 6. Ethnic and cultural identification by Muslim respondents

Ethnic and cultural identity		Muslims %
Asian		6
Asian Bangladeshi		2
Asian Indian		1
Asian Muslim		2
Asian Pakistani		7
Bangladeshi		5
Black African		2
Black African/ Somali		1
British		1
British Asian		4
British Bangladeshi		2
British Indian		2
British Muslim		5
British Pakistani		8
British Pakistani Muslim		1
British Indian Muslim		1
Indian		2
Indian Pakistani		1
Mauritian		1
Muslim		1
Pakistani		31
Pakistani Muslim		1
Somali		6
Turkish		3
Did not answer		4
Total	%	100.0
	Number	100

Source: Open Society Foundations

Table 7 shows the occupations of respondents, though it should be noted that a perhaps surprisingly high percentage did not answer this question in the questionnaire.

Table 7. Occupation of respondents

Occupation		Muslims %	Non-Muslims %	Total %
Did not answer		31.0	14.0	22.5
Modern professional		10.0	24.0	17.0
Clerical/intermediate ²		11.0	15.0	13.0
Senior manager or administrator		4.0	3.0	3.5
Technical and crafts		6.0	5.0	5.5
Semi-routine manual and services		17.0	18.0	17.5
Routine manual and services		11.0	10.0	10.5
Middle or junior manager		6.0	8.0	7.0
Traditional professional		4.0	3.0	3.5
Total	%	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Number	100	100	200

Source: Open Society Foundations

In order to facilitate access to the variety of ethnic and faith communities in the area of research, a number of male and female interviewers were recruited, including people with origins or links in South Asia, Africa, Europe and Australia. Some had Islamic backgrounds while some were from other faith groups.

The focus groups were convened with Muslim residents from wards in the London borough of Waltham Forest according to age and gender. Six groups consisted of male and female participants between the ages of 18 and 45. Each of the focus groups discussed one of the following areas in depth: education and employment, health and social services, and policing and political participation. One of the groups consisted of participants under the age of 25. The other three groups were composed of: women under 35 years of age; women of more than 40 years of age; and men older than 40 years of age. Eight of the focus groups were conducted and facilitated in English; the group with women older than 40 was held in Urdu. The most significant findings of the questionnaires as well as issues of concern from the focus groups are outlined and summarised in the thematic chapters of this report.³

² Intermediate refers to occupations below professional and management position and above the unskilled and partly skilled jobs. Examples include supervisory and technical positions.

³ The full data of the questionnaires as well as the full-length transcriptions of the focus groups are on file with the authors and originators of the research.