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Sweden

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Demographics

Since 2007, there is an estimated 250,000 to 350,000 Muslims in Sweden, from 1.8% to 4.4% of the Swedish population of 9 million, a statistic inferred mainly from the nationality of immigrant populations. [1] Most of the Muslim populations live in major cities, with more than 60% residing in three of the major city areas, Stockholm, Göteborg, and Malmö. [2] The Muslim population of Sweden is quite diverse, from over forty different countries, from Turkey, Bosnia, and Iran to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other African, Asian, and European states.

A major Muslim population in Sweden is the Turkish population. In the 1980s, it had made up a majority of the Muslim populations in Sweden, but currently only constitutes about 10% of the total Muslim population. [3] However, the Turkish population maintains predominant source of Muslim political influence through its established and unified lobbying groups. [4]

The Iranian populations make up the second single largest subgroup of ethnic Muslims (52,000), most of which arrived after 1985 as refugees. [5] Although many members of this population are more secular, one sixth of this population are considered religiously Muslim.

Other large populations include a large number of Iraqis (52,000), many of whom are Kurds, remnants of the Iran-Iraq war and Saddam Hussein's ethnic cleansing policies. [6] There are also sizable populations of Lebanese (21,000). [7] Moroccans, Syrians, Tunisians, and Palestinians make up a population of 90,000. [8] Major populations from Africa include Somalians (16,000), Ethiopians (12,000). [9] From the Balkans, there are about 40,000 Muslims from Bosnia, and a large number of refugees from ex-Yugoslavia during the civil war. [10]

Most of the Muslims in Sweden are Sunnis, though there exists a sizable population of Shias, at about 60,000 in the 1990s. [11]

The five major foreign-born groups

Breakdown by country of birth (2002)

Finland	191,515	
Yugoslavia	74,418	
Iraq	62,751	
Bosnia-Herzegovina	52,948	
Iran	52,721	
Total	434,353	

(Source: Lappalainen 2004)

Islamic Practice

Islam has become the second official religion in Sweden, after Christianity. [12]

There are six purpose built mosques in Sweden, four Sunni Muslim Mosques in Stockholm, Malmö, Uppsala and Västerås, one Shia Mosque in Trollhättan, and one Ahmadiyya mosque in Göteborg. [13] Since there are only few of these purpose-built mosques, most Muslims in Sweden instead practice their faith at "basement mosques." [14] During Ramadan, mosques in Sweden are open for Muslims,

but attendance is poor because of the country's inherent weather. Many Muslims instead stay home or watch Arab TV. [15]

There seems to be only a limited public acceptance of Muslim women wearing the hijab, though the government has not restricted its use. However, the state has allowed schools to regulate dress which covers the face of students.

In a prominent case in 2002, Nadia Gabriel, a Swedish woman of Palestinian origin, was named to host a program on multiculturalism on Swedish public TV. The administration of public TV blocked her appointment because of her wearing of the headscarf. Although it eventually backed down from this decision, the program was cancelled shortly thereafter. [16]

In another case, a 20 year old woman was asked to take off her niqab veil when she entered the bus so that the bus driver could identify her. As the woman refused, she was asked to leave the bus. She later pressed charges for discrimination and subsequently was awarded damages in April 2008. [17]

Other issues currently under discussion in Sweden is the issue of halal slaughter, which is currently forbidden in Sweden. [18]

There are about 50 Muslim cemeteries in Sweden and Islamic burial practice is not impeded. [19]

Labor Market

OECD data shows unemployment rates for the foreign born are more than twice as high as for natives. [20] Sweden's Muslims have unemployment rates 4 to 10 times higher than non-Muslims, depending on ethnicity (Sander et al., 2004). Employment discrimination appears to be a rising concern. Complaints filed with the office of the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination increased six times between 1997 and 2003. A matched-pair study by the Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter in September 2004 showed that those with Arabic names are more often rejected by employers despite similar qualifications to native Swedes.

Only 39% of immigrants had a job that corresponded with their level of education, while the correspondence rate was significantly higher for Swedish born people, at 85% (Berggren & Omarsson 2001). For those specifically with academic degrees in the humanities or social studies, 70% of those with jobs were in the unskilled sector. It has further been found that Muslims who grow beards, wear the hijab, or observe time for prayer face significant difficulties in the labor that other immigrant groups do not face.

To overcome such obstacles in employment, many immigrants turn to self-employment, with one study showing that in 1999 about 20% of all businesses was established by immigrants (Englund, 2003a: 25).

Education

The OECD collects data on education from various statistical agencies within the country, the majority of which comes from census data from the year 2000. The OECD classifies educational achievement

using the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED): ISCED 0/1/2: Less than upper secondary; ISCED 3/4: Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary; ISCED 5A: "Academic" tertiary; ISCED 5B: "Vocational" tertiary; ISCED 6: Advanced research programs. 0-2 are considered low, 3-4 as medium, and 5 and above are considered high. This data is not reported by religion, but does have country of origin as reported by the respondent. It is thus possible to construct an approximate picture of the educational achievement of the population in the country with ancestry from predominately Muslim countries. One significant problem is that some countries, such as India and Nigeria, have large Muslim populations but the immigrant population cannot be readily classified as predominately Muslim or non-Muslim. As such, the educational data is split by predominately Muslim origin, predominately non-Muslim origin, and a separate category for those whom classification would not seem justified. Proportions are for all reported data, individuals with no reported ancestry or education are excluded.

	High	Medium	Low	
Muslim	24	45	32	
Non-Muslim	23	52	25	
Indeterminate	29	45	36	

Sweden has a compulsory education system for ages 7 to 16, and though the government provides the guidelines for the education system, the local governments run the schools. Many of Sweden's schools are either private or independent schools. After compulsory education, many students take the exam to go to university level education, though it has been shown that students of foreign born immigrants are less likely to continue to university level. There is no consensus on how the Muslim population as a whole are doing in the education system in Sweden, as the population as a whole is extremely heterogeneous, ranging from highly educated Iranians to refugees of other nations.

Islamic Education

Sweden allows for independently run confessional schools, including that of Muslim religious schools. These schools are only subject to follow guidelines, including the basic fundamentals of democracy and all world religions. [\[21\]](#)

A documentary in the spring of 2003 critiquing the educational practices of the free schools generated extensive debate. The National Agency for Education investigated the situation and found little evidence of misbehavior, but some of mismanagement. It responded by increasing its oversight of the schools.

A Swedish Islamic Academy has been established for the training of imams, though no imams have yet graduated from the program. The government is supportive of training imams in Sweden, in order to further Muslim integration into Swedish society. [\[22\]](#)

Housing

Sweden has seen significant problems with segregation in neighborhoods in both the larger and medium size cities (Swedish Integration Board, 2003). This is a result of employment and educational disadvantages inherent to immigrant populations, as housing is very much related to financial ability. These areas are populated mainly by Muslims from Africa and Asia.

However, the populations in these areas are quite transient. As of 2004, it has been found that there

has been an increase in immigrant populations in the suburbs of the major cities.

Political Participation and Muslims in Legislatures

There is no effective Muslims participation in politics and no publicly religious Muslims in national politics. There are, however, persons with a Muslim background in the Social Democratic party who are in the Swedish Parliament. Recently among them was a Kurdish woman who sometimes expected to represent Muslims as immigrants in Sweden, a role she claims she does not wish for. On the local level, there are at least two Muslims active in the Christian Democratic Party. Finally, there is a Muslim political party, the Politisk Islamisk Samling (PIS, Political Islamic Union). This is an organization with strictly political aims that was formed in 1999. It is the only formal political gathering among Muslims, but it is quite new and its future existence is highly uncertain. There are only three Muslims out of the 349 members of the Swedish parliament.

As with many immigrant groups, voting participation is much lower than the general Swedish population. However, Muslim organizations, such as the Sveriges Muslimska Råd (the Council of Swedish Muslims) have tried to obtain political clout by raising specific issues such as halal slaughter and time off for prayers, in exchange for votes, though these demands have generally gone unheeded.

In the 2006 election, Nyamko Sabuni of the Liberal party became the new Minister of Integration. Though of Muslim background, Sabuni is not a practicing Muslim, and has even argued that Islamic independent schools should be closed. Another Muslim in politics is Mehmet Kaplan of the Green Party, who practices Islam.

Muslim Organizations

There are three organizations on a national level that are supported by the government through the Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities. They are all umbrella organizations for local communities and they organize about 75 % of all Muslim communities in Sweden. They are not clearly divided by ethnicity nor by religious affiliation. There are also other national organizations that do not receive support from the government. Among these are a Bosnian organization, a Muslim youth organization and a strictly Shia organization. All co-ordinate local activities, form discussion groups or groups to deal with specific questions like adult education, marriage licenses, burial details or visiting the sick or imprisoned.

The Förenade Islamiska Församlingar i Sverige (FIFS, United Islamic Communities in Sweden) was formed in 1974 to fill the need among the Muslim communities for an umbrella organization. This need was engendered by the state support structure, which presupposes a national organization to distribute economic support to the different local communities. Thus FIFS organized all kinds of Muslim communities, including Shia and Sunni of multiple ethnicities. The only exceptions are the Ahmadiyyas, who maintain a separate organization.

There is also the Sveriges Förenade Muslimska Församlingar (SMuF, United Muslim Communities of Sweden) which split from FIFS over internal conflicts in 1982. This organization primarily represents Sunnis of Arabic language background, but also does serve some Shia communities. In 1990, another split occurred and IKUS was formed. The Islamiska Kulturcenterunionen (IKUS, Union of Islamic Centres of Culture) tends to represent the Suleymani, but also co-ordinates quite a few Somali

communities. In IKUS there are no Shia communities.

Also in 1990, the Sveriges Muslimska Råd (SMR - The Muslim Council of Sweden) was formed by FIFS and SMuF to help in their relations with the Swedish majority society. The most active person in SMR is Mahmoud Aldebe who has held the chairmanship of SMuF for quite a while. The SMR can be seen as his project. The specific missions of the SMR are the creation of mosques and Islamic schools, inform non-Muslims about Islam and to take an active part in public debate.

From an ideological point of view, the leaders of FIFS, SMuF and SMR are considered close to the Muslim Brotherhood and some have been closely connected to Rabita. They reject the support of the Saudis. The leaders of IKUS tend to lean towards a revivalist Turkish Islam that accepts Sufism as a form of intellectual piety. Milli Görüs only has local groups and does not seem to have a strong influence.

In Sweden religious organizations are treated equally, and receive financial support by the government. Three Muslim umbrella organizations currently receive this support, which encompass over 100,000 Muslims. [\[23\]](#)

Bias and Discrimination

Muslims in Sweden are quite sensitive to discrimination, and have declared that since the September 11 attacks have been under closer monitoring and increased physical assaults. [\[24\]](#)

The Swedish government has also extradited two Muslims residing in Sweden to Egypt, and a study by the National Council for Crime Prevention has found that immigrant groups are overrepresented in wrongful arrests.

There is also evidence that women wearing headscarves and men who look Arabic are targets of harassment. [\[25\]](#)

Public Perception of Islam

Evidence from the Swedish Integration Board found that 67% of those surveyed felt that Islamic values are not compatible with those in Swedish society. Further, 46% of Swedes did not believe that Muslims were like Swedes, and 37% percent were opposed to the building of mosques in Sweden. [\[26\]](#)
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Media Coverage

Although there have been some complaints about representations of Islam on Swedish media, the representatives of the major Muslim organizations seem to agree that coverage has been more balanced than in other European countries. However, after the September 11 attacks many Muslims have agreed that media coverage has become worse and more biased towards Muslims. [\[27\]](#) For example, in a study by Håkan Hvitfelt on Islam and Muslims in the Swedish television news, only 14% of coverage on Muslims did not involve violence.

There are and have been very few publications by or on Muslims. There are only two journals in

existence at present: Salaam and Minaret. There are other publications but they are for internal use in different communities. There are some Muslims who use the local radio broadcasting system. None has reached any prominence, apart from one in the Stockholm area: Radio Islam. However, this is more an anti-Semitic propagation channel than an Islamic channel. They have been sentenced for crimes against the racial agitation code on a couple of occasions. [28]

A prominent case that is telling of media coverage in Sweden post-9/11 is the Fadime case, in which a father murdered his 26 year old Kurdish daughter. The ensuing debate in the media was focused mainly on the "Muslim problem," which helped cement Swedish attitudes towards Muslims. [29]

[1] "Muslims in the EU: Cities Report" (2007). The Open Society Institute.

[2] Ibid.

[3] M. Anwar, J. Blaschke, and A. Sander. State Policies Towards Muslim Minorities. Sweden, Great Britain and Germany. Berlin: Edition Parabolis. pp. 203 - 374.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] "Muslims in the EU: Cities Report" (2007). The Open Society Institute.

[13] M. Anwar, J. Blaschke, and A. Sander. State Policies Towards Muslim Minorities. Sweden, Great Britain and Germany. Berlin: Edition Parabolis. pp. 203 - 374.

[14] Ibid

[15] Yahmid, Hadi. "Finding Ramadan in Sweden." Islam Online. 23 Sep. 2007.
http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&cid=1189959359307&pagename=Zone-English-News/NWELayout.

[16] <http://www.islamicvoice.com/october.2003/news.htm>.

[17] Simpson, Peter. "Muslim woman receives damages for headscarf slight." The Local. 12 Apr 2008.
<http://www.thelocal.se/11070/20080412/>.

[18] Lexman, Ada. "Sweden Livestock and Products Animal Welfare Legislation in Sweden 2005."
<http://www.fas.usda.gov/gainfiles/200510/146131334.pdf>.

[19] M. Anwar, J. Blaschke, and A. Sander. State Policies Towards Muslim Minorities. Sweden, Great Britain and Germany.
Berlin: Edition Parabolis. pp. 203 - 374.

[20] <http://stats.oecd.org/wbos/viewhtml.aspx?queryname=481&querytype=view&lang=en>.

[21] http://www.eumap.org/topics/minority/reports/eumuslims/background_reports/download/sweden/index/edit/sweden.pdf.

[22] Ibid.

[23] "Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims in the E.U.: Developments since 9/11." (2005) International Helsinki
Federation for Human Rights.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Larsson, Goran (2006, Aug). 'Muslims' in Swedish Media and Academia. International Institute for the Study of Islam in the
Modern World, from http://www.isim.nl/files/Review_18/Review_18-38.pdf

[27] M. Anwar, J. Blaschke, and A. Sander. State Policies Towards Muslim Minorities. Sweden, Great Britain and Germany.
Berlin: Edition Parabolis. pp. 203 - 374.

[28] Ibid.

[29] "Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims in the E.U.: Developments since 9/11." (2005) International Helsinki
Federation for Human Rights.