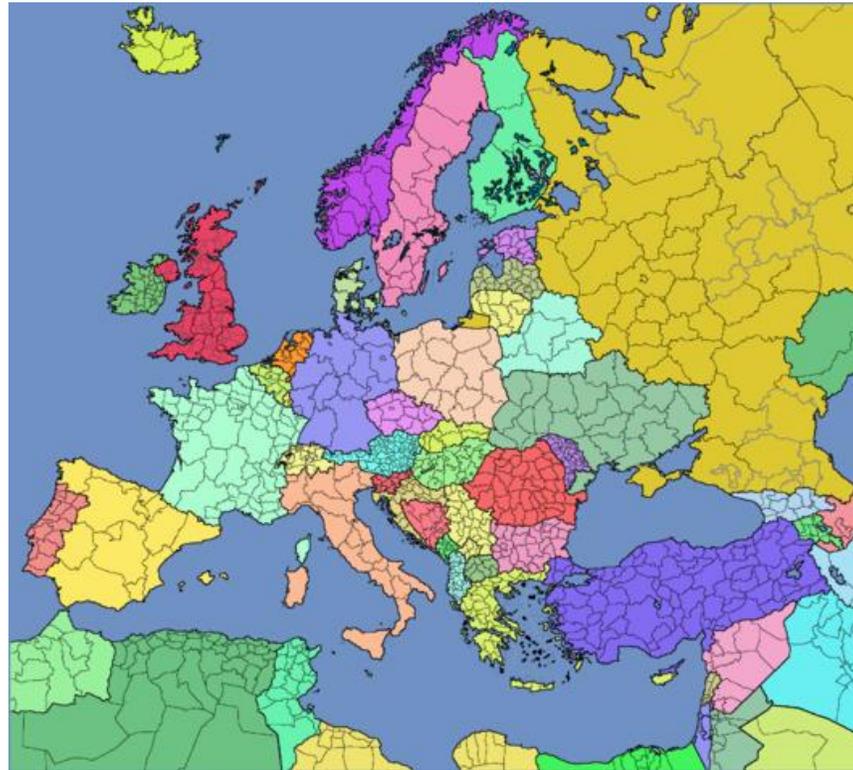


Ethnic, Cultural and Religious Diversity in Europe: Let's accept pluralism!



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However diversity is strictly related to the concept of tolerance and how to live and interact with others is one of the biggest issues affecting European citizens at the moment. The question arises on what should be done to guarantee respect for cultural diversity and social cohesion in European societies.

Is it possible to develop policies that can reconcile European countries and minorities?

How have different countries dealt with diversity and what actions are necessary for the future?

Since 1980, the Netherlands has organized integration courses and tests for immigrants to explain cultural heritage and political organization before newcomers leave their countries.

The definition of the nation in the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden may be considered as similar due to their common background of a Protestant identity, an ideology of a strong welfare state that provides safety for all at the price of high taxation, and a strong commitment to a civic and political culture that is moderately secular.

France has a strong civic conception of the nation. All the people living in France have to adhere to a common set of civic values. French government has banished all religious symbols from schools to help civic integration.

Even Britain and Sweden have had an approach of political and cultural multiculturalism.

Even if Germany is a federal state with a strong national identity, in the last years it has become more liberal and so migrants can participate in local elections after two years. This is also the case of Denmark.

To sum up all “old host” countries have a territorial understanding of national identity and citizenship and promote “political multiculturalism”.

The new host countries like Spain, Italy, Greece and Ireland have had a lot of experience with immigration during the last decades. Compared to the other European countries they are more ethnically oriented in their definition of national identity and see citizenship as a prize rather than as a tool for integration.



- They have not yet re-considered their national identity in any way that would include cultural, ethnic or religious diversity as some of the old host countries did.
- Besides, Spain and Italy have centrifugal tendencies due to regional nationalisms in Spain and regional identities in Italy.
- Also Ireland has not been more open-minded to the new ethnical, religious and cultural diversities. In fact in Greece and Ireland there are a common national culture and traditions.
- All these four countries have significant nomadic Roma populations. In addition Greece has a significant Turkish Muslim native minority and Italy has a number of bilingual regions where national minorities live.



In South-eastern Europe, in the Balkan Peninsula and in Turkey, the issue of ethnic and cultural diversity is further complicated. The violent conflicts that broke up Yugoslavia still trouble Turkey. Turkey is characterized not only by significant emigration, but also by significant immigration from neighbouring Balkan and Asian countries. It is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country characterized by a nationalist intolerance towards minorities.

Cultural, ethnic and religious diversity challenges

There are three main types of minority groups in Europe today:

People of Colour belonging to sub-Saharan Africa or the west Caribbean; Muslims, that may be of Turkish, North African or southeast Asian background; and Roma that are usually indigenous or originate from other EU member states.

'Coloured' People

'Colored' immigrants are present in relatively large numbers in some of the 'old' host countries, the UK, France and Sweden, and in smaller but visible numbers in Italy, Spain, and Ireland. The country in which race relations and protection of cultures are probably most developed is Britain. Black Caribbeans arrived in Britain in the 1950s, earlier than other sub-Saharan African immigration to Europe. These populations, coming from a former colony, had rights of entry in the UK as citizens of the Commonwealth. However, the multi-ethnic character of the Empire was not accepted when it led to the arrival of large numbers of non-white immigrants. This revealed that the idea of a multi-ethnic Commonwealth did not turn into a positive acceptance of cultural diversity at home. At first what made the presence of coloured or more specifically 'black' migrants problematic was biological racism and cultural conceptions about how 'blacks' were different from 'whites'. These led to stereotypes of drug use, laziness, and prostitution that were later, in the 1970s, complemented by the theme of criminality.

- West Caribbean immigrants entered British society at the bottom. The need in Britain was for unskilled labour to perform those jobs which white people no longer wished to do.
- Anti-immigration in the 1960s spoke of cultural incompatibility and conflict.
- Despite the abolition of the open “colour bar” racism persisted in crude and polite forms.
- Anti-discrimination legislation was introduced in Britain in 1965 but it did not mitigate the less visible forms of discrimination.
- In France ‘black’ immigrants come from west and sub-Saharan African countries that are former colonies, such as Cameroon, Congo, Cote d’Ivoire and Senegal.
- Sub-Saharan African immigration to Italy is different from France because there are no former colonial ties but the countries of origin are the same, notably Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana and the Ivory Coast. In Italy and Spain, sub-Saharan Africans are associated with street-peddling and the selling of counterfeit goods. While this is largely tolerated by natives who buy fake DVDs or CDs or other at very low prices in these open-air stalls, it reinforces a view that coloured people live at margins of legality.
- There is a large Nigerian community in Ireland too, but differently from Italy, where Nigerians arrived as economic migrants, in Ireland they have come mostly as asylum seekers.
- In Sweden coloured immigration comes from East African countries, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, as a result of spontaneous refugee flows.
- However all these communities face culturalist racism. Their physical appearance is seen as related to specific cultural traits.
- In France both natives and immigrants from North Africa when they are French citizens and their descendants consider coloured people as different and there are incidents of racism in everyday life.

There is a tendency across Europe to label immigrants in religious terms, in light of their ethno-cultural background. Muslims are never categorised as Turks, Moroccans or Pakistanis and debate over integration and toleration of cultural differences invariably centre on Muslims and religion and is associated with potential conflict. Islam appears incompatible with western values of democracy and equality. Muslims are in fact the largest immigrant group in Europe that is perceived to raise challenges of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. European Muslims cannot instead be considered as a uniform group, they come from different countries and live in different countries, speak different languages, adhere to different versions of Islam, are more or less moderate in their beliefs.



The form of Islamic institutional recognition varies among countries with large Muslim immigrant populations.

In Britain, France, the Netherlands and Germany, Muslims immigrants arrived in the 1960s and in Italy, Germany and Spain Muslims arrived in 1989 because they were attracted by economic factors. Today mostly immigrants come illegally to Europe after the Civil War broke out in Syria in 2011.

Muslims in France pose a challenge to the dominant concept of *laïcité* which is the complete separation of church and state and sets the limits of religious forms of expression. Religion is seen as a private issue and public space is secular, therefore Muslims are considered 'different' from other native French because of their religion and ethnicity and are often discriminated. It is common to hear of "maghrebins" to refer to the members of minorities who trace their ancestry to North Africa. Most French Muslims are in fact mainly of Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian origin. However the government created (in 2004) the Conseil Français du culte Musulman (CFCM) to organize a central institutional presence of this religion and, as in Sweden, there are state-funded schools.



In the UK as in France Muslims are linked to pre-existing colonial ties and the de-colonisation process of North Africa and Southeast Asia. New British Muslims are mainly south-east Asians. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was established in 1997, representing over 500 affiliated organisations, mosques and schools, some of which are semi-state funded as in Denmark and The Netherlands. In the old host countries Muslims also have their own cemeteries.

The vast majority of Germany's Muslims are Turks. They were previously generally referred to as Turks by reference to their nationality. In the 1990s and in the 2000s, they became 'Muslims' and the debate on immigrant integration focused on the notion of a common German leading culture (Leitkultur) which demanded that immigrants adapt to this culture, if they want to stay in Germany. This led to the stigmatization of Muslims in Germany, regardless of their personal beliefs. There was a shift from the 1990s, when it was German extremists who were intolerant in society, to the post-2001 years where it is the Muslims who are the "intolerant" ones.

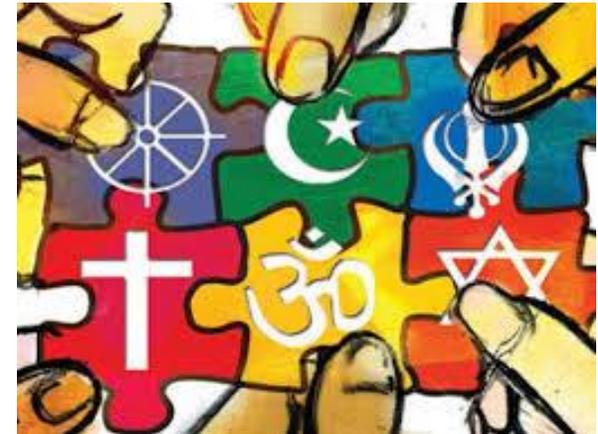
In Denmark there are 23 Islamic communities recognized separately.

Sweden has one of the most heterogeneous Muslim populations of all Western European countries. They have different ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and come from different countries in north and sub-Saharan Africa as well as from Arabic, Turkish or Persian parts of Asia and from Europe. They come from Turkey, from religious states such as Iran, from former socialist states such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and from states that formerly belonged to The Soviet Union. Several organisations emerged there in 1974 (United Islamic Communities in Sweden) or in 1982 (United Muslim Communities of Sweden). The emergence of these organizations has been spontaneous, to cater to the needs of Muslims in Sweden since they can ask for state grants. The largest organization today is Islamiska Samarbetsrådet (Islamic Cooperation Council) which brings together 120 local organizations.

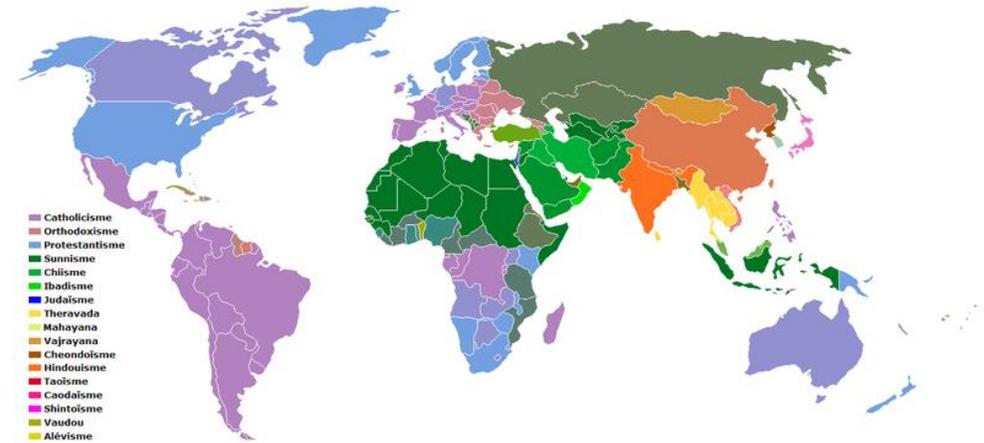
In Italy, Muslims are mainly southeast Asians. There was an attempt to institutionalise Italian Islam and give it a national voice through the creation of the assembly for Italian Islam in 2005. However, the Assembly has had little impact on the way in which Italian Muslims are handled by the state. After an attempt to establish a Charter of Values that would form the basis of Muslim integration in Italian society, the Assembly resumed its meetings in 2008. However, it has not produced any significant results resolving tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim in local contexts.

In Greece 85,000 Muslims live in the north-eastern part of Greece. They are mainly Turkish and Roma. Muslim immigrants in Greece were of Albanian origin and faith was a personal issue for them. They did not claim to wear headscarves or require religious education in a Christian Orthodox society. The south-east Asian immigrants who arrived in Greece were also workers who had left their families in Pakistan or Bangladesh and had no children in schools, nor women wearing the veil in public places. Only recently asylum seekers arriving through Turkey to Greece illegally have been arriving with women and children. They have become concentrated in some of the neighbourhoods of Athens, thus becoming socially visible because of their clothes and physical appearance. In the Netherlands most Muslim organizations operate at local level but in 2004 a coordinating national Muslim organisation was recognised by the Dutch government. In Spain, the Islam Commission of Spain is the body which negotiated the 1992 national agreements on state-Islam relations. It results from the union of the two major federations of Islamic associations in the country: Union de Comunidades Islamicas de Espana (UCIDE) and the Federaci3n Espanola de Entidades Religiosas government (FEERI).

Most of the Muslim institutions are self-funded by the communities rather than state supported. However, this institutional presence is an important factor of integration of Muslims in European democracies.



- In Italy there are three recognised mosques, but there is a great number of prayer rooms. The limits of the institutionalisation of Islam in Europe can be seen in the so called headscarf issue. In France there is a law that prohibits the wearing of religious symbols in public places and schools. In Spain public opinion is divided between those who defend freedom of religious symbol and those who are against them. When schools prohibited girls from wearing the Islamic veil (hijab), the Catalan government intervened maintaining that the right to education had priority over the regulation of religious symbols. In Germany the debate started in 1998 when the federal state refused to engage a young Muslim teacher because of her headscarf and the woman filed a suit to be allowed to teach. So the Federal Constitutional Court decided in favour of the woman because there was no law that justified the refusal. For this reason a lot of laws were published that prevented teachers with the headscarves from working. The NGO judged the German laws as going against the human rights and the culture of the respective women.
- The Danish headscarf debate began when employers in a supermarket were ultimately allowed to fire employees who insisted on wearing headscarves even if a large majority of employers accepted it. In Spain, Italy and Greece headscarves have not attracted particular attention and have not raised public controversies. In the schools the issue is solved internally. This issue is considered as evidence of Muslim difference because it is seen as the proof that Islam is incompatible with the liberal values and culture of European democracies that defend gender equality.



ROMA POPULATIONS

The size of Roma populations in Europe varies from country to country. A nomadic way of life is seen as a characteristic of Roma populations, although only a minority of Roma live a true nomadic life. They stay in makeshift homes and tents in camps situated on the outskirts of large cities which are not suitable in terms of hygienic conditions. The living conditions are better in public housing made available to Roma families to help them settle down and integrate in specific localities. However, in both cases these "Roma settlements" contribute to the ghettoisation of the Roma population. The largest Roma populations live in southern and central-eastern Europe. They usually speak the national language and the Romani dialect. In Germany a difference is made between "Sinti", who have settled in Europe since lots of centuries, and actual "Roma", of south European descent. In France they are known as "travellers", have a specific legal status and came originally from India. They are also divided into sub-groups, such as Roma, Gipsy and Manouche.

Another cultural minority in Europe is the Irish Travellers, different from other Roma by not having Indian origins. Their origin is really hard to ascertain, as they didn't leave any written record. They have many differences in myths, traditions, economy, marriage and language. Roma's physical features and their traditions make them look weird in their homelands, despite having been there by several centuries. The majority of the Roma populations are Christian, though religion doesn't help them to integrate. Members of the Roma groups share the same civil and political rights with the rest of the population, but they are in fact forced to live at the periphery of urban centres (or even as homeless), living off informal trade, begging, or recycling waste material.

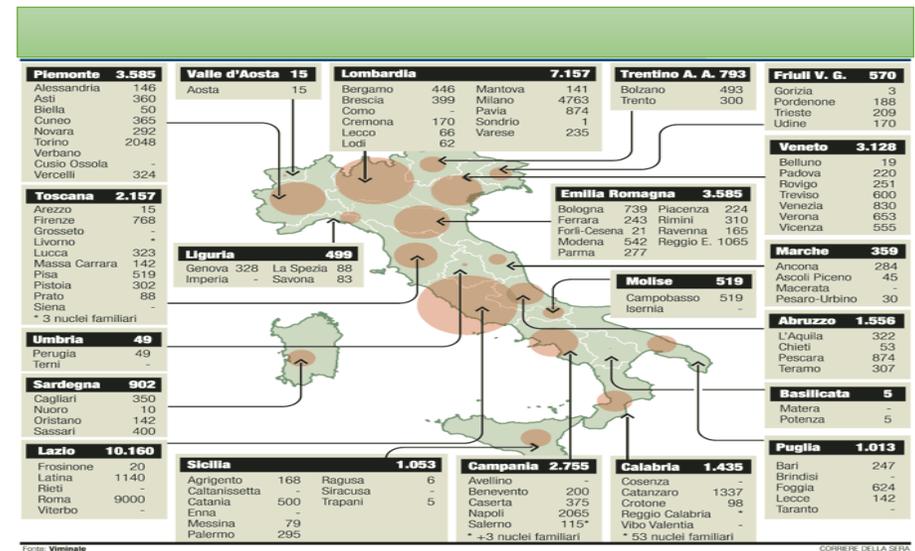
In most of the countries it is estimated that adults are unemployed. Most Roma don't complete primary school, and very few go to secondary. In Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary during the years of the Communist regime, Roma minority populations were forced to abandon their nomadic lifestyle and were included in the social-economic system and in the labour market. They received housing and access to health care and education. They were considered a reserve of manpower, that had the task to satisfy the regime's industrial ambitions. The majority of Roma were employed as unskilled workers. In Hungary in particular the state planned to resettle the majority of Roma who lived at the edges of towns and villages. This caused numerous local conflicts and by the 1980s most of these old colonies had disappeared and their population dispersed. Although the Communist regime claimed that the Roma were fully accepted into society, in reality the Roma experienced problems of discrimination everywhere and their marginal position was cemented.



Roma are a minority and are present in a larger number in southern, eastern and southeastern Europe, especially in "new" and "emerging" countries rather than in the old host countries. Roma people do not have a national homeland. In Italy there are Roma who are native to the country and Italian citizens, citizens coming from Romania, particularly refugees, irregular migrants and stateless people. All of these subgroups are different from each other in their history, language and migration processes.

The situation of Roma population in Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria dramatically deteriorated. Their access to proper health care is limited and they are described as "dirty", "lazy", "liars" and "irresponsible".

In most cases, however, this discrimination is not officially noted because they live in segregated areas, and in schools local authorities take decisions to organise all-Roma classes with the apparent reason to help Roma children but with the real reason of the intolerance of non-Roma parents and the prejudice of the teachers. This way also their culture is discriminated.



Italy has been one of the countries that recently organised demonstrations to protest against the presence of too many Roma in the country. Crime has become the pretext for starting an entire campaign against Roma camps. Although emergency decrees were approved, which ordered to monitor and authorize settlements, to adopt measures for social cohesion, even in schools, and to make censuses of people, protests were followed more recently by mass expulsions from various countries, justified by their threat to public order. They are seen as racially distinct from native majorities as dishonest and cunning and as culturally incompatible with western democracies. The argument is that Roma people have some cultural traits (strong loyalty to the extended family, under-age marriages, nomadic life style, violence) that make them impossible to integrate into European societies. Human rights centers argue that expulsion is discriminatory and this has created a debate on discrimination and prejudice experienced by Roma in Europe.