

Intercultural policies and intergroup relations

Case study: Antwerp, Belgium



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About CLIP

In 2006, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the city of Stuttgart and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) established a 'European network of cities for local integration policies for migrants', henceforth known as CLIP.¹ The network comprises a steering committee, a group of expert European research centres and a number of European cities. In the following two years, the cities of Vienna and Amsterdam joined the CLIP Steering Committee. The network is also supported by the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), and has formed a partnership with the European Network Against Racism (ENAR).

Through the medium of separate city reports (case studies) and workshops, the network enables local authorities to learn from each other and to deliver a more effective integration policy. The unique character of the CLIP network is that it organises a shared learning process between the participating cities, between the cities and a group of expert European research centres, as well as between policymakers at local and European level.

The CLIP network currently brings together more than 30 large and medium-sized cities in all regions of Europe: Amsterdam (NL), Antwerp (BE), Arnsberg (DE), Athens (EL), Barcelona (ES), Bologna (IT), Breda (NL), Budapest (HU), Copenhagen (DK), Dublin (IE), Frankfurt (DE), Helsinki (FI), Istanbul (TR), İzmir (TR), Kirklees (UK), Liège (BE), Lisbon (PT), Luxembourg (LU), L'Hospitalet (ES), Malmö (SE), Mataró (ES), Newport (UK), Prague (CZ), Strasbourg (FR), Stuttgart (DE), Sundsvall (SE), Tallinn (EE), Terrassa (ES), Turin (IT), Turku (FI), Valencia (ES), Vienna (AT), Wolverhampton (UK), Wrocław (PL), Zagreb (HR), Zeytinburnu (TR) and Zürich (CH).

The cities in the network are supported in their shared learning by a group of expert European research centres in:

- Bamberg, Germany (European forum for migration studies, efms);
- Vienna (Institute for Urban and Regional Research, ISR);
- Amsterdam (Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies, IMES);
- Turin (International and European Forum on Migration Research, FIERI);
- Wrocław (Institute of International Studies);
- Swansea, Wales (Centre for Migration Policy Research, CMPR).

There are four research modules in total. The first module was on housing – segregation, access to, quality and affordability for migrants – which has been identified as a major issue impacting on migrants' integration into their host society. The second module examined equality and diversity policies in relation to employment within city administrations and in the provision of services. The focus of the third module is intercultural policies and intergroup relations. The final module (2009–2010) will look at ethnic entrepreneurship.

The case studies on intercultural policies were carried out in 2009.

¹ See also <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/populationandsociety/clip.htm>.

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Introduction

The topic of the third CLIP module focuses on intergroup relations and intercultural policies in two dimensions: the relations between different groups living in the city and the local authority policy towards these groups. Since the CLIP network is based on cities of a different population structure, a 'group' in this project is defined broadly as an ethnic, religious, immigrant or national minority grouping. This kind of understanding of a group is of importance, particularly in the case of eastern European countries where the presence of immigrant groups is still marginal. Instead of immigrants, it is possible to consider national minorities with different cultural, religious and linguistic heritage, who are found within the state territory as a result of conflicts, wars or border changes. As Heckmann (2008) highlighted in the concept paper for the third module of CLIP:

in intergroup relations we have to do with both meanings (of a group): for example, relations between a migrant association and a local branch of a political party or between a religious community and a department of the city administration. When, however, a mayor in a city, for example, wants to improve relations between natives and immigrants, between Christians and Muslims, between natives and a national minority present in the city, he is referring to categories and images of group, often to relations of stereotypes that exist in the communication of the urban public.

Many actors are involved in the process of an intercultural dialogue; this project encompasses the city administration, the city council, political parties, churches, trade unions, welfare organisations and local media. In western European cities, particular attention is paid to the Muslim community and its relations with the local community. Where Muslims are not the most relevant group, the researchers are interested in other faith-based communities.

Any lack of knowledge about one another in group relations might be influential in provoking conflicts. Therefore, another important aspect of this study is the understanding of a radicalisation process in urban populations and the analysis of intercultural policies striving to avoid or solve group conflict at local level.

The case studies in these projects are based on two sources of information: input by the cities in the Common Reporting Scheme (CRS) and a field visit carried out by the researchers in the cities. The CRS was sent to all of the cities in order to collect the basic information relevant to the module. It was a very important tool for the cities where intercultural policies have a long tradition. However, in some cities, particularly those located in eastern Europe, the field visit and interviews with actors involved were of considerable importance in order to learn about informal practices and actions in this regard.

The analysis of the existing documents focused on the programmes and activities undertaken by the city and is placed in the national context of the current policy. With regard to eastern European cities, not only must the existing practices in the field of intercultural dialogue be taken into consideration, but also the question of why there are no policies or how influential the informal activities are.

Each report is organised in the same manner to facilitate the comparison of individual cases. In order to provide a high quality case study, the project implemented quality assurance. One of the important goals of this project is to open discussion and frequent contacts with the different actors involved, which might lead to new projects in the future.

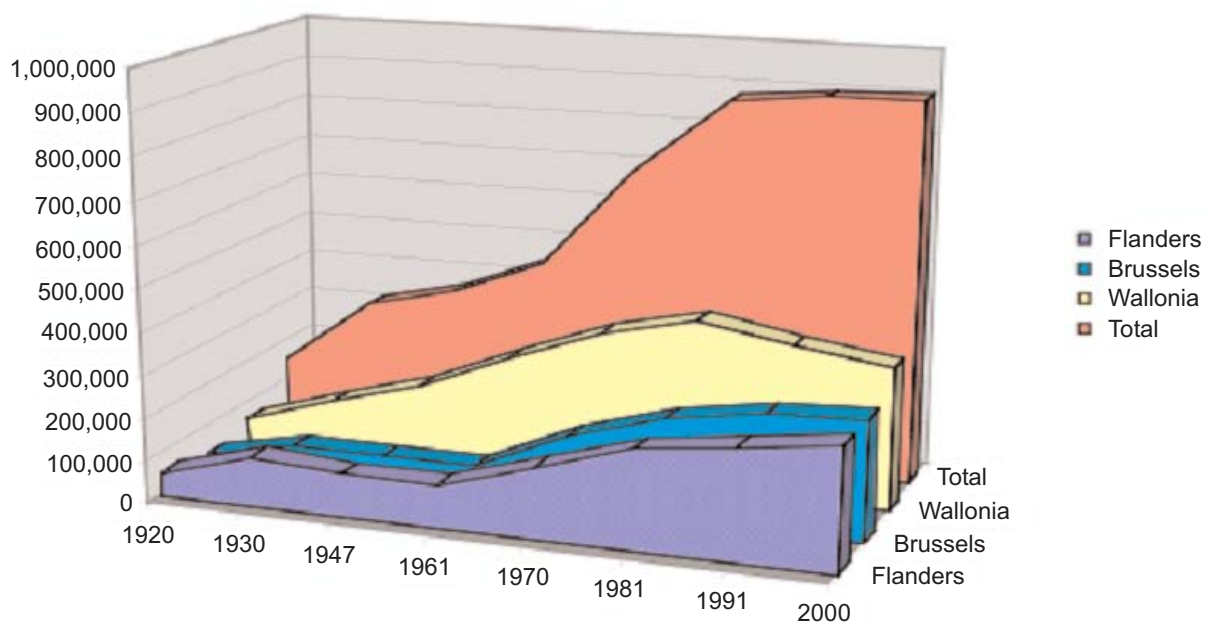
Brief history of migration to Belgium

After World War II, Belgium signed several bilateral agreements, mainly with the countries of the Mediterranean, in order to recruit migrant workers for coal mining and heavy industry. The first wave brought guest workers from Italy, Spain and Greece as well as from Belgium's neighbouring countries, such as France and the Netherlands. This first group was followed by Muslims from Morocco, Turkey and Tunisia. More specifically, bilateral agreements were signed with Italy in 1946, followed by Spain (1956), Greece (1957), Morocco (1964), Turkey (1964), Tunisia (1969), Algeria (1970) and Yugoslavia (1970). In 1974, as a result of the oil crisis, the Belgian government decided to halt the recruitment of foreign workers, as was the case in all other western European countries. However, the inflow of migrants into Belgium has not stopped due to six important processes: the mobility of European Union citizens, asylum applications, foreign students' mobility, the migration of highly skilled workers, irregular migration and, not least, family-related migration (Gsir et al, 2003). In 1974, Islam was recognised as an official religion in Belgium.

It should be noted that the inflow of foreigners into Belgium did not start after World War II. Jews had been part of Antwerp's population for centuries. Before World War II, half of the 100,000 Jewish population in Belgium lived in this city. In the post-war period, as a result of the devastation of the Jewish community in central and eastern Europe, Jews from that region flowed into Belgium and settled down in Antwerp. Today, the Orthodox Jewish Community in Antwerp counts some 15,000 persons and is one of the largest in Europe.

Like other European countries, Belgium did not succeed in stopping migration and Antwerp with its seaport has always attracted migrants to come and settle down. At the time of the post-war recruitment, there were people from Morocco but also Spaniards and Greeks, while the EU enlargement in 1985 was followed by the inflow of Portuguese people to the city. The EU enlargement of 2004 led to an increase in the number of Polish migrants coming to Belgium. However, some of the migrants have only been trying to legalise their status; many Polish workers in the cleaning and housekeeping industry were working illegally in Belgium from the mid-1990s.

Figure 1: *Number of foreigners in Belgium, 1920–2000*



Source: *Study Group on Ethnicity, Racism, Migration and Exclusion (Groupe d'études sur l'Ethnicité, le Racisme, les Migrations et l'Exclusion, GERME)/Free University of Brussels (Université Libre de Bruxelles, ULB)*

Composition of migrant populations

Currently, the foreign population in Belgium has reached more than 8% of the total population; this proportion does not include naturalised migrants or those living in the country illegally. The composition of migrants in Belgium is diverse and they are not evenly distributed in its territory. Brussels, as the Capital Region, has the highest representation of foreigners, at slightly less than 30% of the population. Italians are the most numerous of the foreigners legally residing in Belgium, with around 200,000 people. Moroccans are the second largest group, with around 121,000 people – largely concentrated in Brussels. French people, a population that is rarely considered in studies on immigration, stand in third position, with over 107,000, followed by Dutch persons at over 85,000. Turkish immigrants are in fifth place, with over 69,000 people. Spanish people number over 45,000, while Germans count over 34,000, British persons stand at around 26,000, and Americans and Congolese (ex-Zairians) amount to nearly 12,000 each (Martiniello and Rea, 2003).

Public opinion in Belgium associates immigrants with the Muslim community – mainly with Moroccans and Turks – as well as people with a low level of education and socioeconomic position. The data show, however, that this is not the case as the biggest group of foreigners legally living in Belgium comes from the EU Member States or other developed countries.

National policy context

Belgian policy towards foreigners has undergone different stages in a comparable manner to other western European countries. The recruitment policy of guest workers in the 1950s and 1960s with easy access to permits for residence and work evolved into a more restrictive policy in the 1970s aiming to reduce any inflow of immigrants. This was followed by a policy oriented towards the integration and social inclusion of immigrants living in the country, starting from the mid-1980s.

After the economic recession of the mid-1970s and the rise in unemployment, the Belgian government had to revise its policy allowing foreigners to enter the labour market. Despite the fact that many changes were implemented, the government did not stop immigration into Belgium and initiatives encouraging migrants to return to their countries of origin were unsuccessful.

Following the implementation of a restrictive entry policy, the main migrant flow came from the EU Member States as a result of the free movement of people guaranteed in the Treaty of Rome. Furthermore, family-related migration has been used as a legal possibility for entering the country. After a long public debate, on 1 March 2000 the simplified Act on Citizenship came into effect, making it easier for immigrants living legally in Belgium to become Belgian citizens. Since then, there has been a notable increase in naturalisation, which opens the door to all public and political rights for immigrants.

Since the mid-1980s, the Belgian government has been introducing integration measures focused on the inclusion of immigrants into society. In the 1990s, the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Combating Racism was established. Between 2004 and 2005, the Centre managed the work of the Commission for Intercultural Dialogue. It aimed to improve integration in the diverse Belgian society, working in four main areas: citizenship, gender equality, basic

principles for the public service, and the role of religions in secular society. The recommendation of the Commission was based on a double principle:

- recognition of cultural diversity;
- the promotion of interaction, a mixture of cultures and multiple identities.

In 2006, the Flemish Minister of Culture introduced a new Flemish Action Plan for Interculturalisation, covering the fields of culture, youth work and sport for the period 2006–2009. The plan called for positive action to address the underrepresentation of people with diverse ethnocultural backgrounds in subsidised activities in these fields. These measures should lead to a permanent and growing interculturalisation in all areas of activity (<http://www.interculturaldialogue.eu>).

Profile of Antwerp

Brief description of the city

Antwerp is the largest city in Flanders, with a population of slightly fewer than 500,000 inhabitants and an average population density of 2,420 persons per square kilometre. It is located on the River Schelde and is an important seaport – one of the biggest in Europe and worldwide. Antwerp is well located close to the Netherlands, France, Germany and the United Kingdom (UK). Its central location and significance as a seaport have contributed to the economic growth of the city. Apart from being a trade centre, the agglomeration is famous for other important economic activities, such as the diamond trade, in which Antwerp takes a global leading position.

According to Gsir (2009), the unemployment rate in Antwerp was at that stage 15.9%, which was almost twice as much as in Flanders as a whole. Women were in the majority among the jobseekers (53%). Some 22% of jobseekers were younger than 25 years of age, about 44% were 25–39 years old and around 37% were more than 40 years old. It is important to note that among unemployed people, four out of 10 come from outside the EU; 12.3% are of Turkish and Moroccan origin. Most of the jobseekers live in Antwerp North.

The city of Antwerp comprises nine districts: Antwerp (1), Berchem (2), Berendrecht-Zvadvliet-Lillo (3), Borgerhout (4), Deurne (5), Ekeren (6), Hoboken (7), Merksem (8) and Wilrijk (9) (Figure 2). The districts are split into 42 neighbourhoods.

Figure 2: *Antwerp city districts*



Source: <http://www.antwerpen.buurtmonitor.be>

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Antwerp was known as a rich city with impressive houses of wealthy merchants and manufacturers. It was also known as an artistic place, home to the school of painting which included Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony Van Dyck, Jacob Jordaens, David Teniers the Elder and David Teniers the Younger. During World War II, some of the historical buildings were destroyed but the historical centre of the city still attracts many tourists from around the world. The cultural life in the city is also a magnet for visitors from neighbouring countries and beyond.

Figure 3: *Antwerp city hall*



Source: *Wikipedia*

In political terms, Antwerp has been the centre of a socialist political movement due to the presence of a large group of industrial port workers. For most of the 20th century, the city was governed by the Socialist Party and Christian Democratic Party. However, since 1988 Antwerp has become the centre for the Flemish extreme-right party, known as Flemish Interest (*Vlaams Belang*) – a successor to the Flemish Bloc (*Vlaams Blok*). This party has been using anti-immigrant rhetoric in its political campaigns. Antwerp is the party headquarters.

Antwerp's migrant population

The foreign population in Belgium reached 8.3% of the total population in 2004. As explained, this proportion does not cover illegal immigrants living in Belgium or naturalised Belgians. The actual number of citizens with a foreign background is much higher. The immigrant population is spread unevenly throughout Belgium, with the biggest part of this group concentrated in the Brussels-Capital Region. In Flanders, Antwerp with its seaport industry is the city where most migrants settle down.

Antwerp has seen an increase in the number of its inhabitants: in 2009, the total population of the city reached 482,456 (49.5% women, 50.5% men). The inflow of migrants has contributed to this growth. In January 2005, there were 54,842 inhabitants with a foreign nationality, who accounted for 12% of the total population. By 2009, the number of immigrants had reached 79,199 inhabitants or 16.4% of the population. According to the city statistics, it is possible to distinguish between Belgians, new Belgians – meaning naturalised migrants or people with a foreign background – and foreigners living legally in the city. Looking at these percentages, the total number of Antwerp inhabitants of foreign background seems to be much higher, at 30% (Table 1).

Table 1: *Composition of population in Antwerp, 2009*

Antwerp's population	%
Belgian	70
All citizens with foreign background	30
- New Belgian	13.6
- Residents with foreign nationality	16.4

Source: *City of Antwerp, Districts- en loketwerking, 2009*

The data in Table 2 show that the biggest group among foreigners living in Antwerp are people from the 15 EU Member States before EU enlargement in 2004 (EU15) and not Muslims – despite the perceptions of the inhabitants of the city.

Table 2: *Foreigners living in Antwerp, by group, 2009*

Different groups in Antwerp	Number	%
Belgians	403,337	83.6
Foreigners	79,119	16.4
- From EU15	25,497	5.3
- From new EU Member States (NMS)	7,086	1.5
- Europeans from outside EU	5,956	1.2
- Moroccans	12,101	2.5
- Turks	4,521	0.9

Source: *Antwerpen buurtmonitor, 2009*

Overall, 6.8% of the total population in Antwerp comes from other EU Member States and 9.6% comes from outside the EU. A notable increase in the number of family-related migrants can be seen in 2001, when 1,742 such migrants arrived in the city. In 2004, as many as 3,929 family-related migrants arrived and in 2007 this number reached 4,815 persons.

The migrant population in Antwerp is very diverse and much younger than the autochthonous or indigenous inhabitants. The birth rate among migrant women is higher. Due to the ageing of Belgian society and a relatively young migrant population, the traditional age pyramid has been changing into a square-like structure.

Table 3: *Population of Antwerp, by age group*

Antwerp population	Number / %
Total number of inhabitants	482,456
Age 18–24 years	8.6%
Age 25–39 years	22.5%
Age 40–64 years	30.2%
Age 65+ years	18.1%

Source: *City of Antwerp, Districts- en loketwerking, 2009*

The ethnic composition of Antwerp's population is varied. Data from 2008 indicate the presence of 169 nationalities in the city. The main groups – that is, Moroccans, Dutch people and Turks – have not changed for many years. In 2007, however, a new group – namely Poles – emerged and reached fourth position.

Table 4: *Citizens with different nationality or ethnic background, 2009*

Antwerp	Number of inhabitants with different nationality	Number of inhabitants with foreign background
Moroccans	12,101	36,756
Turks	4,521	12,126
From NMS	7,086	8,525
From EU15	25,497	30,987

Source: *City of Antwerp, Districts- en loketwerking, 2009*

The figures in Table 4 suggest that the number of inhabitants with Moroccan or Turkish nationality has declined mainly due to the naturalisation of members of these groups: 65,629 new Belgians live in the city, which corresponds to a 60% increase in naturalisation in the previous six years. However, looking at the number of inhabitants with a foreign or ethnic background, Moroccans and Turks appear to have achieved the leading position. As noted, Polish people comprise the largest group from the NMS, with a total of 4,600 persons.

Ethnic and religious profile

The city population is diverse in terms of ethnicity and religion. The majority of inhabitants declare themselves to be Roman Catholic but in reality only a small proportion of them take an active part in church activities. Nonetheless, the Catholic Church has been experiencing something of a revival due to the inflows of Catholic migrants from Poland, the Philippines and Africa.

The Protestant Church has had a long tradition in the city of Antwerp and is still active in the field of social work (*Protestants Sociaal Centrum*). The Orthodox Church in Antwerp is represented by migrants from eastern countries, such as Armenia, Belarus and Greece.

In addition, the Jewish community, with its 15,000–20,000 members, ought not to be forgotten. This community is divided into three sections: modern-orthodox Shomre Hadass, orthodox Machsike Hadass and the Portuguese ritual. Many other Jewish organisations, as well as the umbrella body the Forum of Jewish Organisations, cooperate with the municipality within a limited scope. The Muslim community in the city of Antwerp will be considered in the next section.

Community organisations in Antwerp have a long tradition and all ethnic groups are active in this field. Migrant organisations have been set up for different reasons, for example to gather people from the same community, to help each other or to celebrate different holidays together. The organisations are focused on education, culture, religion or sports issues. These migrant organisations can play an important role in the process of integration by showing their presence in society and familiarising the local people with both cultural differences and similarities. There is a notable increase in the number of associations of newly arrived migrants, such as Poles or Russians. In 2002, the city of Antwerp published the first edition of *Atlas of the city. Guide to multicultural associations in Antwerp*. It comprised 264 pages presenting all migrant organisations and associations in the city, with detailed contact information and a description of their specific areas of interest. This publication has been reissued three times so far, thus providing updated information about migrant associations and their activities in the city.

Many migrant ethnocultural associations are members of umbrella organisations. In Flanders, 14 national umbrella organisations are acknowledged by the government of Flanders and receive funds from the Department of Culture. Five of them are based in Antwerp, namely the:

- Federation of Moroccan Associations (*Federatie van Marokkaanse verenigingen*);
- Union of Turkish Associations (*Unie van Turkse Verenigingen*);
- Association for the Development and Emancipation of Muslims (*Vereniging voor Ontwikkeling en Emancipatie van Moslims*);
- Platform of African Communities (*Platform Afrikaans Gemeenschappen*);
- Latin-American Federation (*Latijns-Amerikaans Federatie*).

Another three umbrella organisations are not based in Antwerp but have local branches in the city, namely the:

- International Committee (*International Comité*);
- Federation of Anglo-African Associations in Belgium (*Federatie van Anglo-Afrikaans Gemeenschappen*);
- Federation of Progressive Associations (*Federatie van Vooruitstrevende verenigingen*).

Apart from the entities officially acknowledged by the Flemish government listed above, some umbrella organisations are established on the basis of their own funds, including the:

- Union of Mosques and Muslim Organisations in the Province of Antwerp (*Unie van moskeeen en Islamitische verenigingen provincie Antwerpen*);
- African Cultural Association (*Afrikaans Cultureel Collectief*);
- Immigrant Youth Platform (*Platform Allochtone Jeugdwerkingen*) – which is financially supported by the youth department but still not acknowledged by the Flemish authority.

Not all immigrant organisations are likely to be members of an umbrella organisation, preferring to highlight their individual character. Nevertheless, to the local authorities confronted by many different associations, umbrella organisations are their partners representing certain parts of the ethnic community. The city of Antwerp puts emphasis on intensive contacts with migrant organisations. The department responsible for such communication (described in the next chapter) consists of numerous sections responsible for different projects aiming to activate the communities and create a civil society.

Antwerp's Muslim population and its characteristics

Figures based on the Area Monitor (*Buurtmonitor*) appear to show that the Muslim community in Antwerp consists of two main groups: Moroccans and Turks, representing 10.1% of the population or 48,882 people in absolute numbers. There are other Muslims in the city as well but these two ethnic groups are undoubtedly the most numerous. According to the available data, the Muslim community is younger than the autochthonous population and the birth rate in this group is higher. As a result, the demographic pyramid in Antwerp has undergone changes in the last decades, with an increase in the group aged 20–40 years. The gender division is about 50% men and 50% women.

The unemployment rate in the migrant community is generally higher than in the autochthonous population, mostly affecting the two biggest Muslim groups (Table 5).

Table 5: *Unemployment in Antwerp, 2009*

Unemployment among groups	%
Unemployed Belgians	7.6
Unemployed persons from outside EU	15.9

Notes: The data refer to jobseekers. The average unemployment rate is 8.6%.

Source: *City of Antwerp, Districts- en loketwerking, 2009*

Due to their high unemployment rate and low level of income, the group of migrants from outside the EU – encompassing mainly Moroccans and Turks – is the biggest target group for social services (Table 6).

Table 6: *Persons dependent on social services, 2009*

Target group	%
Belgians	7.6
Migrants from outside EU	15.9

Source: *City of Antwerp, Districts- en loketwerking, 2009*

In terms of ethnicity and the feeling of belonging to one religious group, Muslims living in Antwerp appear to be very diverse and divided. Their activities are strongly related to the mosques to which they belong; there are a total of 36 mosques and houses of worship in the city.

Local intercultural policies in general

General approach and responsibility for relations with ethnic and religious organisations

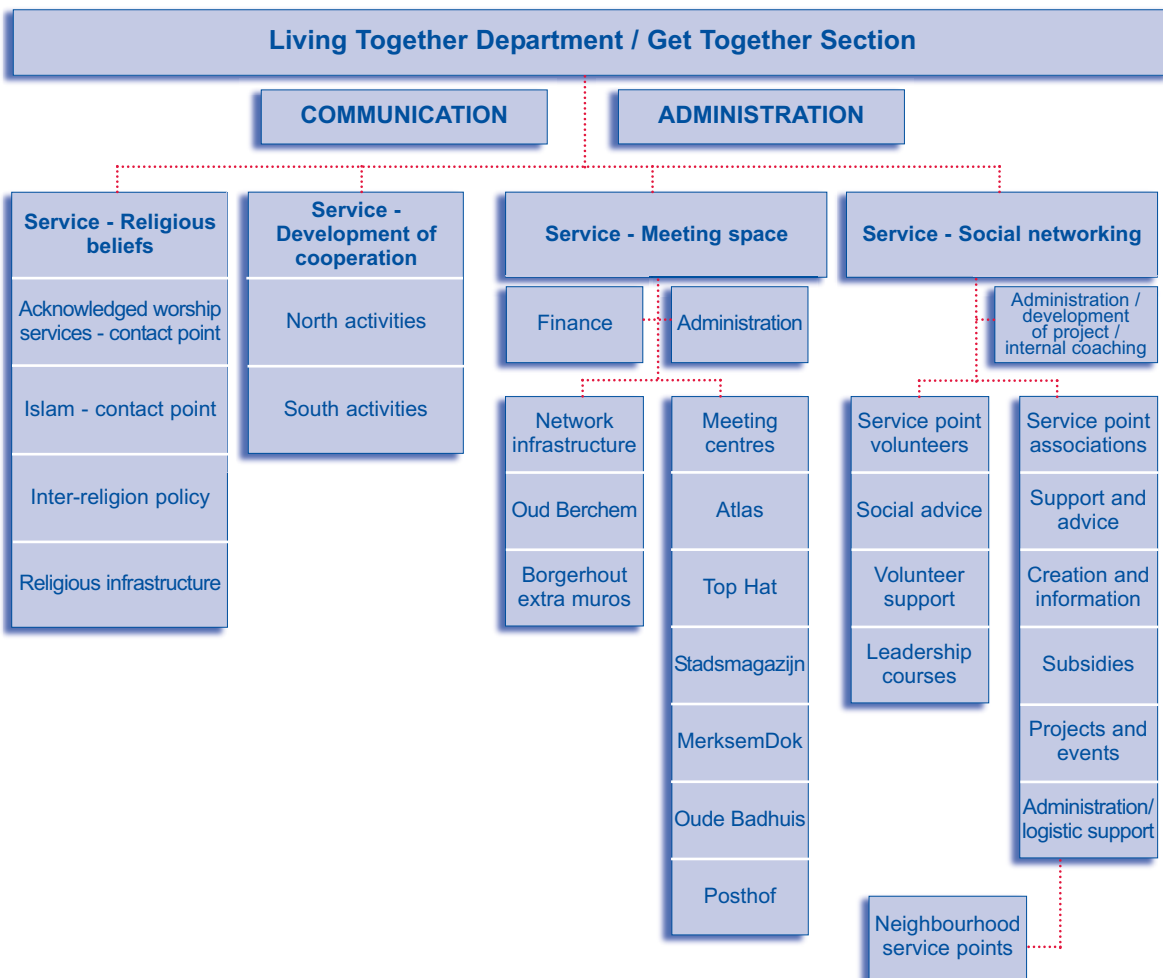
The intercultural policy and integration approach in the city of Antwerp is based on the Administration Accord 2007–2012 (*Het bestuuraakkord 2007–2012*) and the City Diversity Plan (*Stadsplan Diversiteit*). The main aims of the city policy have been formulated as follows: living together, equal opportunities and responsibilities, active citizenship, and social cohesion. On the basis of the above documents, it may be concluded that the diversity of the city should not be perceived as an obstacle but as an advantage. The following five main goals formulated for the coming years aim to improve social cohesion and the inclusion of all citizens of Antwerp into the community, as set out in the City Plan 2008–2012 (*Stadsplan 2008–2012*).

- Antwerp is the city where people from different backgrounds understand each other better.
- Everyone knows democratic and social rules and applies them to the dialogue.
- In Antwerp, everyone is given the space to develop their own identity.
- All of the city services and the Public Centres of Social Welfare (Openbaar Centrum voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn, OCMW) are an example of maximum diversity among their staff.
- The city encourages diversity among other actors (partners, entrepreneurs, organisations) in relation to their staff.

One of the key priorities is to encourage community leaders, organisations and neighbourhoods to use available sources for shaping the common space in the city. Living together in diversity translates into a chance for everyone to be different while simultaneously respecting common rules and becoming part of the city. Developing good communication with immigrant organisations and fostering their activation in city life are believed to be of importance.

In Antwerp, the City Executive is responsible for the development of integration policy and relations with its citizens. In practice, the department Living Together (*Samen Leven*) and the section Get Together (*Ontmoeting*) have been established to implement the policy formulated by the city. According to the department, its main goal is to develop positive and effective contacts with different immigrant organisations and associations. The department staff have been working on the infrastructure of meeting centres, acknowledging religious places, coaching volunteers, developing projects, as well as providing social, administrative and logistical advice to assist community members in becoming active citizens involved in and contributing to the city life. Figure 4 outlines the range of services in this regard.

Figure 4: Services of Living Together Department / Get Together Section



Notes: In the boxes under Meeting space, Berchem and Borgerhout refer to two of the city districts. The boxes under Meeting centres refer to various city meeting spaces. Further information is available (in Dutch) at <http://www.antwerpen.be/stadsmagazijn>.
Source: *Living Together Department, author's translation*

Based on the diversity in the city, it is not surprising that nine out of 55 elected members of the city council are of ethnic origin, including some heads of the city council commissions. However, they rarely take part in diversity-related activities; they would like to be treated like all other members of the council and not be limited to their ethnic or religious background.

The city of Antwerp considers its policy and approach towards minorities to be positive and effective. The development of different projects encouraging intercultural dialogue and engagement in building relations between minority groups appears to be of significance. On the other hand, during the field visit interview representatives of immigrant organisations expressed their concerns about relations with the city and the strong influence of anti-immigrant actors. These matters will be discussed later in the report.

Issues, demands and interests

According to the city, apart from sociocultural issues, social needs such as housing, employment and health are the most important problems for the immigrant community. These were followed by other items of a religious nature which were identified as important both by the city administration and representatives of ethnic organisations, including:

- the need for respect and equal treatment of any religion in the city;
- recognition of mosques and places of worship;
- support for existing mosques through their modernisation, in order to be officially recognised;
- providing religious education by setting up their own school;
- support for Muslim teachers in public schools;
- establishing a place for the ritual slaughter of animals;
- cemeteries.

It may be concluded that religious issues are crucial to the Muslim community in Antwerp and tensions in this regard have affected relations with the city administration and the community's trust in it. Evidence collected during the field visit suggests that the headscarf ban for women in the city administration and debate around this issue, which commenced in 2007, have polarised relations between the Muslim community and administration to a large extent. This issue will be discussed in a later chapter.

Forms of relations and dialogue

According to the city, there is no explicit policy of intercultural relations. However, many specific tools formulated in Antwerp's integration policy aim to improve relations and create common interests among different groups living in the city. Instead of having one immigrant counselling board, the city has tried to establish relations with immigrant umbrella organisations as well as individual associations. This does not mean that such advisory committees are not present in Antwerp. In fact, the city has a Migrant Council (*Migrantenraad*), an Urban Integration Council (*Stedelijke integratieraad*), a Discussion Board (*Overlegraad*) and a Board of Ethnic Minorities (*Raad van etnisch-culturele minderheden*).

Regarding religious issues, the city has been cooperating with the Executive of the Muslim faith to Belgian Authorities, which is a Muslim representative body selected in an election among Muslims. According to the city, regular, formal, institutionalised but also informal contacts exist with ethnic and religious organisations through the Living Together Department. The city has been supporting different ethnic, religious and cultural organisations, thus contributing to diversity and enabling interaction between people of different origins. A variety of subsidies are available for activities aiming to break down prejudices against different groups and enhance diversity. These funds have been allocated to the following:

- working costs for organisations dealing with living in diversity;
- projects on diversity and contributing to the emancipation of specific minority groups;
- projects aimed at dialogue between different ethnocultural or religious communities living in the city.

No funds are available for religious events but members of religious communities may apply for grants for social or cultural events, particularly if these activities are also targeted at the majority population or if they activate local neighbourhoods, for example.

As already mentioned, in 2008 the new City Diversity Plan was implemented, with a primary focus on providing support and counselling for various organisations aiming to bring together people from different backgrounds. Diversity has been defined as a strategic goal for the Living Together Department and also for the Diversity Unit in the local police service. The city has intensified its monitoring of any kind of discrimination in all fields of public life. Within the framework of the diversity policy, the city has been trying to encourage different actors to discuss the challenges of living in diversity. In 2007–2008, the subject of a number of debates and meetings was language. The debates in 2008–2009 revolved around external appearances, more specifically connected with the headscarf ban in the city. There are meeting centres in different parts of the city where such discussions can take place. For example, Atlas is a meeting place for citizenship courses and diversity; it aims to provide assistance to immigrants and offers a number of interesting activities.

Many events are celebrated by members of ethnic and religious communities living in Antwerp. If they are open and addressed to the wider public, the city might support them financially and logistically – examples being the celebration of the Chinese New Year, the Feast of Buddha, the Ganesh Festival and the Bazaar.

According to evidence collected during the field visit, some inter-ethnic organisations deal with diversity, such as the:

- International Committee – an umbrella organisation for different migrant organisations;
- Church Work Multicultural Cooperation (*Kerkwerk Multicultureel Samenwerking*) – a network of churches emphasising diversity in its relations;
- Federation of Moroccan Associations (*Federatie Marokkaanse Verenigingen*) – despite its name, the members of this umbrella organisation are also Muslims from other countries such as Chechnya. It actually intends to change its name;
- Platform for Immigrant Youth – its management is diverse and the organisation has been trying to involve ethnically different youth migrant organisations in its projects.

The Living Together Department has established contacts with local organisations and it aims to encourage cultural and religious immigrant organisations to become active members of their local neighbourhoods. Another vital element is combating the prejudice and aversion shown by local people towards migrants. In 2006, the city's Department of Marketing and Communication introduced a slogan for Antwerp – 'This city is for everyone' ('*'t Stadt is van iedereen*') – emphasising the importance of diversity to the city.

Finally, the boxes below outline our examples of successful initiatives connected with developing intergroup relations.

Case 1. The office for citizenship courses (*inburgeringsbureau*) in Antwerp tries to put newcomers in contact with people living in the city – either native Belgians or migrants living in the city for a longer period of time. The office is thus gathering a volunteer team with the aim of putting newcomers in touch with citizens of the city. This is important for learning the language, getting to know the city and its inhabitants, and developing social contacts.

Case 2. A project entitled 'Intercultural stewards' focuses on finding, through advertisements, immigrants who are interested in doing voluntary work as 'peacemakers' (*kalmtemakers*) during different events. During the recruitment for this role, the person's position in their local community and network is taken into consideration. The successful candidates are expected to assist in raising interest among immigrants and people from their environment in events organised by the city. It often happens that the participants in various events are not diverse in terms of ethnicity and that immigrants do not take part in such meetings.

Case 3. A project leader working in the meeting centre aims to support projects showcasing the multicultural nature of specific parts of the city by developing a contact network among the local inhabitants. The objective is to shift the organisation of such undertakings to the local actors, while being supported by the city. A good example of this initiative is the annual North Bazaar festival presenting different cultures, traditions, cuisines and habits of immigrants residing in Antwerp.

Case 4. A neighbourhood secretary organises where the different groups can meet during their working hours in order to manage their administrative work, use a computer and access the Internet. These shared spaces should give the participants the chance to meet people from other ethnic or cultural groups.

Relations between different ethnic groups

The city of Antwerp appears to consider the situation in the city to be stable; however, relations between different immigrant groups and between immigrants as a whole and the majority population are far from ideal. Different ethnic communities live separated from one another and do not have any contact with each other. The attitudes towards immigrants shown by Belgian nationals are reflected in election results. A significant proportion of inhabitants support the right-wing Vlaams Belang party, whose members are categorically against the Islamisation of Europe – including Antwerp. In the last local elections in 2006, Vlaams Belang won 20 out of 55 seats in the city council (Table 7). It is important to add that other political parties, although they do not directly use anti-immigrant rhetoric, frequently talk about the role of religion in society and the need to remain neutral in public life, which is closely related to the perception of Islam. As religion is very important for the Muslim community, restrictions in this domain have been observed with distrust. During the interviews, the representatives of the Muslim community emphasised that Vlaams Belang has a much clearer programme than other parties which indirectly support some anti-immigrant solutions.

Table 7: Results of local elections in Antwerp, 2006

Name of political party	Result (%)	Number of seats in city council
Socialist Party Spirit (Socialistische Partij Anders-Spirit, SPA Spirit)	35.28%	22
Flemish Liberals and Democrats (Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten, VLD-Vivant)	9.7%	5
Vlaams Belang	33.51%	20
Flemish Christian Democrat Party (Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams, CD&V)	11.17%	6
Green Party (Groen)	4.7%	2

Source: <http://www.antwerpen.lokaal.be/verkiezingen>

Interviews conducted during the field visit reveal that the majority population perceives some representatives of ethnic groups, especially Muslims, as being dangerous, displaying anti-social behaviour such as accosting passersby in the street, particularly young women, and using bad language. Moreover, the high concentration of immigrants in some districts of the city appears to be of concern.

Despite certain efforts and a carefully formulated policy supporting diversity, there are few examples of different ethnic groups cooperating in joint projects. Although no serious conflicts have arisen, tensions exist between groups and unfortunately the situation cannot be described in terms of cooperation but only in terms of coexistence. The city spares no effort in resolving growing conflicts, by resorting to the system of neighbourhood and district mediation.

Public communication

Antwerp does not have an explicitly formulated strategy for public communication with ethnic communities living in the city. Nevertheless, the Department of Marketing and Communication in cooperation with the Office of Diversity Management have organised focus groups with migrants for the purpose of testing the city's communication strategy, information campaigns and information leaflets. It is important to obtain feedback from people of different cultural and linguistic background.

There are no ethnic media in Antwerp. However, migrants have taken some interesting initiatives to inform the public about issues related to ethnic and cultural communities.

- Kif Kif (<http://www.kifkif.be>) is a platform for young people of different origin aiming to monitor the media in the area of ethnic relations, inform people on integration issues and contribute to the intercultural dialogue. Its electronic newsletter is widely circulated.
- Films have been posted on YouTube, such as 'Ask a Moroccan' made by young immigrants who were bored with the debate on integration. These short films are a kind of skit on various subjects connected with intergroup relations.

In addition to the Belgian media, members of the Muslim community in Antwerp – mainly Moroccans and Turks – use satellite television for entertainment and as their source of information. According to research conducted by the University of Hasselt, Turkish immigrants are more oriented towards their national media than Moroccans. Three quarters of the Turkish community watch Turkish television every day whereas in the Moroccan community less than a third of its members watch television channels from Morocco every day (Table 8).

Table 8: *Popularity of Turkish/Moroccan TV in both communities*

	% of Turkish community watching Turkish TV	% of Moroccan community watching Moroccan TV
Never	2.7%	20.1%
From time to time	9.5%	29.1%
About once a week	1.9%	5.3%
More than once a week	10.7%	13.2%
Every day	75.2%	32.3%
Total number interviewed	262 (100%)	189 (100%)

Source: *Van Craen et al, 2007*

Summary and lessons learnt

The city seems to consider the overall state of affairs among ethnic and religious groups and their organisations to be positive. The diversity policy realised so far emphasises the development of good relations with all communities of different background as well as encouraging close cooperation between such groups. Many projects receive support from the Living Together Department. The interviewed representatives of the migrant organisations positively evaluate many of these projects, such as the Bazaar Festival, the provision of social advice or meeting centres. However, all of the migrant representatives highlighted the lack of dialogue between the majority and migrant communities and racial prejudice in society.

On the basis of evidence collected during the field visit, it appears that the administration is expected to show close cooperation and openness regarding the ideas and demands of the communities. Many respondents pointed out that, despite the constant discussion and emphasis put on diversity, no attention is paid to projects involving different ethnic groups, and financial support is instead granted to initiatives of individual ethnic groups. The respondents claim that there are few examples of joint cooperation or common projects, especially those which would unite immigrants and the local community. The only instance quoted in the interviews was the Bazaar Festival; however, as emphasised by the interviewees, this event takes place annually.

Local intercultural policies towards Muslim communities

Major issues, demands and interests

Interviews with representatives of the Muslim community in Antwerp have given a complex view of the concerns about improving the position of this group in society. Such concerns include education and their labour market position, discrimination and identity issues. The main problems and demands were defined as follows:

- a sense of discrimination in the public sphere, experienced mainly by highly skilled Muslims but also by those with a basic level of the Flemish language. The discrimination was related to the public administration, police and schools – Muslims are perceived as second-class citizens, and approached with deep mistrust;
- the dress code within the administration of the city and the public communication about the headscarf ban introduced by political parties. The sudden introduction of the dress code in the public administration forced Muslim women to decide whether to take off the scarf or lose their job. The manner of introducing the ban and the negative atmosphere surrounding the debate have both contributed to a feeling of mistrust towards the administration and a sense of discrimination;
- concerns about the failure of educational policy towards immigrant children. Such children are two years behind native Belgian children as regards the level of their linguistic development, which affects the educational level that they reach and consequently their position in the labour market;
- frustration about the lack of knowledge about Islam and the Muslim community;
- concerns about a very slow process of recognition of mosques in the city. Islam has been recognised as an official religion in Belgium since 1974, but the first mosques in Flanders were only acknowledged in 2007. The process of getting all of the necessary permissions is long and complicated, and sometimes the Muslims feel no goodwill towards them on the part of the public institutions;
- concerns regarding the establishment of new mosques and meeting places for the Muslim community;
- the problem of finding a location for ritual slaughter.

According to the available data, the city of Antwerp seems to be aware of the difficulties in relations between the majority population and the Muslim community. The lack of personal, neighbourly relations particularly with Muslims is distinct. A study carried out by researchers from the University of Hasselt on the sociocultural distance between immigrants and the majority population indicates that the number of contacts with members of the immigrant community is very low (Table 9) (Vancluysen et al, 2009).

Table 9: *Number of friends Belgians have in Moroccan community*

	Friends in Moroccan community (% of Belgians)
None	79.3%
1–2	11.8%
3–5	6.5%
6–10	2.2%
More than 10	0.3%
Total interviewees	323 (100%)

Source: *Vancluysen et al, 2009*

The research shows that the majority population and immigrants from the Muslim community live apart and do not have regular and close contact with each other. Table 10 presents the number of contacts that Belgians have with their Muslim neighbours: slightly more than 40% have no contact with Moroccans. Sociological theory about social capital and the theory of the political scientist Robert D. Putman on bonding and bridging social capital emphasise the fact that, for society, informal contacts are as important as association networking. According to Green and Brock (2005), ‘neighbours chatting with one another on their front porches may engender a sense of community no less strong than the one that may be created by attending a neighbourhood association meeting’. The life of immigrant associations in Antwerp is rich and complex, covering activities in all domains of social life. However, the bridging process is still very limited and encouraging intercultural communication and cooperation might be the main goal in the diversity policy.

Table 10: *Number of chats Belgians have with neighbours from Moroccan community*

	Contact with neighbours from Moroccan community (% of Belgians)
Every day	6.2%
Many times a week	10.7%
About once a week	9.5%
About once a month	10.1%
A few times a year	11.9%
Never	42.7%
No Moroccans in neighbourhood	8.9%
Total number of interviewees	337 (100%)

Source: *Vancluysen et al, 2009*

From the data on the frequency of daily contacts between immigrant groups and the majority population – and also between different ethnic and religious groups – it is clear why intergroup cooperation and the establishment of positive relations in society are so high on the city’s agenda.

General approaches and policies improving relations with Muslim groups

Antwerp does not have a target policy focusing on any one ethnic or religious group. The city’s diversity policy generally aims to improve intergroup relations in the community and empower groups to contribute to the local social and cultural life. The city emphasises that, through various projects and subsidies, it assists and encourages different groups to establish intergroup relations. All of the activities promoted by the city should contribute to fostering tolerance and respect among its citizens. As a significant employer, the city promotes diversity among its own employees. For example, many people in the Living Together Department and in the Diversity Unit in the local police service have an ethnic background, which should be helpful in developing relations with immigrant groups.

Both formal and informal contacts exist between Muslim organisations and the city administration. Formal contacts take place through the Muslim Executive and Mosque Discussion (*Moskeeverleg*), as well as the Muslim umbrella organisations. They also take place through individual organisations which, for various reasons, are not members of the umbrella organisation but are contacted by members of the city administration staff. The Living Together Department and the Social Networking Service in particular are responsible for establishing intergroup relations. Moreover, the Diversity Unit in the local police service is very active as regards contacts with different religious and ethnic groups. It tries to gather information about the groups, support them by organising events and mediate in conflicts. The Diversity Unit has developed two interesting initiatives – ‘A heart for diversity’ and ‘The police. Your best friends’ – aiming to build trust in this institution.

There are some organisations with which the city is not willing to have contact as they are suspected of radical views and calling for radicalisation. An example in this regard might be Youth for Islam (*Jongeren voor Islam*), whose members are approached with reluctance due to their suspected radical views in terms of integration and fostering diversity in the city. According to the police, however, there is no evidence confirming such activities by this group.

In addition, there are three elected members of Moroccan origin in the city council and some in the district councils. The data do not register the ethnicity of the members but they can easily be recognised by their names.

Good practice examples of improving relations with Muslim groups

As previously mentioned, the diversity policy of Antwerp aims to improve relations between different groups living in the city. Diversity has been defined as a challenge for the development of the city, not as an obstacle in this process. The diversity policy is not focused on any specific target group but concentrates its activities on every minority group living in the city. Until 2005, the migrant advisory board was established as an advisory body for local policymakers and the administration but its activities were not very successful. Therefore, the present diversity policy is based on direct regular contacts with migrant umbrella organisations as well as individual associations. The Social Networking Service within the Living Together Department is responsible for developing relations with a variety of groups present in the city. Meetings between the local administration and mosque representatives take place twice a month.

Good practice examples of activities aiming to support the Muslim community include support for meeting centres, administration and logistical support for its organisations, leadership coaching and an interesting project consisting of a neighbourhood secretariat – that is, a place for working and contact with the groups living in the particular district. All of these projects are offered to all migrant groups and not only to the Muslim community. According to the city, a clear decline in the number of intergroup events can be seen: for example, sports activities are organised primarily for individual groups, which contributes to polarisation between immigrants and the majority population. Events open to the broader public include initiatives such as street festivals, neighbourhood festivals, henna workshops and public debates. Two examples in this context are notable:

- the Dar Es Salaam [House of Peace] initiative taken by a number of ethnic, religious and cultural organisations aimed at intercultural dialogue. A total of six evening meetings were organised ‘about and with Muslims in Antwerp’. The subjects of the discussions were as follows: Muslims in Antwerp, the history of Islam, women and relations, immigrant youth, the headscarf debate and the future of Islam;
- discussions on Diversity is/in Reality organised by the Boss of My Own Head (*Baas over Eigen Hoofd*, BOEH!) Action Platform (<http://www.baasovereigenhoofd.be>). The Platform examines discrimination against women in society and is very active in this area, for example regarding the controversy over the headscarf ban.

Public communication

The city of Antwerp does not have a specific policy for communication about Muslim issues. According to both the city and representatives of migrant organisations, the local and regional media – namely the daily newspaper *Gazet van Antwerpen* and the regional television station ATV – do not tend to present positive reports concerning the Muslim community. Generally, the media maintain prejudices against the Muslim community or, in other words, they fail to dispel certain stereotypes by reporting mainly about negative occurrences. The media have fostered Islamophobia and give accounts of threats connected with the growing number of Muslims in Belgium and Antwerp, thus participating in the debate on the Islamisation of Europe. As mentioned, the city has been trying to get the Muslim community’s point of view by organising focus groups and also by encouraging migrant organisations to establish relations with the local media.

No Muslim media are present in the city except for the Kif Kif Internet platform mentioned earlier, which aims to report on ethnic and cultural minorities living in the city.

Summary and lessons learnt

The city of Antwerp is aware that relations between the administration and the Muslim community could be significantly improved and deepened. As relations between the Muslim community and the majority population are limited – which can influence the exclusion of this community – the most important task appears to be strengthening the bridging process. It seems to be useful to encourage cooperation within the communities in a so-called bonding process as there are many organisations where the members are not active. Fostering the activity of existing associations and cooperation between them might play an important role in social cohesion and preventing discrimination against immigrants.

Both the city and the representatives of Muslim organisations identified religious issues as being the most sensitive in their relations. On the one hand, the political parties believe that religion should be limited to private life without any support from the public institutions because religion does not play an important role for the Belgian majority. On the other hand, Muslims expect the administration to support and respect their community and religion, particularly because Islam has been recognised in Belgium since 1974. The debate about the role of religion in the local community may be one of the most difficult issues for the coming years.

Intergroup relations and radicalisation

Radicalisation within the majority population

Radicalisation of the public debate on immigration and integration issues has been undergoing different stages since 1991 when the Flemish Bloc (now Vlaams Belang) achieved its success in the local elections. One third of Antwerp voters had chosen this party and its anti-immigrant rhetoric on, for example, strict limits to immigration and acceptance of a multiethnic society as long as non-Flemish citizens assimilate into the Flemish culture, tradition and language. In the 2006 local elections in Antwerp, Vlaams Belang maintained its share of the vote.

Public debate surrounds controversial issues such as the limits of freedom of expression, the neutrality of the public administration and the role of religion in public life. These appear to be sensitive topics both to the majority population and especially to the Muslim minority. According to local policy and also representatives of Muslim organisations, besides the previous radicalisation of the public debate, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States and subsequent events in Europe have influenced negative attitudes against the Muslim community. According to the Muslims interviewed during the field visit, almost all of them are perceived as terrorists and the growing number of Muslims in Europe is interpreted by some political parties and media as a threat to European values and the democratic system.

Such public debate and radical attitudes within the majority population also have an effect on radicalisation in the Islamic community. Young people are looking for their identity in religion; as a protest against the ban on showing religious symbols, they do the opposite. Strengthening their position as a Muslim community may be perceived as a protest against the intention to force them into assimilation.

The city of Antwerp believes that it is not facing radicalisation within the majority population, as the growing support for the right-wing Vlaams Belang is perceived as part of a democratic process. This party is legally entitled to express its views; nevertheless, anti-immigrant statements have influenced the public debate and polarised relations between the majority population and the Muslim community.

A notable example of sensitive issues in this context, as already mentioned, was the headscarf ban proposed by the local authority after the elections in 2006. The proposal was interpreted as discrimination against Muslim women, which led to protests and the establishment of the BOEH! Action Platform, combating discrimination against Muslim women in Antwerp. This initiative gathered representatives of different circles opposing the restriction of civil liberties and attempts at the forced assimilation of any person. Interestingly, the accompanying posters showed persons promoting this initiative who had previously represented the Socialist Party on its election posters.

General approach, policies and measures towards these groups

In Antwerp, there are organisations representing anti-discrimination and anti-racism issues in society, examples being Kif Kif, BOEH! and the Federation of Moroccan Associations. All of these initiatives are supported by the city authorities. They strive to organise information campaigns against discrimination, racism and radicalisation, as well as monitoring any related events and carrying out media monitoring.

The local police, especially the Diversity Unit, take action in relation to any anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic or xenophobic actions. This policy is aimed at recruiting partners with an immigrant background in order to achieve better contacts with minority groups through them.

Radicalisation within migrant and/or minority population

The city of Antwerp does not appear to have any evidence of radical tendencies among the migrant population. There is some speculation about radicalisation among members of the second and third generations of the Muslim community; however, according to the local police, such rumours have not been confirmed. As noted earlier, one of the groups considered to be radical is Youth for Islam but police monitoring of their meetings has not confirmed any radical actions or incitement to aggression or riots against other social groups. Young Muslims from the second and third generations searching for their identity tend to turn towards religion.

According to the city, there is no evidence that the radical behaviour of some members of the Muslim community has been influencing the social integration process to a significant degree. There are some radical mosques in the city. Interviewees explained that they faced a particular challenge as regards establishing contacts with mosques, due to the high turnover of imams or Muslim leaders. New imams without a knowledge of the Flemish language hinder contact.

The Federal Police conducted an operation aiming to monitor call shops and all-night shops run by immigrants. The results of the investigation showed that some immigrants illegally transferred money to Pakistan, for example, and they may also have supported suspicious organisations in their countries of origin.

General approach, policies and measures towards these groups

Antwerp has been trying to encourage the mosques to take an active part in the fight against radicalisation and in interethnic dialogue. The city has supported public debates, dialogue and activities focused on the bridging process between minorities and the majority population. The city believes that the learning process and minimising prejudice constitute an important part of building a tolerant, diverse society. Although radicalisation is discussed at length nowadays, few organisations or initiatives focus on this problem.

Relations between groups

The city does not provide any information about relations between groups mobilised against radicalisation. From the field visit findings, it appears that the only intergroup initiatives against radicalisation and discrimination are BOEH!, the action platform encouraging people from different groups to tackle discrimination, and Kif Kif, monitoring discrimination in the media.

Communication strategy concerning radicalisation

Antwerp does not have any specific strategy related to discrimination or xenophobia. In the city's opinion, as an institution it gives a clear message that it opposes any discrimination within society and it emphasises the equal treatment of every member of the community. The city believes in supporting any action against radicalisation, discrimination or xenophobia for the public good. However, during the field visit, the representatives of Muslim organisations expressed their concerns about the negative attitudes of the majority population towards them.

Radicalisation: Summary and lessons learnt

Radicalisation within the population of Antwerp is, on the one hand, related to the political parties and attitudes towards the Islamisation of society and the role of religion in the state and the city. This fear of the Muslim community is strengthened by certain media reporting on problematic issues related to the community. On the other hand, radicalisation of attitudes towards Muslims and implementing the headscarf ban, for example, might influence the radicalisation of Muslims. Young Muslims who are excluded from society in socioeconomic and cultural terms feel that

they are perceived as second-class citizens. They search for their identity by becoming more radical in their interpretation of Islam. In general, it is believed that the process of radicalisation is becoming important for society but in fact there is no evidence of any radical group acting against other groups in the city.

Antwerp does not have an explicit policy against radicalisation but it believes that a successful integration process and support for intergroup relations and diversity in the city signal that the authority is against radical action. The city supports the anti-discrimination and anti-radicalisation activities taken by different organisations.

Key challenges and lessons for CLIP

For centuries, the city of Antwerp with its famous seaport has been a magnet for migrants from all over the world. After World War II, as a result of economic growth and Belgian recruitment policy, the city experienced different waves of migration, which did not stop until recently. This process has changed the population structure in the city and opened discussion about the integration of migrants. It is expected that migrants become equal members of society and accept the existing rules and way of life. As a result of the inflow of migrants, about 12% of Antwerp's population is Muslim, with a distinct religion and traditions. Therefore, potential areas of conflict need to be addressed.

Integration must be understood as a mutual process involving not only immigrants but also the majority population. Intergroup relations and the dialogue between the groups constitute a challenging and long-lasting process causing concern on both sides: for the city authority and immigrants. Many representatives of the migrant organisations participating in the research expressed their dissatisfaction about the high expectations of the majority population in terms of the adaptation and assimilation of immigrants, as well as about the perception of immigrants as one homogenous group. They also highlighted the negative picture of immigrants among Belgians reinforced by the media. In the opinion of the immigrants interviewed, maintaining this negative view contributes to their discrimination – primarily in the labour market.

Antwerp has defined its policy in terms of diversity with an emphasis on the emancipation of all groups living in the city for the common good and success. Diversity, according to the official documents, should be understood as a challenge and not as an obstacle to city life. The Living Together Department with its various sections has been established to encourage bonding and bridging processes among the members of society. Undoubtedly, the biggest challenges for now – and presumably for the future – are intergroup relations and the interaction between immigrants and the majority population. The role of religion and the display of religious symbols in public were defined by both immigrants and the city administration as the most sensitive issues in their mutual relations.

The city administration undertakes grassroots activity to encourage and motivate group leaders and organisations to apply for available grants. The meeting centres and the neighbourhood secretariats are good examples of these activities. However, there seems to be a lack of activities aimed at intergroup projects encouraging different groups to work together. The Bazaar Festival was cited by all representatives and the city administration as a successful initiative showing the diverse face of the city of Antwerp. This kind of activity is useful in breaking down prejudice and building trust. It is especially important in light of research indicating a sense of discrimination among immigrants.

In Antwerp, the lives of the majority population and immigrant groups seem to be divided not only in geographical terms but also in physical terms. Nonetheless, there are few examples of disturbance or acts of aggression. The city has been trying to achieve a positive level of intergroup relations and dialogue; however, the ideas about dialogue put forward by the representatives of migrant organisations and the authorities still tend to be very different.

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List of persons and organisations interviewed

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Ibrahim Bentoutouh, Imam of Omar Mosque

Ahmed Azzouz, inspector of Muslim teaching in the region

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Najim Einaouan, Immigrant Youth Platform (*Platform Allochtone Jeugdwerkingen*), <http://www.paj.be/>

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Ekrem Koçak, Department of Associations in the city of Antwerp

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Anissa Akhandaf, Living Together Department in the city of Antwerp

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