

# **Intercultural Policies and Intergroup Relations**

## **The case of Antwerp (Belgium)**

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## Foreword

This report is a part of the Eurofound project „Cities for Local Integration Policy“ (CLIP) launched in 2006. Antwerp is one of the 30 European cities that cooperate in the European network on exchanging information on their Integration Policies. The network implements thematic modules for its research. The first module concentrated on the issue of housing, the second focused on diversity, whereas the third one (in which this report has been written) analyses intercultural policies and intergroup relations.

The project aims at collecting and analyzing innovative policies and their successful implementation at the local level, supporting the exchange of experiences between cities and at encouraging a learning process within the network of cities. It addresses the role of social partners: NGOs, companies and voluntary associations in supporting successful integration policies. It aims at providing objective assessment of current practice and initiatives as well as discussing their transferability, communicating good practice to other cities in Europe, leading to guidelines to help the cities to cope more effectively with the challenge of integrating migrants. Another objective is to support the further development of a European integration policy by communicating the policy relevant experiences and outputs of the network to: European organizations of cities and local, regional authorities, the European and national organizations of social partners, the Council of Europe and various institutions of the European Union.

The CLIP network is also a cooperation endeavour between cities and research institutes. Six research institutes (EFMS Bamberg, IMES Amsterdam, Austrian Academy of Science, FIERI Turin, CMPR Swansea, Institute of International Studies Wrocław) are implementing the research of the CLIP project. The researchers of the Institute of International Studies are responsible for this report on Antwerp. Together with the contact person of the city of Antwerp, Mrs. Anissa Akhandaf, a considerable effort has been undertaken to find necessary data for this report. I would like to thank all the interviewed persons for the time they have accorded me. And my very special gratitude goes to Mrs. Anissa Akhandaf for her commitment and passion she put in this project.

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Patrycja Matusz Protasiewicz

August 2009, Wrocław

# 1 Introduction

The topic of module 3 of CLIP has to do with 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 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 group. This kind of understanding of a group is of importance, particularly in case of Eastern European countries where the presence of immigrant groups is still marginal. But in place of immigrants we can talk about national minorities with different cultural, religious and linguistic heritage, included into the state territory as a result of conflicts, wars or border changes. As Heckmann pointed out in the concept paper for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Module of CLIP: “in *intergroup relation* 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.” (Heckmann 2008) There are many actors involved in the process of an intercultural dialogue; this project encompasses the city administration, the city council, political parties, churches, trade unions, welfare organizations, local media etc. In Western European cities the 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.

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

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

The analysis of the existing documents focused on the programs and activities taken by the city and is placed in the national context of the current policy. As regards Eastern European cities, not only the existing practices in the field of intercultural dialogue must be taken into consideration but also the question why there are ‘no policies’ or how influential the informal activities are.

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

## **2 Background information on the country**

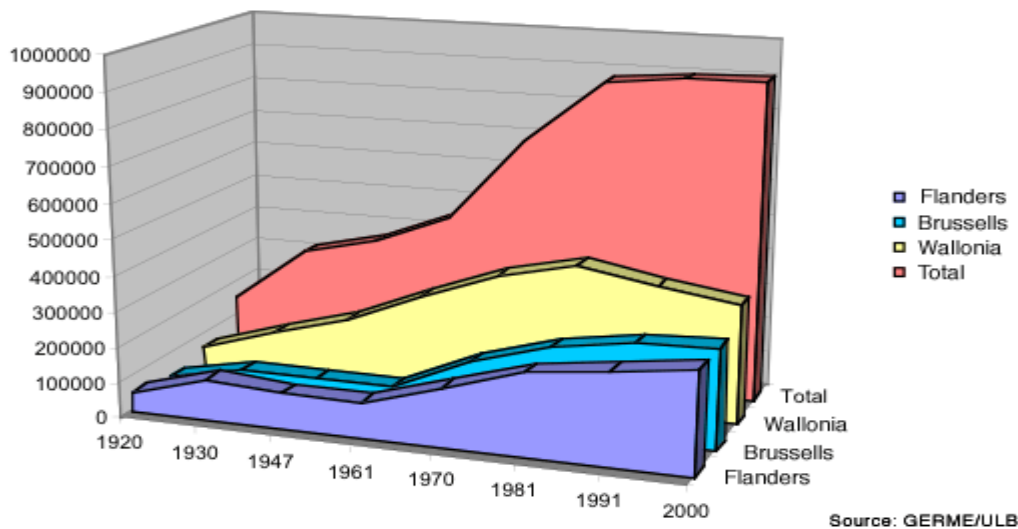
### **2.1 History of migration and composition of the migrant populations**

After WWII Belgium signed several bilateral agreements, mainly with the countries of the Mediterranean in order to recruit migrant workers for the coal mining sector and heavy industry. The first wave brought guest-workers from Italy, Spain and Greece as well as from the neighbouring countries, such as France and the Netherlands. This first group was followed by Muslims from Morocco, Turkey and Tunisia (bilateral agreements: with Italy in 1946, and continuing with 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 took a decision to stop the recruitment of foreign workers. So was the case with all other Western European countries. However, the inflow of migrants into Belgium has not been stopped due to some important processes: mobility of EU citizens, asylum applications, foreign students' mobility, highly skilled workers' migration, irregular migration and last but not one of the most important sources: family-related migration (Gsir, Martinello, Wets, 2003). In 1974, Islam was recognized as an official religion in Belgium.

While talking about migration we should not forget that the inflow of foreigners into Belgium did not start only after WWII. Jews had been the part of Antwerp's population for centuries. Before WWII half of the 100 000 Jewish population of Belgium lived in this city. In the post-war period, as a result of devastation of the Jewish community in Central Eastern Europe, Jews from this region flowed in Belgium and settled down in the city. Nowadays, the Orthodox Jewish Community in Antwerp counts 15 000 persons and is one of the largest in Europe.

Like other European states, Belgium did not succeed in stopping the 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 and the EU enlargement in 1985 was followed by the inflow of the Portuguese to the city. The latest EU enlargement of 2004 brought about an increase in the number of Polish migrants coming to Belgium but some of them have only been trying to change their status from illegal to a legal one. Polish workers in the cleaning and housekeeping sector were illegally working in Belgium from the mid 1990s.

Graph1. Number of foreigners in Belgium from 1920 till 2000.



Currently the foreign population in Belgium has reached more than 8% of the total population and this figure does not include naturalized migrants, and those living there illegally. The composition of migrants in Belgium is very diverse and they are not equally distributed in its territory. Brussels, as the Capital Region, has the highest representation of foreigners at the level of slightly less than 30%. "Italians are the most numerous of the foreigners legally residing in Belgium, with around 200,000 people. The Moroccans are the second-largest group, with around 121,000 people largely concentrated in Brussels. The French, a population that is rarely talked about in studies on immigration, stand in third position with over 107,000 people, followed by the Dutch with over 85,000. The Turks are in fifth place with over 69,000 people. The Spanish number over 45,000, the Germans over 34,000, the British around 26,000, the Americans and the Congolese (ex-Zairians) with nearly 12,000 each" (Martinello, Rea, 2003). The public opinion in Belgium associates immigrants with the Muslim community (mainly with Moroccans and Turks), people with low level of education and socio-economic position. The data shows that this is not the case for the biggest group of foreigners legally living in Belgium comes from the EU countries or other developed countries.

## 2.2 National policy context

The Belgian policy towards foreigners has been undergoing different stages in a comparable manner to other Western European neighbouring countries, from the recruitment policy of guest-workers in the 1950s and 1960s with an easy access to permits for stay and work through the more restrictive policy of the 1970s aiming at reducing any inflow of immigrants to the policy

oriented on integration and social inclusion of immigrants living in the country starting from mid 1980s.

After the economic recession of the mid 1970s and 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 the initiatives in encouraging the migrants to return to their countries of origin were unsuccessful as well.

Following the implementation of restrictive enter policy, the main migrants flow came from the countries of the EU member states as a result of free movement of people guaranteed in the Treaty of Rome. Furthermore, the family related migration has been used as a legal possibility in entering the country. After a long public debate on 1 March 2000, the simplified Act on Citizenship was implemented giving the chance to become Belgian citizens much more easily to the immigrants legally living in Belgium. Starting from this point there is a visible increase in naturalization which opens the door to all public and political rights for the immigrants.

Since the mid 1980s the Belgian government has started introducing integration measures focused on inclusion of immigrants living in Belgium into its society. In the 1990s the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight against Racism was established. Between 2004 and 2005 the Centre managed work of the Commission for the Intercultural Dialogue. It aimed to improve the integration in the diverse Belgian society, working in the four main areas: citizenship, gender equality, basic principles for the public service, and the role of religions in the secular society. The recommendation of the commission was based on a double principle:

- Recognition of cultural diversity
- Promotion of interaction, of a mixture of cultures and multiple identities

In 2006 the Flemish Minister of Culture introduced a new Flemish Plan for Action of Interculturalisation covering the fields of culture, youth work and sport (2006-2009). The plan calls for positive action to address the under-representation of people with diverse ethnic-cultural background in subsidised activities in the respective sectors. These measures should lead to a permanent and growing interculturalisation in all sectors. ([www.interculturaldialogue.eu](http://www.interculturaldialogue.eu))

### **3 Background information on the city**

#### **3.1 Brief description of the city**

Antwerp is the largest city in Flanders with the population of slightly less than 500.000 inhabitants and average population density of 2 420 persons per square kilometre. It is located on the river

Schelde and is an important and one of the biggest seaports in Europe and worldwide. Antwerp is well located at a close distance to the Netherlands, France, Germany and the UK. The central location and its importance 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, namely diamond trade, in which Antwerp takes a worldwide leading position.

The unemployment rate in Antwerp is 15,9 %, which is almost twice as much as in the Flanders as a whole. Women are in the majority among the jobseekers (53%), 22% of jobseekers are younger than 25 years of age, 44% are 25-39 years old and 37% are more than 40 years old. It is important to note that in the group of the unemployed four persons out of ten come from the non-EU states; 12,3% are of Turkish and Moroccan origin. Most of the jobseekers live in Antwerp North (Gsir, CLIP 2008) .

The city of Antwerp is made up of 9 districts: Antwerp (1), Berchem (2), Berendrecht-Zwadvliet-Lillo (3), Borgerhout (4), Deurne (5), Ekeren (6), Hoboken (7), Merksem (8), Wilrijk (9). The districts are split in 42 neighbourhoods.

Graph 2. The districts in the city of Antwerp.



Source: [www.buurmonitor.be](http://www.buurmonitor.be)

In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Antwerp was known as a rich city with impressive houses of these wealthy merchants and manufacturers but also as the artistic place, home for the school of painting which included Rubens, Van Dyck, Jordaens, the two Teniers. During WWII some of the historical buildings were destroyed but the historical centre of the city still attracts a lot of tourists from around the world. The cultural life in the city is also a magnet for the guests coming not only from the neighbouring countries.

Picture 1. The city hall of Antwerp.



In political terms, Antwerp has been the centre of a socialist political movement as a result of presence of a huge group of industrial port-workers. For the last seven decades the city was governed by the Socialist and Christian-Democrats but it is important to add that since 1988 Antwerp has become the centre of the Flemish extreme-right party (presently: Vlaams Balang, previously Vlaams Blok). This party has been using the anti-immigrant rhetoric in their political campaigns. Antwerp is the headquarters of this party.

### **3.2 The city's migrant population and its characteristics/main groups**

The foreign population in Belgium reached 8,3% of the total population in 2004. This number does not cover neither illegal immigrants living in Belgium nor naturalized Belgians. The actual number of citizens with a foreign background is much higher. The immigrant population is spread unequally around Belgium. The biggest part of this group is concentrated in the Brussels- Capital Region. In Flanders, Antwerp with its seaport industry is the city which attracts the most migrants to settle down.

Antwerp is facing an increase in the number of inhabitants, in 2009 the total population of the city reached 482 456 (49,5% women, 50,5% men). The inflow of migrants has also contributed to this growth. In January 2005 there were 54 842 inhabitants with a foreign nationality, which accounts for 12% of the total population, in 2009 the number of immigrants reached 79 199 inhabitants (16,4%). However, according to the city statistics we can distinguish between Belgians, new Belgians (naturalized migrants, people with foreign background) and foreigners living legally in the city. If we consider this percentage, the number of inhabitants of Antwerp of the foreign background seems to be much higher (see table below).

Table 1. The composition of the population in Antwerp 2009.

Antwerp's population	Percentage
Belgian	70
All citizens with foreign background (allochtonen)	30
New Belgian	13,6
Residents with foreign nationality	16,4

Source: Stadt Anwerpen, District- en Loketenwerkng 2009.

As we take a look at the data contained in the tables we can discover that the biggest group among foreigners living in Antwerp are people from the old EU states (EU 15) and not Muslims as perceived by common inhabitants of the city.

Table 2. The foreigners living in the city of Antwerp, group division, 2009.

The number of different groups in the city of Antwerp (2009)	Numbers	Percentage
Belgians	403.337	83,6
Foreigners	79.119	16,4
From the old EU member states (EU 15)	25.497	5,3
New EU states	7.086	1,5
Europeans from outside the EU	5.956	1,2
Moroccans	12.101	2,5
Turks	4.521	0,9

Source: Antwerpen buurtmonitor 2009.

In this group: 5,8% come from other EU- states and 8,6% from outside the EU. A noticeable increase in the number of family-related migrants can be seen in 2001, as a result of this process 1 742 new migrants arrived in the city, in 2004 as many as 3 929 and in 2007 the number reached 4 815, respectively.

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

Table 3. The main age groups of the population of Antwerp.

Antwerp population	Percentage
The total numbers of inhabitants	482 456
Age 18-24	8,6
Age 25-39	22,5
Age 40-64	30,2
Age 65+	18,1

Source: Stadt Antwerpen, District- en loketenwerking 2009.

The ethnic composition of Antwerp's population is very varied. The data from 2008 indicate the presence of 169 nationalities in the city. The main groups i.e. Moroccans, Dutchmen and Turks have not changed for many years. In 2007 a new group, namely Poles, emerged and reached the fourth position.

Table 4. Number of citizens with different nationality/ 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
New EU states	7 086	8 525
Old EU states (EU 15)	25 497	30 987

Source: Stadt Antwerpen, District- en Loketenwerking, 2009.

The figures (see table) suggest that the number of inhabitants with the Moroccan and Turkish nationality was reduced mainly due to naturalization of members of these groups (65 629 new Belgians live in the city, an increase in the naturalization in the last 6 years (60%), but if we take the numbers of inhabitants with the foreign, ethnic background, Moroccans and Turks appear to have achieved the leading position. In the group of new EU states a numerous group is constituted by Poles (4 600).

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

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.

Undoubtedly, while talking about religions in Antwerp, the Jewish community, with its 1500-2000 members ought not to be forgotten. The Jewish community is divided into 3 communities: modern-orthodox Shomre Hadaas, orthodox Machsike Hadass and the Portuguese ritual. There are many other Jewish organizations as well as the umbrella organization – Forum of the Jews organization cooperating with the municipality within a very limited scope. The Muslim community in the city of Antwerp will be analyzed in the next paragraph.

The life of associations in Antwerp has a long tradition and all ethnic groups are active in this field. The organizations of migrants were set up for different reasons, e.g. to gather the people from the same community, to help each other or to celebrate different holidays together. The organizations are focused on education, culture, religion or sport issues. Those migrant organizations can play an important role in the process of integration by showing their presence in the society and familiarizing the locals with both cultural differences and similarities. There is a visible 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 a multicultural associations in Antwerp* of 264 pages presenting all migrant organizations and associations in the city, with detailed address information and description of specific areas of interest. This publication was reissued 3 times so far, thus providing updated information about migrant associations and their activities in the city.

Many migrant ethnic-cultural organizations are members of the umbrella organizations. In Flanders there are 14 national umbrella organizations, acknowledged by the government of Flanders and receiving funds from the Department of Culture . Four of them are based in Antwerp:

- Federation of Moroccans associations (*Federatie of Marokkanse verenigingen*)
- Union of Turkish Associations (*Unie van Turkse verenigingen*)
- Association for the Development and Emancipation of Muslims (*Vereeniging voor Ontwikkeling and Emancipatie van Moslims*)
- Platform of African Communities (*Platform Afrikaans Gemeenschappen*)
- Latin-American Federation (*Latijns- Amerikaans Federatie*)

Another 3 umbrella organizations are not based in Antwerp but have their local branches there:

- International Comité

- Federation of Anglo-Africans Associations in Belgium (*Federatie van Anglo-Afrikaans Gemeenschappen*)
- (*Federatie van Vooruitstrevende verenigingen*)

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

- Union of Mosques and Muslim Organizations in the Province Antwerp (*Unie van moskeeën en Islamitische verenigingen provincie Antwerpen*)
- Afrikaans Cultureel Collectief
- Platform allochtoon Jeugdwerk – it is financially supported by the youth department but still not acknowledged by the Flemish authority.

Not all immigrant organizations are likely to be members of the umbrella organization, in order to highlight their individual character. To the local authorities confronted by many different associations, umbrella organizations are their partners representing certain part of the ethnic community. The city of Antwerp put emphasis on intensive contacts with migrant organizations. The department responsible for such communication (described in the subsequent paragraph) consists of numerous sections responsible for different projects aiming to activate the communities and create a civil society.

### 3.3 The city' Muslim population and its characteristics

The figures based on *Buurmonitor* appear to show that the Muslim community in Antwerp consists of two main groups: Moroccans and Turks representing 10,1% of the population and 48 882 in absolute numbers. There are other Muslims in the city as well but these two ethnic groups are undoubtedly most numerous. According to the available data, the Muslim community is younger than the autochthonous population and also the birth rate in this group is higher. Owing to this fact, the demographic pyramid in Antwerp underwent changes in the last decades. A rise in the group aged 20-40 can be observed. The gender division is approximately 50% males and 50% females.

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

Table 5. Unemployment in the city of Antwerp 2009.

Unemployment for groups	Percentage (average unemployment 8,6)
Unemployed Belgians	7,6
Unemployed from outside the EU	15.9

It refers to jobseekers, Source: Stadt Antwerpen, District- en Loketenwerking, 2009.

Due to the high unemployment rate as well as 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. Social services dependent persons, 2009.

Target group	Steuntrekkende op beroepsactive ltf. In debevolking
Belgians	1,2
Migrants from outside the EU	7,9

Source: Stadt Antwerpen, District- en Loketenwerking, 2009

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

## 4 Local intercultural policies in general

### 4.1 General approach and responsibility for relations to ethnic and religious organisations in the city

The intercultural policy and integration approach in the city of Antwerp is based on the *Het bestuuraakkord 2007-2012* and *De Stadsplan Diversiteit*. The main aims of the city policy were formulated as follows: living together, equal opportunities and responsibilities, active citizenship, social cohesion. On the basis of the above mentioned documents it is possible to conclude that the diversity of the city should not be perceived as an obstacle but as an advantage. The six main goals formulated for the coming years target at improving social cohesion and inclusion of all citizens of Antwerp into the community:

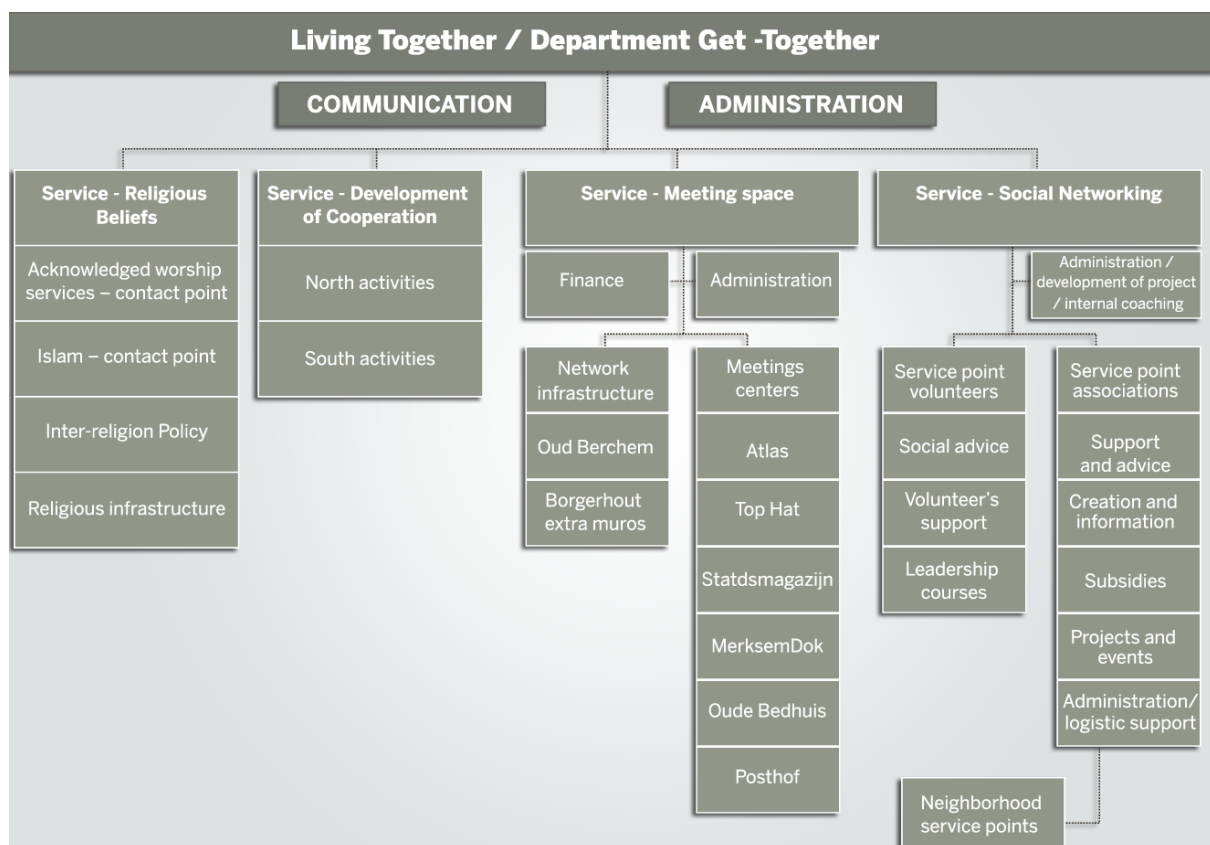
- Antwerp is the city where people from different backgrounds understand each other better
- Everyone knows democratic and social rules and applies them to the dialogue
- In Antwerp everyone gets their space for development of their own identity
- All the services of the city and OCMW are the example of maximum diversity among their staff
- The city encourages diversity among other actors (partners, entrepreneurs, organizations) in relation to their staff (Stadsplan 2008-2012)

One of the key priorities is to encourage community leaders, organizations, neighbourhoods to use available sources for shaping the common space in the city. Living together in diversity, to the city translates into a chance for everyone to be different while simultaneously respecting common rules and becoming a part of the city. The development and good communication with

immigrant organizations as well as their activation in the city life, all of those aims are believed to be of importance.

In the city of Antwerp, the City Executive is responsible for the development of integration policy and relations with its citizens. In practice, the Department *Samem Leven* (Living together) and the section *Ontmoeting* (Get Together) have been established for the purpose of realisation of the policy formulated by the city. According to the department its main goal has been formulated as building positive and effective contacts with different immigrant organizations and associations. The department staff have been working on the infrastructure of meeting centres, acknowledgement of religious places, coaching volunteers, development of projects, social, administrative, logistic advice to assist the community members to become active citizens involved in and contributing to the city life.

Graph. The Department Living Together / Section Get Together



Source: Department Samen Leven, author's own translation.

Knowing the diversity in the city it does not seem to be very surprising that 9 out of 55 elected members of the city council are of ethnic origin, including some heads of the city council commissions but they rarely take part in the diversity-related activities. They would like to be treated as all other members of the council and at the same time not to be limited to their ethnic or religious background.

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

## 4.2 Issues, demands and interests

According to the city, apart from the socio-cultural issues, social needs such as housing, employment and health are apparently the most important problems to the immigrant community. These were followed by other items of religious nature identified as important both by the city administration and representatives of ethnic organizations. They are:

- the need for respect and equal treatment of any religion in the city,
- recognition of mosques and worship places,
- support to the already existing mosques through their modernization (in order to be acknowledged),
- coaching by setting up their own school,
- support for the Muslim teachers in public schools,
- establishing place for the ritual slaughter of animals,
- cemeteries,
- other.

We can conclude that religion issues are extremely crucial to the Muslim community in Antwerp and the tensions around them have affected the relations with the city administration and the community's trust in it. The 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, has been polarizing the relations of the Muslim community and administration to a large extent (it will be discussed in the subsequent part of the report).

## 4.3 Forms of relations and dialogue

According to the city there is no explicit policy of intercultural relations. However, there are many specific tools formulated in the integration policy of the city aiming to improve relations and create common interest of different groups living in the city. Instead of having one immigrant counselling board, the city has been trying to establish relations with immigrant umbrella organizations as well as individual organizations. It does not mean that this kind of advisory committees is not present in Antwerp. Some of them are: Migrantenraad, Stedelijke integratieraad, Overlegraad and Raad van etnisch-culturele minderheden. As for the religious issues, the city has been cooperating with

the Executive of the Muslim faith to Belgian Authorities (Muslim representative body selected in the election among Muslims). According to the city, there exist regular, formal, institutionalized but also informal contacts with ethnic and religious organizations via the Samen Leven Department. The city has been supporting different ethnic, religious and cultural organizations thus contributing to diversity and enabling interaction between people of different origins. There is a variety of subsidies available for the activities aimed at breaking the bias against different groups and building diversity. These funds have been allocated for:

- Working costs for organizations dealing with living in diversity
- Projects on diversity and contributing to the emancipation of the specific minority group
- Projects aiming at dialogue between different ethnic-cultural or religious communities living in the city.

There are no funds available for entirely religious events but members of religious communities may apply for grants for social or cultural events, particularly if those activities are addressed to the majority populations or they activate local neighbourhoods, for example.

As it was already mentioned, in 2008 the new Stadsplan Diversiteit was implemented with the main focus on the support and counselling for different organizations concentrated on bringing together people from different backgrounds. Diversity has been defined as a strategic goal for the Samen Leven Department, but also for the Diversity Unit in the Local Police. The city has been intensifying the monitoring of any kind of discrimination in all fields of public life. In the framework of the diversity policy the city has been trying to encourage different actors to a debate about the challenges of living in diversity. In the years 2007-2008, the subject of a number of debates and meetings was the language. The debates in 2008-2009 they revolved around the external appearance more specifically connected with the headscarf ban in the city. There are meeting centres in the different parts of the city where such kinds of events can take place. Atlas, a meeting place for citizenship courses and diversity with its objective to provide every kind of assistance to immigrants and where some interesting activities take place appears to be an exciting place.

There are many events and symbols celebrated by members of ethnic and religious communities living in Antwerp. If they are open and addressed to the wider public they might be financially and logistically supported by the city, the examples being: celebration of the Chinese New Year, Feast for Buddha, Ganesh Festival, Baazar etc..

According to the evidence collected during the field visit there are some inter-ethnic organizations dealing with diversity as for example:

- Het International Comite – an umbrella organization for different migrant organizations

- Kerkwerk Multicultureel Samenwerking – the network of churches accentuating diversity in its relations
- Federatie Marokkaanse Verenigingen – despite its name the members of this umbrella organization are Muslims from other countries such as Chechnya. This Federation intends to change its name.
- Platform Alloctonen Jeugdverenigingen – its management is diverse and the organization has been trying to involve ethnically different youth migrant organizations in its projects

Establishing contacts with local organizations has been carried out by the Samen Leven Department and it is targeted at activating cultural and religious immigrant organizations to become active members of their local neighbourhoods. Another vital element is striving for elimination of prejudice and aversion displayed by locals against migrants. In 2006, Marketing and Communication Department introduced a slogan advertising Antwerp „ ‘t Stadt is van idereen” – „this city is for everyone,- emphasizing the importance of diversity to the city.

Finally, some examples of successful initiatives connected with building intergroup relations ought to be mentioned:

Case 1. The office for citizenship courses (inburgeringsbureau) in Antwerp tries to contact newcomers with people living in the city, the autochthons or the migrants living in the city for a longer period of time. The office is building a volunteer team with the aim of contacting the newcomers with the citizens of the city. Apparently, it is important for learning the language, knowing the city and its inhabitants and of course for development of social contacts.

Case 2. The project called “Intercultural Stewards” focuses on finding immigrants interested in a voluntary work during different events as “security guards” (kalmtemakers) via announcements. During recruitment for this position such person in their local community, the network is taken into consideration. These people are to provide assistance in making immigrants and people from their environment interested in events organized by the city. It happens quite often that the participants of various events are not varied in terms of ethnicity and immigrants do not take part in such meetings.

Case 3. The project leader working in the meeting centre is supposed to support projects influencing presentation of the multicultural nature of specific parts of the city by introducing its inhabitants. Its objective is to shift organization of such undertakings to the local actors while being supported by the city. A good example of this initiative is annual North *Bazaar* festival presenting different cultures, traditions, cuisines and habits of immigrants residing in Antwerp.

Case 4. Neighbourhoods secretary places where the different groups can meet during their working hours in order to deal with their administrative work, using the computer, the Internet etc. The share places should give them the chance to meet people from other ethnic or cultural group.

#### 4.4 Relationship between different ethnic groups in the city

The city of Antwerp appears to consider the situation in the city stable, however, the relations between different immigrant groups and between immigrants as a whole and the majority are far from being ideal. Different ethnic communities live separated from one another and do not have any contacts with each other. The attitudes towards immigrants represented by Belgian nationals have been mirrored in the results of elections. The significant part of inhabitants supports the right-wing Vlaams Belang, the party whose members are categorically against the Islamization of Europe and Antwerp at the same time. In the last local election in 2006 the Vlaams Belang took 20 out of 55 seats in the city council. (See the table below) It is important to add that other political parties even if they do not directly use the anti-immigrant rhetoric, more frequently talk about the role of religion in the society, the need to remain neutral in the public life which is closely related to the perception of Islam. Knowing that religion is very important for the Muslim community all kinds

of restrictions in this domain have been observed with distrust. During the interviews, the representatives of the Muslim community stressed that Vlaams Belang has a much clearer programme than other parties which indirectly constitutes support for some anti-immigrants solutions.

Table 7. The results of the local election in Antwerp, 2006.

Name of the political party	Result in percent	Number of seats in the city council
SPA Spirit	35,28%	22
VLD-Vivant	9,7%	5
Vlaams Belang	33,51%	20
CD&V	11,17%	6
Groen	4,7%	2

Source: [www.antwerpen.lokaal.be/verkiezingen](http://www.antwerpen.lokaal.be/verkiezingen)

The interviews made during the field visit show that the majority perceives some representatives of ethnic groups, especially Muslims, as dangerous, presenting anti-social behaviours such as, e.g. accosting passers-by in the street, particularly young women, using unprintable words and the like. Also, high concentration of immigrants in some districts of the city appears to be worrying.

Despite certain efforts and precisely formulated policy supporting diversity still there are very few initiatives presenting cooperation of different ethnic groups in joint projects. Even though there are no serious conflicts, but only tensions between groups, unfortunately one cannot refer to the situation in terms of cooperation, but only in terms of coexistence. The city spares no effort to solve the growing conflicts in the bud, by resorting to the system of neighbourhood and district mediation.

## 4.5 Public communication

The city does not have any explicitly formulated strategy for public communication with ethnic communities living in it, however, the Department of Marketing and Communication in cooperation with the Office of Diversity Management have organized focus groups with migrants for the purpose of testing the communication strategy of the city, information campaigns, information leaflets etc. It is important to obtain feedback from persons of different cultural and linguistic background.

There are no ethnic media in Antwerp however, some interesting initiative has been taken by migrants to inform the public about the issues related to ethnic and cultural communities:

- Kif Kif ([www.kifkif.be](http://www.kifkif.be)) is a platform of young people with different origin aiming at monitoring the media in the area of ethnic relations, informing of integration issues and contributing to the intercultural dialogue. Their electronic newsletter is widely circulated.
- Films posted on YouTube, such as “Ask a Moroccan” made by young immigrants bored with the debate on integration. These short films are a kind of a skit on various subjects connected with intergroup relations .

Besides the Belgian media the members of the Muslim community in Antwerp (mainly Moroccans and Turks) use satellite television for entertainment and as their source of information. According to the research done by the University of Hasselt, Turkish immigrants are more oriented at their own national media than Moroccans. Three fourths of the Turkish community members watch Turkish TV every day whereas in the Moroccan community less than 50% of its members watch their national television. See table below.

Table 8. Popularity of Turkish/ Moroccan TV in both communities.

	Turkish community	Moroccans community
Never	2,7%	20,1%
From time to time	9,5%	29,1%
About once a week	1,9%	5,3%
More time in the week	10,7%	13,2%
Every day	75,2%	32,3%
Total number of interviewed	262 (100%)	189 (100%)

Source: Van Craen, Vancluysen, Ackaert 2009

## 4.6 Summary and lessons learnt

The city seems to consider the overall state of affairs within ethnic and religious groups and their organizations positive. The diversity policy realized so far put strong emphasis on the development of good relations with all communities with different backgrounds as well as on the encouragement of close cooperation between those groups. There are many projects going on with the support of the Samen Leven Department. Many of those projects, such as Bazaar Festival, social advisers or meeting centres are evaluated by the interviewed representatives of the migrant organization positively however, the awareness of the lack of dialogue between the majority and migrant communities and racial prejudice in the society have been stressed by all of them. On the basis of evidence collected during a field visit it appears that the administration is expected to show close cooperation and openness for the ideas and demands by the

communities. Many respondents pointed out the fact that despite the constant discussion and emphasis put on diversity, no attention is paid to projects involving different ethnic groups, the financial support is granted to projects of one ethnic group to which such support is addressed. The respondents claim that there are few examples of joint cooperation, common projects and especially those which bond immigrants and the local community. The only instance quoted in the interviews was Bazaar Festival, however, as emphasized by the interviewees, this event takes place annually.

## 5 Local intercultural policies towards Muslim communities

### 5.1 Major issues, demands and interest

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

- Sense of discrimination in the public sphere, experienced mainly by highly skilled Muslims but also by those representing a basic level of the Flemish language (the discrimination was related to the public administration, police, schools – the Muslims are perceived as second class citizens, and approached with deep mistrust)
- Dress code within the administration of the city, the public communication about the headscarf ban introduced by political parties (the sudden introduction of the dress code in the public administration confronted the Muslim women with the decision whether to take off the scarf or to lose the job, the manner of introducing the ban with the atmosphere surrounding the debate have both contributed to the feeling of mistrust towards the administration and feeling of discrimination)
- Concerns about the failure of educational policy towards immigrant children (immigrant children are two years behind native Belgian children as regards the level of their linguistic development which affects the level of education they reach and consequently their position on 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 recognized as an official religion in Belgium since 1974, but only in 2007 the first mosques in Flanders were acknowledged, the process of getting all possible permissions is very

long and complicated, sometimes the Muslims feel that 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 problems with getting a location for ritual slaughter

According to the accessible data, the city of Antwerp seems to be aware of the difficulties in the relations between the majority population and Muslim community. The lack of personal, neighbourly relations particularly with Muslims is very distinct. The research carried out by the researchers from the University of Hasselt on the socio-cultural distance between immigrants and the majority population indicates that the number of contacts with members of immigrant community is very low. See table below. (Vancluysen, Van Craen, Ackaert 2009)

Table 9. Number of friends Belgians have in the Moroccan community.

	Friends in the Moroccan community
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, Van Craen, Ackaert 2009

The research shows that the majority population and the immigrants from the Muslim community live separated and do not have any regular and close contacts with each other. The next table presents the number of contacts of Belgians with their Muslim neighbours, where slightly more than 40% does not have any contacts with Moroccans. The sociological theory about the social capital and Putman's theory on bonding and bridging the social capital stress the fact that for the society informal contacts are as important as association networking. According to Green and Brock: "neighbours chatting with one another on their front porches may engender a sense of community no less stronger than the one that may be created by attending a neighbourhood association meeting" (Green, Brock 2005). The life of immigrant associations in Antwerp is very rich and complex covering the activities in all domains of social life but the bridging process is still very limited and encouragement of intercultural communication and cooperation might be the main goal in the diversity policy.

Table 10. Number of chats Belgians have with the neighbours from Moroccan community.

	Contacts with neighbours from Moroccan community
Every day	6,2%
Many times in the 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 the neighbourhood	8,9%
Total number of interviewees	337 (100%)

From the figures about the frequency of daily contacts between immigrant groups and the majority but also between different ethnic and religious groups it is clear why intergroup cooperation and establishment of positive relations in the society is such an important item to the city on its agenda.

## 5.2 General approaches and policies improving the relations with Muslim groups

The city of Antwerp does not have a target policy focusing on one ethnic or religious group only. The diversity policy of the city generally aims at improvement of intergroup relations in the community and empowerment of the groups to contribute to the local social and cultural life. The city stresses that through different projects and subsidies it assists and encourages different groups to establish intergroup relations. All the activities promoted by the city should contribute to building tolerance and respect among the citizens of the city. As a significant employer the city promotes diversity among their own employees, e.g. there are many people with ethnic background in the Samen Leven Department and in the Diversity Unit in the Local Police, which might definitely be helpful in developing relations with immigrant groups.

There are both formal and informal contacts between Muslim organizations and the city administration. Formal contacts take place through the Muslim Executive and Moskeeverleg and Muslim umbrella organizations, but also via individual organizations which for many reasons are not members of the umbrella organization, are contacted by members of the city administration staff. The Samen Leven Department (described previously in the report) and particularly the

Service Social Networking is responsible for establishing of intergroup relations. The Diversity Unit in the Local Police is very active as regards contacts with different religious and ethnic groups. They try to collect information about the groups, support them by organizing events, mediate in conflicts etc. The Diversity Unit has developed two interesting initiatives: A Heart for Diversity and The Police. Your Best Friends both aiming at building trust in this institution.

There are some organizations which the city is not willing to have contacts with as they are suspected of e.g. radical views and calling for radicalization. An example of the latter might be Youth for Islam (Jongeren voor Islam), whose members are approached with reticence due to the suspected radical views in terms of integration and building diversity in the city. According to the Police there is no evidence confirming such activities of this group.

Additionally, there are 3 elected members of Moroccan origin in the city council and some in the district councils. Looking at the data, there is no ethnic registration of the members but they can be easily recognized by their names.

### **5.3 Good practice examples of concrete activities and measures improving the relations with Muslim groups**

As previously mentioned the diversity policy of Antwerp aims at improving the 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 it was the migrant advisory board established as an advisory group for the local policy makers and administration but the results of its activities occurred to be not very successful. Therefore the present diversity policy is based on direct regular contacts with migrant umbrella organizations as well as individual organizations. The Social Networking Team within Samen Leven Department is responsible for building relations with a variety of groups present in the city. Meetings between the local administration and the representatives of mosques take place twice a month.

Good practice examples of activities with the aim of support for the emancipation of Muslim community encompass the support for meeting centres, administration and logistic support for its organizations, leadership coaching and a very interesting project of neighbourhoods secretariat – place for working and contacts with the groups living in the particular district. But all these projects are related to all migrant groups and not only to the Muslim community. According to the city a clear decline in the number of intergroup events is perceptible and e.g. sports activities are organized primarily for individual groups, which contributes to polarization between immigrants and the majority population. What is actually offered to the public are: street festivals, neighbourhood festivals, henna workshops, public debates etc.

While talking about the initiatives addressed to the broader public some activities should be mentioned:

- Dar Es Salaam (House for Peace) initiative taken by a number of ethnic, religious and cultural organizations aiming at the intercultural dialogue. There were 6 evening meetings organized “about and with Muslims in Antwerp”. The subjects of the discussions were as follows: Muslims in Antwerp, history of Islam, women and relations, immigrant youth, headscarf debate, future of Islam ([www.dar-es-salaam.be](http://www.dar-es-salaam.be)).
- Discussions: Diversity is/in Reality organized by the BOEH! Action Platform Baas over eigen hoofd (boss of my own head! [www.baasovereigenhoofd.be](http://www.baasovereigenhoofd.be)) The Platform dealing with discrimination of women in the society is very active in different happenings and events against discrimination e.g. headscarf ban.

## 5.4 Public communication

The city of Antwerp does not have any specific policy for communication about the Muslim issues. According to both the city and representatives of migrant organizations the local and regional media *Gazet van Antwerpen* (daily newspaper) and ATV (regional TV) have not always brought positive reports concerning the Muslim community. Generally, the media try to maintain prejudices against Muslim community or in other words, they fail to break certain stereotypes by reporting mainly about negative occurrences. The media have been focused on supporting Islamophobia and giving accounts of threats connected with the growing number of Muslims in Belgium and Antwerp thus becoming a participant of the debate on Islamization of Europe. As it was mentioned in the previous paragraph the city has been trying to get the Muslim community’s point of view by organizing focus groups but also by encouraging migrant organizations to establish relations with the local media.

As it was already mentioned in the report there are no Muslim media present in the city except for the Kif Kif internet platform aiming at reporting on ethnic and cultural minorities living in the city.

## 5.5 Summary and lessons learnt

The city of Antwerp is aware that the relations between the administration and Muslim community could be significantly improved and intensified. Knowing that the relations between the Muslim community and the majority are very limited, which can influence the exclusion of this community, the most important task seems to be strengthening the bridging process. It seems to be of importance to encourage cooperation within the communities - a so called bonding process because it is known that there are many organizations where the members are not active at all. The activation of existing associations and cooperation between them might play an important

role in social cohesion and prevention of discrimination against immigrants. Both the city and the representatives of Muslim organizations expressed the religious issues as the most sensible in the relations. On the one hand, the political parties believe that religion should be limited to the private life without any support of 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 the community and its religion, particularly because Islam has been recognized in Belgium since 1974. The debate about the role of religion in the local community might be one of the most difficult issues for the coming years.

## **6 Intergroup relations and radicalisation**

### **6.1 Radicalisation within the majority population**

Radicalisation of the public debate on immigration and integration issues has been undergoing different stages starting from 1991 when the Vlaams Block (now Vlaams Belang) had achieved its success in the local election. One third of Antwerp voters had chosen this party and its anti-immigrant rhetoric, e.g. the strict limits of immigration, acceptance of the multiethnic society as long as non-Flemish citizens assimilate the Flemish culture, tradition and language. In the local elections 2006 in Antwerp Vlaams Block thwarted its growth and did not improve its results. The public debate surrounds such hot issues as: the limits of freedom of expression, neutrality of public administration, role of religion in public life. These appear to be sensitive topics both to the majority and especially to the Muslim minority. According to the local policy but also representatives of Muslim organizations, except for the previous radicalization of the public debate, the 11/09 terrorist attacks in the US and the subsequent events in Europe have influenced the negative attitudes against the Muslim community. According to the Muslims interviewed during the field visit almost all of them are perceived as terrorists and a growing number of Muslims in Europe is interpreted by both some political parties and the media as a threat to the European values and democratic system.

This kind of a public debate and radical attitudes within the majority population have effect on radicalisation in the Islamic community as well. Young people are looking for their identity in religion and as part of their opposition to the ban on presenting 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 to assimilation.

### **6.1.1 Radicalisation tendencies: who and what**

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

One of the important examples of sensitive issues mentioned already in this report was the headscarf ban proposed by the local authority after the election in 2006. The proposal was interpreted as discrimination against Muslim women, which caused the protest and establishment of a very interesting initiative: Action Platform BOEH! ([www.baasovereigenhoofd.be](http://www.baasovereigenhoofd.be)) acting against discrimination of Muslim women in Antwerp. The initiative gathered representatives of different circles opposing the restriction of civil liberties and attempts at forced assimilation of any person. Interestingly enough, the posters showed persons advertising this initiative who had previously represented the SPA party on its election posters.

### **6.1.2 General approach, policies and measures towards these groups**

In the city of Antwerp there are organizations representing antidiscrimination and antiracism issues in the society, the examples being: Kif Kif, BOEH! and Federatie van Marokkanse Verenigingen. All these initiatives are supported by the city authorities. All these organizations strive to organize information campaigns on discrimination, racism, radicalization etc., also they monitor any events in this area and carry out the media monitoring.

The local Police, especially the Diversity Unit takes actions in relation to any anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, or xenophobic actions. The policy is aimed at recruiting partners with immigrant background in order to enable better contacts with minority groups through them.

## **6.2 Radicalisation within the migrant and/or minority population**

### **6.2.1 Radicalisation tendencies: who and what**

The city of Antwerp does not appear to have any evidence of radical tendencies among the migrant population. There are some speculations however, about the radicalization among the members representing the second and third generation of the Muslim community but according to the local police they have not been confirmed. One of the groups considered radical is Jongeren voor Islam but the Police participating in the meetings through their contacts with migration background has not confirmed any radical actions or inciting to aggression, riots against other social groups. Young Muslims from the 2nd and 3rd generation searching for their identity turn towards religion.

According to the city there is no evidence that the radical behaviour of some members of Muslim community have been influencing the integration process in the society to a significant degree. There are some radical mosques in the city. The interviewers pointed out that they had to face a serious problem as regards contacts with mosques, namely high fluctuation of imams. New imams without knowledge of Flemish language hinder the contacts.

The Federal Police carried out an action aimed at supervision / monitoring of Call Shops and Night shops run by immigrants. The results of the actions showed that some immigrants illegally transferred money e.g. to Pakistan, and they might have also supported suspicious organizations in the countries of their origin.

### **6.2.2 General approach, policies and measures towards these groups**

The city of Antwerp has been trying to encourage the mosques to take an active part in the faith against the radicalisation and the interethnic dialogue. The city has been supporting public debates, dialogues and activities focused on the bridging process between minorities and majority population. The city is of the opinion that the learning process and reducing prejudice constitute a very important part of building a tolerant, diverse society. Even though radicalization has been talked about much these days one is unable to indicate many organizations and initiatives concentrated on this problem.

### **6.2.3 Relations between groups**

The city does not provide any information about the relations between groups mobilized against radicalization. From the field visit findings it appears that the only intergroup initiatives against radicalization and discrimination are BOEH! the action platform stimulating people from different groups to deal with discrimination and Kif Kif monitoring the discrimination in the media.

## **6.3 Communication strategy concerning radicalisation**

The city does not have any specific strategy related to discrimination or xenophobia. In the opinion of the city, as an institution it gives a clear message that it is against any discrimination within the society and its aims concentrate on equal treatment of every member of the community. The city believes in support of any action against radicalization, discrimination or xenophobia for the public sake. However, during the field visit, the representatives of Muslim organizations expressed their concerns about the negative attitudes against them being present among the majority population.

## 6.4 Radicalisation: Summary and lessons learnt

Radicalization within the population of Antwerp is on the one hand related to the political parties and its attitudes towards Islamization of the society and the role of the religion in the state and the city. This fear of Muslim community is strengthened by some media reporting about problematic issues related to the community. On the other hand radicalization of the attitudes towards Muslims and the implementing of e.g. headscarf ban might influence the radicalization of the Muslims. The excluded, in the socio-economic and cultural terms, young Muslims, perceived as the second class citizens have been searching for their identity by being more radical in the interpretation of Islam. In the society it is believed that the process of radicalization is becoming an important one for the society but in fact there are no evidences about any radical groups acting against other groups in the city.

The city does not have any explicit policy against radicalisation but it is believed that the successful integration process and the support for the intergroup relation and diversity in the city should be the signal that the authority is against any radical action. The city has been supporting the antidiscrimination and anti-radicalisation activities taken by different organizations.

## 7 Conclusion: Key challenges, lessons and learning for CLIP

For centuries the city of Antwerp with its famous seaport has been a magnet for migrants from all over the world. After WWII as a result of economic growth and Belgian recruitment policy, the city experienced different waves of migration, which went through different stages but did not stop, until recently. This process has changed the population structure in the city and opened the discussion about integration of migrants. It is expected that migrants become equal members of the society and will accept the existing rules and way of life. Knowing that as a result of the inflow of migrants, about 12% of the population of Antwerp are Muslims with distinct religion and traditions, the potential areas of conflict are to be distinguished. 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 very challenging and long-lasting process causing the most concern on both sides: for the city authority and immigrants. Many representatives of the migrant organizations participating in the research expressed their dissatisfaction about high expectations of the majority in terms of the necessity of adaptation/assimilation of immigrants and the fact of perceiving immigrants as a one homogenous group. Also the emphasis was put on the negative picture of immigrants among

Belgians reinforced by the media. In immigrants' view maintaining this picture contributes to discrimination of immigrant primarily on the labour market .

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

The city administration seems to show grassroots activity in trying to encourage and motivate the group leaders and organizations to apply for available grants. The meeting centres and the neighbourhood secretaries are good examples of this kind of activities. There seems to be a lack of activities aiming at intergroup projects encouraging different groups to mutual cooperation. The Bazaar Festival was mentioned by all representatives and the city administration as a very successful initiative showing the real diverse face of the city of Antwerp. This kind of activity is very useful for breaking down prejudice and building trust. It is especially important, when considering research indicating a sense of discrimination among immigrants.

In the city of Antwerp the life of the majority and immigrant groups seems to be divided not only in geographical terms but for all in physical terms, but despite this there are not many examples of disturbance or acts of aggression. The city has been trying to achieve a positive level of intergroup relations and dialogue but the ideas about the dialogue represented by the representatives of migrant organizations as well as the authorities still tend to be very different.

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