

# European Muslim Youth



**& the Rise of the Far-right  
Anti-Muslim Narrative**

# contents

Acknowledgements	3
Foreword	4
Executive Summary	5
Recommendations	8
About FEMYSO	10
Introduction	12
Definitions	15
Research Aims	16
Research Questions	17
Methods	18
Sample	20
Case Studies	21
France	21
United Kingdom	27
Belgium	32
Germany	35
Sweden	39
The Netherlands	43
Europe	46
Conclusions	49
Glossary	52
Useful Contacts	52
References	53

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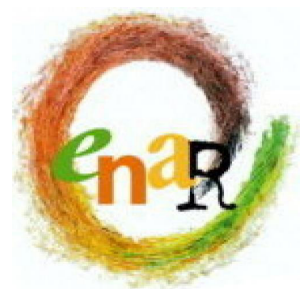
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"The views and opinions expressed on this research report are solely those of the original authors and other contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Youth Foundation, Open Society Foundation and European Network against Racism".

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# Foreword



Through our work with young European Muslims, we at FEMYSO have built relationships with a range of European Muslim youth, from Ireland through to Albania, representing a broad range of backgrounds, interests, concerns and perspectives. European Muslim youth largely have the same concerns as other young Europeans – education, employment, and building a better life by making the most of the opportunities available to them. Yet there are other concerns facing European Muslim youth over and above other young Europeans and which have increasingly manifested themselves in the conversations and discussions we have with young European Muslims – in particular the rise of a threatening, hate-filled rhetoric by the far-right which increasingly target and single them out as a demonized “other”. This worrying trend has gained attention particularly through the electoral successes and public manifestations of far-right movements, which have carved their way through political taboos and established themselves as serious political contenders in many countries across Europe.

In the midst of the discussions and analyses of this phenomenon and its political ramifications, we have barely turned to look at its impact on daily human lives. What does an electoral gain of 20% for a far-right party mean for a young citizen watching these political movements? How does the spread of far-right discourse affect his or her wellbeing, identity, self-image and perception of politics? How does it impact the activities he or she engages in and the way he or she participates in political and social life? Coverage of the rise of the far-right rarely, if ever, explores the tangible impact it is having on the lives and wellbeing of millions of European Muslim youth and on their organisations, shaping their identity, experiences and engagement.

This unique research report seeks to do just that. We hope through this project to promote a more empirical approach to discussions of the rise of the far-right and to better understand its impact on a category of young Europeans. We seek through these conversations to uncover the human realities behind this political phenomenon and to put forward practical recommendations from those affected to address its impact on the cohesion, contribution and wellbeing of European Muslim youth.

Intissar Kherigi  
FEMYSO President

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Far-right organisations across Europe are enjoying increasing popularity and electoral support, and thus no longer represent fringe movements. In many cases across Europe the far-right presents a diverse political discourse and campaigns on themes related to populism, nativism, anti-immigration, anti-Roma, in some cases anti-Semitism, and general Euroscepticism. In addition, the anti-Muslim narrative has come to be recognised as a central feature of the far-right discourse in Europe. Whilst the far-right is not the sole source of the anti-Muslim narrative, the far-right is increasingly linked to the normalisation of the anti-Muslim discourse.

Through a review of literature and political sources, this report identifies that the far-right anti-Muslim narrative is based on several arguments. Namely, the visible presence of Islam in the West is framed as constituting a threat to Western civilisation, since Muslims are perceived as retrogressive and generally at odds with Western normative values, and therefore unable to integrate into Western societies. In lieu of integrating, the far-right anti-Muslim narrative posits that Muslims want to Islamise Europe and impose Shari'a law throughout the continent.

In addition, the far-right anti-Muslim narrative frames Muslims as posing a demographic threat. This perceived threat is seen as a tool for the Muslim

takeover of Europe. Muslims are also constructed as presenting an economic threat, and are seen to be taking financial sources that belong to the indigenous population.

Furthermore, Muslim communities are argued to pose a threat of physical violence and delinquency. Similarly, Muslim women are seen as oppressed, their oppression is argued to be manifest in their dress. Muslim women's dress is also seen as symbolic of the Muslim takeover of Europe. Generally, stereotypes presented in the far-right anti-Muslim narrative frame Muslims as diametrically opposed to Western society's normative values.

Via the anti-Muslim narrative, far-right organisations externalise their xenophobic and discriminatory positions and frame Muslims as the source of problems. They thus frame their anti-Muslim stance as a necessary response to the perceived threat posed by Muslims in Europe and see themselves as defenders of European society and culture.

In spite of the differing trajectories of far-right organisations across the six case studies within this report, we observe a convergence around the anti-Muslim narrative. In addition, we note a lack of empirical consideration of the European Muslim youth experience of the increasingly popular far-right anti-Muslim narrative.



## Research Aims and Objectives

This report seeks to develop a greater understanding of European Muslim youth awareness and experiences of the far-right and its anti-Muslim narrative in both the national and European contexts. The report also aims to highlight how European Muslim youth currently respond to the far-right anti-Muslim narrative in both the national and European contexts. The report endeavours to explore the ways European Muslim youth might respond to the far-right anti-Muslim narrative in the future. In the long term the report aims to document European Muslim youth experiences, inform and improve European policy and understanding, and to encourage on-going research into the European Muslim experience.

## Method

In order to assess European Muslim youth experiences of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, an unstructured focus group was initially conducted to orient the study and assess its viability. Subsequently, 20 young Muslims were recruited from across France, Germany, the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden. FEMYSO members and volunteers in each country enabled the recruitment of a diverse range of participants. Semi-structured qualitative interviews with young Muslims from the six countries were subsequently undertaken, between February and August 2013. Semi-structured interviewing was based on the research questions defined within the main body of the report and enabled us to elicit analytically rich and detailed information relating to the lived experiences of participants.

A total of 20 Muslims aged between 18 and 29 were interviewed by a designated member of the research team. The sample was made up of 9 female respondents and 11 males. With regards to ethnic background, 9 interviewees were from a North African background, 6 were from a Middle Eastern background and a further 5 participants were of an Asian background. Respondents were all either pursuing or had achieved university level education. In addition, all respondents discussed their civic, political and community engagement. Interviewees were commonly active in local and national Islamic organisations, anti-discrimination organisations, or volunteered within the local community.

## Conclusions

The report notes that European Muslim youth interviewed have high levels of awareness and understanding of the far-right in their respective countries. Moreover interviewees had a significantly higher awareness of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative than of the far-right general policies. Respondents were less aware of the far-right across Europe when compared to awareness of the respective national case. However, some interviewees point to the European convergence of various national far-right organisations around the anti-Muslim narrative.

For the respondents within this report, the far-right anti-Muslim narrative provoked a strong emotional response. Interviewees describe how the far-right anti-Muslim narrative has made them feel shock, fear, upset, hurt, rejection by society, revulsion, ostracized, frustration, anxiety, concern, and worry.

However, respondents within this report are keen to cast off an attitude of victimhood, and suggest that the anti-Muslim narrative served as a catalyst for young Muslims to increase their already high levels of community engagement, and challenge the negative public perception of Muslims in Europe. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that not all young Muslims in Europe have such high levels of community engagement.

For young Muslims within this report the media also play a central role in both fuelling and conveying the detrimental far-right anti-Muslim narrative. Across the board, interviewees felt that national media outlets sensationalise stories relating to Muslims, and therefore contribute to the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. In addition, for interviewees the media are seen to be fuelling the anti-Muslim narrative through affording far-right activists time to air their divisive anti-Muslim views.

Through the course of the report, respondents in each of the six case studies attribute the increasing successfulness of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative to a general lack of awareness of Muslims in each of the national cases, and Europe on the whole. For the young Muslims interviewed within the report, through engaging in dialogue with the wider local and national community, young Muslims felt that they were able to proactively combat the negative image of Muslims brought about by the far-right anti-Muslim narrative.

Participants within this report also felt that the concept of Islamophobia was commonly negated by influential figures, such as politicians. Respondents felt that denying the existence of discrimination of Muslim communities in Europe firstly

silenced any discussion on the matter, and therefore allows the far-right anti-Muslim narrative to go unchallenged.

Similarly in order to tackle the issues raised by the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, young European Muslims interviewed within this report stress the need for political participation by Muslims. The nature of political participation urged ranged from lobbying local politicians to respond to and condemn the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, to calling for political representation of Muslims by Muslims. Young Muslims interviewed believed that by participating in politics they would be able to shape the political discourse relating to Muslims and voice the concerns of the European Muslim community. In addition, participants within this report, particularly those in France and Sweden, stressed that the anti-Muslim narrative is not confined to the far-right and instead permeates the wider political sphere.

Young Muslims interviewed within the report also discussed the need to tackle the anti-Muslim narrative through collaborating with other local and national anti-discrimination networks. Respondents believed that collaboration and cooperation with anti-discrimination organisations would enable Muslims subject to the anti-Muslim narrative to draw on positive experiences and practices of other organisations.

Furthermore, collaboration with anti-discrimination networks was believed to be a useful tool in legitimising and giving credibility to the fight against the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, and would also enable Muslims to combat all forms of discrimination that exist within society, whilst protecting their rights.

# Recommendations

## Media:

The report recommends that media institutions apply caution when reporting Muslims and engaging with far-right spokespeople. We draw on an example highlighted by Nielsen relating to a Danish national newspaper:

**“A Danish national newspaper editor, for example, introduced a policy for reporting on Muslim affairs that she called the “Jew test”. It required that anyone writing about Islam and Muslims should test the appropriateness of what they were writing by replacing “Muslim” with “Jew”.” (Nielsen, 2009)**

The suggestion cited above draws on the example of the Jewish community, who were once and are still subject to anti-Semitism in the media. However, through years of positive campaigning by the Jewish community, there is an increasing sensitivity to the ills of anti-Semitism, and thus media and public discourse has been challenged.

In addition, the media should exercise caution and verify sources relating to Muslim media coverage. In recommending the implementation of a similar test whereby media outlets test the appropriateness of media reports pertaining to Muslims by replacing the term ‘Muslim’ with ‘Jewish’, thus media professionals may begin to employ sensitivity and understand the serious nature of, and counter the anti-Muslim narrative.

## Normalising Muslim Presence:

The report also recommends that Muslim organisations continue to facilitate dialogue between Muslims and diverse non-Muslim communities across Europe in order to overcome prejudices and achieve better mutual understanding.

## Islamophobia:

We call on European and national authorities to recognise the prevalence of Islamophobia in Europe, by effectively and publically defining and condemning it. Whilst there are varying definitions and understandings of Islamophobia, based on interview responses within this report, a European working definition of Islamophobia, based on the example of anti-Semitism, and better legal protection against it, may enable young Muslims to effectively tackle the anti-Muslim narrative and discrimination against Muslims in general.



We also call on national authorities to collect data on Islamophobic incidents as a separate category of discrimination and hate crime, in order to understand the scale and nature of the problem, and to provide better support to victims of Islamophobia. We also call on influential public figures, such as politicians, intellectuals and celebrities, to publicly stand up against Islamophobia and the anti-Muslim discourse to send a strong signal that it is unacceptable.

### **Political participation:**

Drawing on best practice, the report highlights the UK-based organisation Engage. The organisation recognises the low rates of political engagement and participation by Muslims in the UK, and thus seeks to encourage Muslim political engagement in the UK, through providing information and organising free workshops aimed at Muslims.

Thus based on research findings, it is recommended that EU and national authorities look to implement a similar strategy across the European countries considered within the report by facilitating equal political participation as an important facet of citizenship and a vital means of creating dialogue on important issues.

### **Tackling the Anti-Muslim Narrative in Politics:**

The report also recommends that politicians exercise sensitivity when discussing issues pertaining to Muslims and not fall into racialising or 'Islamicising' all socio-economic issues pertaining to communities of Muslim background. Furthermore, politicians should show greater courage in condemning the anti-Muslim narrative regardless of political affiliation.

### **Cooperation and Collaboration:**

In addition, Muslim organisations, other minority organisations and wider anti-discrimination organisations should collaborate in the fight against the anti-Muslim narrative and general prejudice. Activism by Muslim organisations should also be recognised by national authorities as an important means of providing an outlet for European Muslim youth to voice their concerns and engage with and gain trust in local and national institutions.

# About FEMYSO

In 1995, a number of national Muslim youth organisations met in Sweden, brought together at a Swedish government conference on “Islam in Europe”. Through this encounter, they saw the need for building a pan-European platform to bring together European Muslim youth, and the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO) was born.

Today, as a non-governmental organisation based in Brussels, FEMYSO is made up of 34 national member organisations across 23 countries, and is recognised as the voice of European Muslim youth.

FEMYSO seeks to build the capacity of its member organisations to enable them to reach their full potential within European society, so that they can effectively contribute to building a diverse, prosperous and cohesive Europe. FEMYSO promotes networking and cooperation across European Muslim youth organisations and between European youth of all backgrounds, in order to facilitate mutual understanding and overcome prejudice on all sides.

FEMYSO actively campaigns against Islamophobia, and the economic, social, political and cultural discrimination that it brings about. FEMYSO recognises that Islamophobia is a complex and multi-faceted problem that limits the potential of the young Muslim community in particular. Therefore, through

conducting research, hosting seminars, study sessions and training programs for Muslim youth organisations, FEMYSO seeks to equip Muslim youth with the awareness, confidence and skills to creatively tackle Islamophobia.

In addition, FEMYSO recognises the central importance of human rights. FEMYSO endeavours to promote development, understanding, respect for and enjoyment of human rights in Europe. Similarly through partnership with numerous human rights non-governmental organisations, FEMYSO has organised numerous educational activities at both the national and European levels, produced educational publications and continuously encourages the promotion of human rights as a key focus of member organisations’ activities.

Within today’s European diverse society and in the face of rising misunderstanding and hostility towards Islam and Muslims, FEMYSO also works to promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue. In doing so, FEMYSO encourages young people to actively engage in dialogue across all levels of European society. Drawing on Islamic and human rights sources, FEMYSO highlights the value of racial and religious pluralism.

The organisation believes that intercultural and interfaith dialogue provides a platform for youth of varying backgrounds to promote mutual understanding and cooperation.

Finally, FEMYSO believes it is paramount to encourage active citizenship amongst young European Muslims. Through seminars, debates, conferences and publications FEMYSO draws on the European Muslim experience to better understand and reflect on the meaning of European citizenship for Europe's young Muslims and to address the obstacles that European Muslims may face in realising active citizenship. Furthermore, FEMYSO highlights the social, economic, and cultural contribution made by European Muslim youth.

# Introduction

This report seeks to highlight the European Muslim youth awareness and experiences of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative in both the national and European contexts. The report considers the far-right anti-Muslim narrative within the wider frame of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim discrimination. However, in applying the specific lens of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative the report may begin to contribute to the wider understanding of Islamophobia and its many facets. This report does not seek to explain the rise the far-right's popularity across Europe, nor does it seek to explain the reasons behind the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. It is acknowledged that the anti-Muslim narrative has multiple sources that extend beyond the far-right. However, the increasingly prevalent and normalised nature of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative provokes concern for FEMYSO, and serves as a starting point for this report. In spite of the overt anti-Muslim campaign led by far-right organisations across Europe, a review of literature demonstrates an apparent limited consideration of the impact that such a narrative may have on Muslims, and Muslim youth in particular.

The report begins by providing a brief background to the far-right in Europe and the increasing anti-Muslim narrative. Subsequently, the report discusses the research aims and objectives of the report. Subsequently the report provides an overview of the data collection methods utilised within the project, a discussion of the nature of the respondents within

the research. We then provide a contextualisation of the far-right in each of the national case studies and the current responses of young Muslims in each of the cases. Finally, the report puts forward the concluding remarks and recommendations based on the interviews conducted with European Muslim Youth.

After the second world war and until the 1980s, the far-right, as defined in this report, was commonly associated with neo-fascism and was generally politically weak across Western Europe (Ignazi, 2003). Historically, the far-right narrative focused on coloured immigration (Streiff-Frénart, 2012). However, research indicates that the far-right in Western Europe no longer represents a fringe movement (Fekete, 2006) and is becoming increasingly popular across Europe (Wilson and Hainsworth, 2012). In the United Kingdom, for example, Goodwin (2013) cites an upsurge in support for far-right political parties in recent years. Similarly, Shields (2010) notes a growing and sustained support for the French far-right party the Front National (FN) in recent years. Furthermore, the growing popularity of the far-right throughout Europe is linked to the rightward shift in the European political scene (Savage, 2010, Wilson and Hainsworth, 2012).

In many cases, the far-right presents a diverse discourse which includes elements of populism, nativism, anti-immigration, anti-Roma, in some cases anti-Semitism, and general Euro-scepticism (Wilson and Hainsworth,

2012). However, currently there is a proliferation of the anti-Muslim and anti-Islam discourse amongst the far-right in Europe (Slade, 2010, Wilson and Hainsworth, 2012).

Anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe has been intensified by terrorist events such as 9/11 in New York and 7/7 in London (Allen, 2011). Nonetheless, presently anti-Muslim sentiment has come to be recognised as a key feature of the current far-right discourse across Europe, particularly post-2000 (Zúquete, 2008). Notable examples of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative can be seen in the British National Party's (BNP) 2002 campaign 'Islam out of Britain' (Allen, 2011), in the highly mediatised comparison of Muslim prayer in the streets to the Nazi occupation in France by the FN, or in the Belgian Vlaams Belang (VB) mobilisation against the alleged 'Muslim invasion' of Belgium (Betz and Menet, 2009).

In addition to increasing prevalence of the anti-Muslim narrative, there is also an increasing normalisation of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative across Europe (Zúquete, 2008). For example, in the British context, Slade (2010) posits that the increasing anti-Muslim discourse has come to be seen as *à la mode* and largely acceptable in public and political discourse. In the UK, the normalisation of this narrative has been observed by organisations and Muslim politicians alike (Warsi, 2011, Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism, 2002).

Through a review of literature and political sources, we have identified that the far-right anti-Muslim narrative functions at several levels, as detailed

below in figure 1.

These stereotypes of Muslims visibly draw on tropes of Orientalism (Said, 1978) and Huntington's Clash of the Civilisations (1993) since they create the impression of diametric opposition of Western and Islamic cultures. As Wilson and Hainsworth (2012) observe, the far-right anti-Muslim narrative has enabled far-right organisations to externalise their inherent xenophobia, and in turn construct Muslims in Europe as the source of problems and intolerance, and thus enables these organisations to position themselves as necessary defenders of European society and cultural heritage (Betz and Menet, 2009).

In addition to the increasing far-right anti-Muslim narrative in national contexts, and in spite of the traditionally nationalist and anti-EU stance of the far-right, there are surprising calls for the unification of European populist movements (Betz and Menet, 2009), in the defence of European culture against the alleged threat posed by the Muslim presence in Europe. An example of the unification of European far-right organisations in their anti-Muslim narrative can be seen in the group Cities against Islamisation (CAI) (Cities against Islamisation, 2013).

Like many national far-right organisations considered within this report, CAI state that given the Judeo-Christian Western European enlightenment, and normative values of freedom of speech, gender equality and secularism, Islam is largely at odds with Europe. Similar to anti-Muslim claims made the national level, CAI offer an oversimplified understanding of



Islam, suggesting unassimilated Muslim communities across Western Europe favour the Shari'a in lieu of local laws and thus remain in opposition to Western civilisation. Furthermore, CAI sees mosques as catalysts for the Islamisation of local neighbourhoods. Mosques are

also argued to intensify strict Islamic observance, prevent Muslim integration into Western society and promote the Islamification of Europe. The CAI also has a specific women's page for women opposed to Islam in Western Europe (Cities against Islamisation, 2013).

**figure 1**

Far-right Anti-Muslim Claim	Details	Selected references
Muslims constitute a demographic threat to European civilisation.	Muslims populations are seen to be expanding, given Muslim birth rates and Muslim immigration to Europe. Growing Muslim populations are seen as a tool for the Muslim takeover of Europe.	(British National Party, 2001, Cities against Islamisation, 2013)
Muslims pose ideological threat to European civilisation.	Islamic values are framed as being backwards and in opposition to European Judeo-Christian normative values.	(British National Party, 2001 Wilders, Goodwin et al. ENAR, Wilders, 2011, Goodwin et al., 2013, Wilson and Hainsworth, 2012)
Muslims pose threat of physical violence, and crime.	Muslims are seen as prone to violence, and are commonly regarded as delinquents.	(British National Party, 2001 NPD, Wilson and Hainsworth, 2012, Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, 2013)
Muslims pose economic threat.	Muslims are seen to pose financial burden, and regarded as taking money and jobs that belong to the native population.	(British National Party, 2001)
Muslims want to Islamise Europe	Muslims want to make Europe an Islamic society, through the imposition of Islamic legal structures, such as Shar'ia law, and Islamic social structures. Mosques are seen as the space that allows for the Islamisation of Europe.	(Cities against Islamisation, 2013 Pro NRW, Vellenga, Pro NRW, 2013, Vellenga and Wieggers, 2013)
Muslims do not favour gender equality	Muslims are seen to oppress and sexually exploit women. Oppression of Muslim women is argued to be apparent in Muslim women's dress.	(British National Party, 2001 Betz, Erk, Erk, 2005, Betz and Menet, 2009)

# Definitions

This section of the report seeks to define the terms employed within the report. Firstly, given the remit of the report focuses on France, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium and Sweden and use this as a basis for our conclusions that broadly discuss European Muslim youth. These countries were selected based on the rise of the far right in terms of electoral success and visibility in recent years. Furthermore, in each of the 6 countries there are significant Muslim populations amongst which which FEMYSO has a wide network. We also recognise that Muslim minorities in Eastern Europe have a different history and thus the discourse on Islam and Muslims in those countries requires separate analysis.

At FEMYSO, we note the remarkable heterogeneity of the Muslim community (Gest, 2010). Whilst most often the term 'Muslim' relates to those engaged in Islamic religious practice, Muslim may also mean those that are identified as Muslim based on their cultural and ethnic heritage (Frégosi, 2013). Muslims in Europe also have diverse ethnic backgrounds (Cesari, 2004). Therefore, in the context of this report when discussing Muslims interviewed, we apply the definition coined by Sinno, who does "not consider "Muslim" to necessarily mean a religious identity, but instead an identity that may have religious, racial, political or cultural dimensions" (Sinno, 2009:2). In applying the above broad definition of Muslim we have sought to incorporate and reflect the diversity of European Muslim youth.

With regards to youth, the report employs the criteria as defined by

FEMYSO, therefore in the context of the report youth generally refers to those aged 14 to 35, and thus the report sought to recruit participants for the study from across this age range. The final sample of participants in this report were aged between 18 and 29.

Far-right organisations across Europe have diverging histories and differing agendas. Prior to undertaking the fieldwork we investigated the various far-right organisations active in each of the countries to be studied. A more detailed exploration of such far-right organisations can be found below. The report identifies in particular the English Defence League (EDL), the British National Party (BNP), and the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the United Kingdom, the Front National (FN) in France, Vlaams Belang (VB) in Belgium, Pro NRW and Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) in Germany, the Sverigesdemokraterna (SD) in Sweden, and finally the Partij Voor Vrijheid (PVV) in the Netherlands as notable and influential for young Muslims in Europe. The examples cited are by no means a complete list of the far-right organisations present in each of the case studies in this report.

Finally, to define the anti-Muslim narrative, far-right party policy and academic articles relating to Muslims and far-right parties mentioned above were explored. Although the report provides discussion of national cases individually below, we note that the common themes of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative were identified in the cases studied within this report, as detailed in Figure 1.

# Research Aims

## **In researching the influence of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative on European Muslim youth, FEMYSO aims to:**

1. Develop a greater understanding of European Muslim youth **awareness** of the far-right, and its anti-Muslim narrative in both the national and European contexts.
2. To understand how European Muslim youth **experience** the far-right anti-Muslim narrative.
3. To highlight how European Muslim youth currently respond to the far-right anti-Muslim narrative in both the national and European contexts. The report also sought to explore the ways European Muslim youth might respond to the far-right anti-Muslim narrative in the future.

## **More generally the research and research findings seek to:**

1. Document the experiences of European Muslim youth in relation to the far-right anti-Muslim narrative.
2. Inform policy makers about the experiences of European Muslim youth with regards to the far-right anti-Muslim narrative.
3. Influence government, media, policy makers and public attitudes and thereby contribute to generating new solutions.
4. Set the groundwork for building rigorous and independent measurement of the situation of Muslim youth in European countries.

# Research Questions

## **The research was centred on the following research questions:**

1. How does the far-right anti-Muslim narrative influence the understanding, the response and experience of European Muslim youth in France, Germany, Belgium, the UK, the Netherlands and Sweden?
  - How do European Muslim youth understand the far-right anti-Muslim narrative nationally?
  - How do European Muslim youth understand the far-right anti-Muslim narrative on the European level?
  - How have European Muslim youth experienced the far-right anti-Muslim narrative in both the national and European contexts?
  - What is the actual and suggested response of European Muslim youth to the far-right anti-Muslim narrative in both the national and European level?

# Methods

Given the qualitative focus of the research questions, data within this report was gathered through conducting 20 semi-structured qualitative interviews with young Muslims from France, Germany, the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden. Data collection for the report took place between February and August 2013.

In order to orient the study, an initial informal focus group was conducted in Brussels in February 2013. The focus group was conducted in English, and interpretation was undertaken by participants as necessary, in order to facilitate participation by all. The focus group was made up of volunteers involved in FEMYSO from Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and the United Kingdom. The focus group was largely unstructured, but loosely framed around the issue and the pertinence of studying the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. In this instance, an unstructured discussion was beneficial, since the purpose of the focus group was to orient and test the viability of researching the European Muslim youth experience of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative.

Following the focus group, 20 participants were recruited via the FEMYSO network. Given that FEMYSO has contact with Muslim youth organisations across Europe, coupled with FEMYSO's recognised position, recruitment of participants via the FEMYSO network was deemed most

suitable. Initially, individuals from the FEMYSO network were identified in each of the six countries to be studied. In order to participate in the study, individuals had to be from France, Germany, Belgium, the UK, the Netherlands or Sweden. In addition, eligible participants also needed to be identified or self-identify as Muslim, and be aged between 14 and 35. The importance of recruiting a diverse range of participants was stressed, thus we sought to interview both male and female Muslims, Muslims from varying ethnic and social backgrounds, and also include both cultural Muslims and practicing Muslim youth.

In purposefully recruiting a diverse sample of European Muslim youth, the report seeks to maximise the validity and generalizability of the research findings (Barbour, 2008). However, as with most qualitative research involving small samples generalizability may be an issue, nonetheless issues of generalizability are countered with the unique in-depth and detailed insight that this report offers into the European Muslim youth experience of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative.

Once participants were recruited, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted by a designated member of the research team. A sole interviewer conducted the interviews with participants to the study, in order to minimise the influence of individual differences on the delivery of the interview. Interviews were conducted



in either French or English, and subsequently transcribed in English for analysis. However, in three instances whilst the prospective participant was keen to contribute to the research and voice their opinions on the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, they did not feel comfortable with undertaking an oral interview, therefore in these cases the participants completed a written response based on the interview schedule used in the oral interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were selected since it is commonly recognised a 'gold standard' in qualitative research (Barbour, 2008) and are seen as providing unique insight into the lived experiences of individuals (Kvale, 2007). Thus, through utilising semi-structured interviews we were able to elicit valuable and analytically rich data (Barbour, 2008). Semi-structured qualitative interviews were based on an interview schedule, formulated around the research questions in the report. The interview schedule sought to include open-ended questions in order to facilitate discussion, but also allowed opportunities for the interviewer to clarify or obtain further detailed information from the interviewees. Given the diverse sample, the same interview schedule elicited varied and diverse responses from interviewees (Barbour, 2008).

Also, prior to conducting the interviews, the interviewer discussed ethical considerations within the research, including anonymity, confidentiality and

right to withdraw. Drawing on the British Sociological Association's guidelines (British Sociological Association, 2004), we sought to protect the participant and the interviewer during the interview process.

# Sample

As noted the sample interviewed within this report comprised a total of 20 respondents, 5 from France, 4 from the UK, 3 from Belgium, Germany and Sweden respectively, and finally 2 respondents from the Netherlands. The sample was made up of 9 females and 11 males.

Where specified, participant's ages ranged from 18 to 29 years of age, averaging 24.2 years of age. Within the sample, all participants specified their ethnic background upon introducing themselves - 9 interviewees were from a North African background, 6 were Middle Eastern and a further 5 participants were of an Asian background.

In addition to specifying their ethnic background, respondents commonly identified themselves in relation to their respective national identity and either ethnic background or as Muslims, so for example a British interviewee self-identified as British Muslim, or a French respondent self-identified as French Tunisian, thus demonstrating identification with their respective nations.

All respondents also noted their professional and academic backgrounds during the interview. Within the report, 12 of the 20 respondents were in university level education. Out of the 12 respondents that were in education, 5 were pursuing postgraduate level study. The remaining 8 participants were all employed in graduate level jobs or self-employed.

In addition, all respondents discussed their civic, political and community engagement. Interviewees were commonly active in local and national Islamic organisations, anti-discrimination movements, or volunteered within the local community, we recognise that not all Muslim youth have such high levels of engagement.

# Case Studies

## France

### The Far-Right in France

The French far-right political party the Front National (FN) was formed, with Jean-Marie Le Pen as party president, in October 1972 (Shields, 2007). Formerly a very minor fringe movement, the FN's breakthrough in the 1984 European election is recognised as the turning point for the FN (Shields, 2010, Ignazi, 2003). The FN traditionally mobilised on anti-European and anti-immigration issues. Whilst France on the whole is generally in favour of ethnic minority assimilation and sees ethnic identity as a barrier to emancipation (Streiff-Frénart, 2012), the FN's previous success is attributed to the way in which they discuss issues relating to immigration, unemployment and delinquency (Ignazi, 2003). The French far-right discourse has led to the problematisation of immigrant communities in France (Streiff-Frénart, 2012).

Under its new leadership, the daughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen, Marine Le Pen is seen as changing the former hard line style of the FN (Shields, 2013). Marine Le Pen has recently attracted significant media attention based on her comparison of Muslim prayers on the streets to the Nazi occupation of France, thus creating the image of a Muslim invasion of France.

Previously FN supporters were commonly male and blue collar. However, there is a now more wide-ranging demographic of FN voter across both rural and urbanised France. Poller (2013) argues that due to the Muslim presence in France dissatisfied centre

right voters are increasingly likely to vote for the FN. However it should be noted that the economic situation and widespread political dissatisfaction with centre parties also contributes to the rise in support of the FN. Fekete (2006) recognises the somewhat paradoxical feminist ideological convergence with the far-right, in support of the ban of Islamic headscarves. However, it must be noted that in the case of Muslim women's dress in France, the debate is not limited to the far-right, since the entire political spectrum is often involved in the debate.

In France the Islamic headscarf has been banned in schools since 2004 under the Loi Stasi, and the Islamic full-face veil or niqab has been banned nationally since April 2011. Nonetheless, for the far-right, the Islamic headscarf is seen as the symbol of the Muslim invasion of France, thus in the national debate against the headscarf in France has played in the favour of the far-right (Betz and Menet, 2009).

Initially, the FN did not mobilise on Muslim-related issues (Betz and Menet, 2009). However, in the wake of the 1989 headscarf controversies in France, FN candidate Marie-France Stirbois framed her legislative election campaign on an anti-Islamic platform, and experienced significant success (Shields, 2007). Similarly in 1991, the FN as a whole began to campaign against the 'Implantation of Islam in France' (Betz and Menet, 2009). The FN is now generally recognised for their 'tough on Islam' rhetoric (Poller, 2013). The FN frame Muslim identity as a hindrance to integration and suggest that Muslims are less willing to integrate into the wider French society (Streiff-Frénart, 2012).

Notably, in 2008 Jean-Marie Le Pen was involved in efforts to establish a Europe-wide anti-Islamic ‘patriotic’ party, which saw the unification of European far-right organisations in response to a perceived threat posed by the presence of Islam in the West (Betz and Menet, 2009).

### French Muslim Youth and the Far-Right Anti-Muslim Narrative

French Muslim youth respondents demonstrated a high level of awareness of the presence of the FN in France, particularly when compared to respondents interviewed in the other case studies presented in this report. Interviewees commented on the change of leadership in the FN, from Jean-Marie Le Pen to Marine Le Pen. Furthermore, respondents reflected on the ways in which Marine Le Pen’s leadership style was different to that of her father. Respondents regarded Marine Le Pen as being more pragmatic, less controversial and more conciliatory, as discussed below:

**“ Whilst Jean-Marie Le Pen was known for his tough stance, Marine Le Pen tries to be more conciliatory... she wants the Front National to be part of the French political power at the local and national level.**

For some respondents, the stylistic change brought about by Marine Le Pen’s leadership evoked fear, since it was believed that the reduced controversy that surrounded the FN under the leadership of Marine Le Pen enabled the FN to position itself

as a legitimate political player within the wider French political arena. Thus based on the interview responses, it is apparent that young Muslims in France are also keenly aware of the stylistic change brought about by Marine Le Pen’s leadership of the FN as discussed by Shields (2013) and the perceived consequences that this may bring about.

Young Muslims interviewed in France also note the increasing popularity of the FN in France. Whilst the electoral success of the FN is exaggerated, interviewees note the FN is not a political outlier in France. A respondent states the following:

**“ In France the far-right represents 20% of the electoral body, so we can’t say it’s a black sheep.**

The interviewees also suggest that the FN tends to attract disaffected and working class communities in France. In addition, young Muslims interviewed also remark the increasing popularity of the FN in rural areas of France. Interviewees partly attribute the FN’s increasing electoral success to the current economic crisis faced in France. Participants in France demonstrate awareness of the wider FN policy, noting the FN’s general anti-immigration, anti-European and nationalist agenda. More interestingly, a participant also notes:

**“ ...there’s a part which is tempting to the point we wish that it was said by another party... the FN has logical arguments sometimes.**

Whilst the response is arguably somewhat controversial, the young Muslim respondent is able to highlight elements within the FN's wider policy that he feels possess some merit, and notes how in spite of his difference of opinion he is able to objectively discuss FN policy.

Furthermore, an interviewee discusses the centrality of the FN in the wider French political arena:

**“What I think is dangerous is the fact that everybody tends to take a position depending on far-right posture. It means that they became central and essential to the French political system.”**

The suggestion put forward regarding the centrality of the FN in France reflects the perceived importance of the FN as felt by young French Muslims. This therefore demonstrates that young Muslim respondents in France discuss the FN as a general political party rather than as extreme outliers. This may be attributed to the noted institutionalisation of the FN in France, rather than a national political rejection of the FN in France (Wilson and Hainsworth, 2012).

Upon discussing the anti-Muslim narrative as presented by the far-right in France, young Muslim interviewees noted that they felt targeting Muslims was central to the FN's political agenda:

**“Their speech is all about the demonization of Muslims.”**

Whilst another respondent added:

**“The core of their political ideology at the moment is Islamophobia”**

Respondents felt that the FN positioned Islam as a foreign religion in France and that Islam and its beliefs were opposed to France and its values. The way in which the FN positioned Muslims in France evoked feelings of ostracization amongst Muslims interviewed within the report. Therefore, whilst we observe that the far-right anti-Muslim narrative across Europe frames Muslim populations as unwilling to integrate and that Muslims self-select isolation, based on data from the French sample we would argue that in part the far-right anti-Muslim narrative ostracises and results in the potential isolation of Muslim communities in France.

Furthermore, for young Muslims interviewed in France the far-right anti-Muslim narrative evoked feelings of fear, concern and revulsion. In addition, respondents felt that the FN's anti-Muslim narrative was influential in France in general. For young Muslims in France, the FN's anti-Muslim narrative was seen to be most influential on the wider political spectrum and seen to result in subsequent violent hate crimes against Muslims:

**“The events clearly show that it is the normalization of such a narrative in the media, and among other political parties that participate in the rise of Islamophobic and xenophobic public statements and unfortunately more and more are committed as an outcome of it.”**



Also:

**“ ...there is a direct link between extreme hate speech ideas... and the rise of Islamophobic acts, such as the many assaults that have been directed against Muslims, the main victims of the assaults being women.**

Therefore young French Muslims interviewed associate the far-right anti-Muslim narrative with violent attacks committed against Muslims in France, particularly attacks against Muslim women.

In addition, young French Muslims interviewed highlight the role of the French political left wing in articulating the anti-Muslim narrative:

**“ That’s undeniable. The political speech, even of the extreme-left, has changed because of the far-right positions. It was surprising to see that it was actually the extreme-left who asked for a new law against wearing hijab in private spaces following the controversy about the Muslim nanny in the Baby-Loup kindergarten.**

Another respondent added:

**“ Today, the left harms the Muslim community more than the far-right. They first evoke their humanist values and the need for a strong secularization of society, secondly they use their identity profile and exclusion to promote the fight against a Muslim presence...**

**In my opinion, the far-right is dealing with the dirty work, but the left is taking advantage of it. I think that the ideology which is harming Muslims today in France isn’t only the far-right one, but it is mainly the secularist one defended by the left.**

Thus for young French Muslims interviewed within this report, it is clear that in France the left wing is also seen as key in promoting the anti-Muslim narrative. Whilst this may be seen as an example of political convergence on Muslim-related issues (Allen, 2010), the perceived significance of the left in the demonization of Muslims may also be attributed to respondents living in left wing political strongholds, therefore any issues encountered are attributed to the left. For FEMYSO, this suggests the need for further research into the role of the wider political anti-Muslim narrative as voiced by mainstream parties and its influence on European Muslim youth, particularly in France. Similarly, young Muslim respondents see the media as central in the proliferation of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, which then subsequently influences the wider French population:

**“ ...it is often people who have never been in touch with Muslim population who are the most sensitive to these theories, like those living in rural areas and who see violence linked to Muslims through TV.**

However, in comparison to other cases studied within this report, the role of the media in the portrayal of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative is not expressed as strongly in France.

Interviewees in France were already keenly engaged in measures to combat the proliferation of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. Activism by interviewees included signing petitions, protesting against the far-right anti-Muslim narrative and supporting organisations in France that work to tackle hate crimes and hate speech against Muslims in France, such as the Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en France (CCIF).

Respondents also saw engaging in dialogue with far-right supporters and candidates as a means of understanding why people might vote for the FN, and subsequently combatting the far-right anti-Muslim narrative.

With regards to future means of combatting the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, interviewees saw multiple avenues for Muslim youth response. On a local level, a respondent highlighted the value of dialogue between Muslim and non-Muslim groups. Furthermore interviewees highlighted the importance of Muslims moving beyond what they felt was commonly conveyed as a “dialectic of pain and negativity”, and therefore casting off an attitude of victimhood in order to pursue more proactive engagement.

Respondents also stressed the importance of political engagement and representation for Muslims and by Muslims. An interviewee felt that, apart from the CCIF, there was no one to represent the political interests of the Muslim community in France. The respondents highlighted that political engagement by Muslims in France was a legitimate means of highlighting and addressing Muslim concerns

surrounding the far-right anti-Muslim narrative.

Interviewees also suggested that the role of the mainstream political parties in the promotion of the anti-Muslim narrative must be explored and taken seriously. When discussing possible solutions to the far-right anti-Muslim narrative a respondent emphasised that the problems faced by Muslim youth in France did not solely arise from the far-right and that the left wing was largely influential in promoting the political anti-Muslim narrative in France.

French respondents also noted that the left wing questioning and denial of Islamophobia put into question their rights and undermined their ability to denounce hate speech and hate crimes committed against the Muslim community.

**“To deny to someone their rights, you have first to deny the right to name things. If you deny them the right to define issues, you don't give them the tools to defend their rights; you don't give them the opportunity to bring the concept to the public sphere. If the concept doesn't exist, so the problem doesn't exist. You don't have any word to describe what is happening, so everything which could be related to what is happening becomes sporadic acts and not a whole movement of something.**

Therefore it would appear that for young Muslims in France, it is of central importance to create a framework for defining and combating Islamophobia, in order to combat both the far-right

anti-Muslim narrative and wider discrimination against Muslims in France.

In summary, young French Muslims interviewed demonstrate high levels of awareness of the FN, its leadership, supporters, general policy and in particular its anti-Muslim narrative. This narrative evokes feelings of fear, concern and revulsion for young French Muslims. Many are already engaged in several means of combatting the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, including dialogue, petitions and supporting anti-Islamophobia organisations. However, interviewees highlight the importance of the wider political spectrum, in particular the left wing in the perpetuation of the anti-Muslim narrative in French politics. In addition, French Muslim youth interviewed noted the role of the media in conveying the far-right anti-Muslim narrative and saw it as consequently shaping the views of non-Muslims on Muslims in France who do not have the opportunity to interact with Muslims. Young French Muslims also highlight the need for political participation by Muslims in France.

# United Kingdom

## The Far-Right in the UK

The main British far-right organisations considered within this report are the British National Party (BNP), the socio-political movement the English Defence League (EDL), and finally to a certain extent, the political party, the UK Independence Party (UKIP).

The BNP emerged in 1982 as a splinter group of the UK nationalist party the National Front (Allen, 2011). Initially, the BNP framed itself as a 'whites only political party', and advocated anti-Semitic and subsequently anti-coloured immigration policies. However, in October 2002 party leader Nick Griffin launched the BNP's anti-Islam campaign, entitled 'Islam out of Britain' (Allen, 2011). Subsequently the BNP released a promotional leaflet entitled 'The Truth About Islam' (BNP, 2001). The leaflet is based on an acronym for Islam "Intolerance, Slaughter, Looting, Arson, Molestation of Women", and details inflammatory allegations against Muslims, including the selective use of Qur'anic verses that the BNP considers justification behind alleged anti-Western Muslim practices, thus drawing on the visceral emotions of supporters, such as anger, fear, bitterness and hatred (Slade, 2010).

In addition to the BNP's recent anti-Islam narrative the BNP has also adopted and emphasised its British Christian heritage (Zúquete, 2008), which it argues is being compromised by the presence of Muslims in the UK. This in turn acts as a cloak of respectability or reputational shield for the BNP in the face of criticism (Slade, 2010).

Whilst in the grand scheme of British politics, the BNP's electoral success has

been limited, in 2001 the BNP fielded 350 seats and won 35 (Allen, 2011). The BNP reached its highest level of electoral success in 2010 (Goodwin, 2013), and is subsequently experiencing a declining electoral support (Ignazi, 2003, Goodwin, 2013). BNP supporters are often older, male proletariat (Goodwin and Evans, 2012), and were shown to be more likely than other far-right supporters to engage in violence to protect their ideas (Goodwin and Evans, 2012).

The UK Independence Party (UKIP) distances itself from the far-right, but unlike the BNP it does not see itself as a far-right organisation. However, it is argued that UKIP also presents an anti-Islam narrative (Goodwin and Evans, 2012), apparent in their inviting Dutch far-right politician Geert Wilders, of the Partij Voor Vrijheid (PVV), to the UK House of Lords to screen his anti-Islam film *Fitna* (Goodwin and Evans, 2012). In addition, UKIP also advocates support for the implementation of a burqa ban in the UK (Goodwin and Evans, 2012).

UKIP is often framed as a far-right 'polite alternative' to the BNP (Goodwin and Evans, 2012). Recent research suggest UKIP supporters are less likely than other far-right supporters in the UK to engage in violence to protect their ideas (Goodwin and Evans, 2012). UKIP supporters are largely professionals (Goodwin and Evans, 2012). Also, unlike the BNP, UKIP experienced an upsurge in electoral support in 2013 (Goodwin, 2013).

Finally, the English Defence League (EDL) formed in 2009, and sees itself as a direct and necessary response to the alleged threat posed by Muslims and the supposed Islamification of Britain (Allen, 2011). The EDL has subsequently

experienced a dramatic increase in their public profile. It is also experiencing an upsurge in support. Allen (2011) suggests that the EDL has a large base of 'armchair warriors' who express their sympathy with the EDL through social media. Allen (2011) identified that the EDL had 85,000 online Facebook fans in April 2011. Given that the EDL Facebook page is publicly available on the internet, on 19th June 2013, FEMYSO identified that a total of 144,601 Facebook users had 'liked' the EDL page; however Facebook statistics must be treated with caution. They also demonstrate that the majority of people that have liked the EDL page were aged 18 to 34, and that the week beginning 19th May 2013 was the most popular week for the EDL Facebook page. Notably this week coincides with the tragic murder of British soldier Lee Rigby in Woolwich. Tell MAMA, a UK-based support group that aims to monitor anti-Muslim attacks, also noted a significant upsurge in anti-Muslim hate crimes in the same week (Copsey et al., 2013).

Unlike both the BNP and UKIP, the EDL is not a political party but a socio-political movement (Allen, 2011). Generally EDL supporters are generally young working class males (Goodwin and Evans, 2012). Supporters of the EDL express identification with the EDL's anti-Islam narrative (Goodwin and Evans, 2012). Unlike the BNP's whites only policy, the EDL welcomes a range of individuals under the banner of anti-Islamic extremism. The EDL is recognised as employing divisive tactics to recruit individuals from across the British faith communities (Lane, 2012). The EDL specifically targets Hindus and Sikhs as potential supporters thus provoking intra-Asian tensions. Similarly, the EDL

also frequently marches under the Israeli flag and the Star of David (Allen, 2011, Lane, 2012) and seeks to attract Jewish supporters (Lane, 2012), thus antagonising Muslim-Jewish tensions. It must be noted that the support that the EDL receives from members of faith communities is generally limited (Lane, 2012).

### British Muslim Youth and the Far-Right Anti-Muslim Narrative

Muslims within the sample cite the BNP and the EDL as far-right organisations in the UK. Interestingly the young British Muslims interviewed do not mention UKIP as a far-right party. Unlike the French case, interviewees do not discuss the far-right leadership in the UK. However, the differences that arise here can be attributed to the reduced focus on the far-right leadership in the UK when compared to France. British Muslim youth do not discuss the general policies of the British far-right, but primarily see the far-right in the UK through the prism of its anti-Muslim rhetoric.

Respondents also recognise that the British far-right no longer seeks to attract support merely from the indigenous population, but also from diverse minority groups within British society:

“**But it not just the white working class that they target in the UK; the EDL even has Sikh, Hindu, gay, women's and Jewish sections within their movement. To me this shows that they are not just a xenophobic far-right movement that we might have seen in the past, but it is a fascist**



## **movement specifically aimed at targeting Muslims...**

The respondent goes on to add:

**“From what they say, it is mostly targeted towards Muslims; they don’t tend to target other ethnic minority backgrounds. They make claims that we are barbaric and backwards. They make false claims; they all say that we are taking over the country, that Muslim women are oppressed by covering because they equate freedom with the ability to expose your body. They say that we are taking benefits. They also erroneously generalise all Muslims as being radical extremists and prone to violence. They always go on about Muslims wanting to impose Shari’a law in the UK, which is totally not true.**

For respondents the specific anti-Muslim stance of the EDL in the UK creates a sense of demonization of Muslims. Thus interviewees felt that the EDL anti-Muslim narrative contradicts Britain’s tradition of multiculturalism and frames Muslims as outsiders, and as different from other minority communities in the UK. As in the French case, the far-right framing of Muslims as outsiders to society creates a sense of ostracization for British Muslim youth. Furthermore, the anti-Muslim narrative promoted by the EDL in the UK is seen as a false narrative and not a true reflection of the British Muslim community.

A respondent links the far-right anti-Muslim narrative to the subsequent demonization of Muslims and perceived otherness of Muslims in Britain:

**“So they are against people who are not like them... for example the Muslims, they don’t see them as being British, as being like them, they see a difference in their values and their look, then they are able to label them, to dehumanize them and to attack them. They feel conformable doing that.**

For others the far-right anti-Muslim narrative in the UK evokes frustration, particularly far-right calls for Muslims to leave the UK:

**“It can be very frustrating; technically, this is ‘our country’ just as much as it’s theirs. I was born here, I’ve spent my entire life here, I’ve volunteered for the community, I’ve worked with the people here; this place is my home too.**

Overall, young Muslim respondents were keen to highlight that in spite of the far-right framing of the British Muslim community, Muslims are at home in the UK and make a significant contribution to British society. These findings reflect an earlier empirical study, as undertaken by Hopkins (2007) in Scotland, whereby young Scottish Muslim males, when interviewed about the BNP, highlighted the British Muslim and Asian contribution to the UK.

For young Muslims surveyed in the UK, the far-right anti-Muslim narrative

evoked a clear emotional response. Respondents described feelings of anxiety, upset and fear of physical attack by far-right supporters and those influenced by the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, particularly on vulnerable members of the British Muslim society such as women, children and the elderly.

Young Muslims in the UK also suggest that the far-right anti-Muslim narrative influences the wider political spectrum in the UK. Furthermore, the normalisation of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative in British politics creates scepticism and distrust of British politicians. Therefore, the normalisation of the anti-Muslim narrative in UK politics risks alienating British Muslim youth. However, the normalisation of the narrative is felt to a lesser extent than in the case of France, where the left is strongly linked to the proliferation and normalisation of the anti-Muslim narrative.

In addition to the role of politics, young British Muslim respondents all highlighted the perceived highly significant influence of the British media in fuelling and disseminating the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. The media was seen to be perpetuating the far-right anti-Muslim narrative through giving the far-right airtime to voice their counter-cohesive and divisive views. In addition, young Muslims interviewed see Muslim engagement with the media as a tool for combatting the anti-Muslim narrative in the media.

**“The media appear to be constantly fuelling the far-right anti-Muslim narrative...I feel that we should do more to engage in politics and news reporting, in order to counter the anti-Muslim**

**narrative that we see in both politics and the media.**

**“The media have a tendency to depict Muslims in a negative light; they twist everything to put Muslims in the wrong, even if the individual is innocent. If there’s ever a story in the news about a criminal or a suspect that might involve a Muslim individual, you can guarantee that the word ‘Muslim’ shall be heard in the first sentence of the report. The media definitely exaggerate, which just makes society more hesitant towards Muslims.**

Another respondent perceives the media portrayal of the anti-Muslim narrative as potentially dangerous and determinative of public perception, since those who do not know Muslims are likely to take statements at face value and see them as true.

In addition, young British Muslims interviewed within this report note that they experience prejudice in society and link the prejudice faced to the prevalence of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. However interviewees highlight that they are easily able to counter the negative perception of Muslims that is brought about by the far-right anti-Muslim narrative through engaging in positive dialogue with others. Participants note that they are able to discuss the positive elements of Islam and thus counter the negative stereotypes of Muslims held by others.

British Muslim interviewees highlight the importance of taking proactive measures to counter the far-right anti-Muslim narrative in the UK. Like young Muslims

in France, British interviewees suggest the importance of political engagement by Muslims as a means of combatting the far-right anti-Muslim narrative.

In addition to political engagement by Muslims in the UK, young British Muslim respondents discuss the value of collaborating with anti-fascist movements in the UK in order to combat the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. A participant notes:

**“ I have heard about Unite against Fascism, and I have seen them at a rally in London. They seem to stand up against all forms of racial hatred and the fact that they are not just one ethnic or religious group of people, it actually gives them more credibility when they speak against the far-right stance on Muslims. UAF appear to have more credibility when they engage with the wider public. I think it is a good way for Muslims to be engaged and to respond to this problem. It might actually be better, rather than Muslims to speak up alone against the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, for us to be engaged with groups like UAF.**

Therefore in combining efforts with other organisations in the UK, young British Muslims feel that their campaign against the far-right anti-Muslim narrative will have increased credibility and legitimacy. Indeed, for young British Muslims collaboration would enable Muslims to draw on best practice and potentially increase the efficacy of their campaigns. Furthermore, it is apparent that young Muslims in the UK feel that the anti-Muslim

narrative and associated hate speech and hate crimes should be tackled within the wider frame of anti-discrimination.

In summary, like young French Muslims, British Muslim youth are also keenly aware of far-right organisations in their national context. However, for the young Muslims surveyed in the UK, the far-right is perceived as having an agenda that is constructed entirely around an anti-Muslim narrative. Arguably this is due to the increased prevalence of the purely anti-Islamist EDL at present in the UK. For young British Muslims the far-right anti-Muslim narrative creates an experience of prejudice and feelings of upset, frustration, concern and fear of physical attack.

Muslim youth interviewed in Britain also report the normalisation of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative in British politics and highlight the role of the British media in fuelling and portraying the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. Interviewees highlight the contribution made by the Muslim community to the UK. At present the young Muslims interviewed in the UK respond to the far-right anti-Muslim narrative by engaging in dialogue with those that do not know a great deal about Muslims and seek to challenge the negative stereotypes of Muslims brought about by the prevalence of the anti-Muslim narrative. Respondents highlight the need for proactive engagement by the young Muslim community, in both the political and media sphere as well as suggesting that Muslims collaborate with existing anti-fascist and anti-discrimination organisations in their campaign against the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, and tackle the narrative within the wider frame of anti-discrimination.

# Belgium

## The Far-Right in Belgium

Belgium's far-right political movement originates in the Flemish north of Belgium, with Vlaams Belang (VB) or Flemish Interest. The Vlaams Belang was formerly known as the Vlaams Blok, or Flemish Block, until 2005. The Vlaams Blok was formed in the 1970s. A court ruling in 2005 meant that the party was forced to change its name, since it was found to be in violation of Belgian anti-racism laws. However, VB used the name change as a means of widening its appeal and to generate publicity (Erk, 2005).

More generally, the VB is argued to have created a rightward shift in Belgian politics (Erk, 2005). Like the far-right organisations in France and the UK, VB also promotes an anti-Muslim narrative. VB mobilises against the perceived threat posed by the alleged Muslim invasion of Belgium (Betz and Menet, 2009). The VB frames Muslims in Belgium as being in opposition to Belgian cultural values (Erk, 2005) and thus claims the VB are defenders of the Belgian Euro-Christian heritage (Betz and Menet, 2009). The leader of VB, Filip Dewinter, regards Islam as the 'Trojan horse' of fundamentalism (Betz and Menet, 2009), thus creating an image of a covert invasion of Belgium by Muslims.

Similarly, Dewinter notably suggested that Muslim women in Belgium who wear the Islamic headscarf have effectively signed an agreement for deportation (Erk, 2005), therefore negating the compatibility of Muslim and Belgian identity. Controversially, Filip Dewinter's daughter An-Sofie Dewinter posed in a

burqa, left open to show her wearing a bikini. The image carried the slogan "Freedom or Islam? You choose" in Flemish across her body, thus equating Islam and Muslim women's dress with a lack of freedom.

Within the Flemish region, VB has enjoyed considerable levels of electoral success since the 1990s (Thijssen and de Lange, 2005). Such electoral support has been strongest in areas with large immigrant and impoverished communities (Thijssen and de Lange, 2005).

On the European level, in 2008 Filip Dewinter invited far-right leaders to form a project against the Islamisation of European cities (Betz and Menet, 2009). The Belgian far-right also appears to be active in the Cities against Islamisation Movement (Cities against Islamisation, 2013).

## Belgian Muslim Youth and the Far-Right Anti-Muslim Narrative

Interviewees in Belgium cited VB as the main far-right movement in Belgium and were aware of the VB's leadership. Respondents in Belgium noted VB's increasing electoral success. In addition, interviewees also demonstrated awareness of the VB general political agenda, commenting that it included anti-immigration, anti-foreign and nationalist policies.

Respondents also felt that the anti-Muslim narrative was central to the VB political agenda:

**“ I feel like the far-right is just about the hate and fear of Islam.**



Similarly:

**“The far-right in Belgium has a very Islamophobic position.**

Therefore, for the young Belgian respondents the anti-Muslim narrative was inherent to the Belgian far-right movement. Furthermore, for the young Muslims interviewed in Belgium the far-right anti-Muslim narrative evoked feelings of worry, shock, revulsion and the experience of animosity from the wider Belgian community.

Furthermore, like British Muslim youth, young Muslims in Belgium attributed the widespread nature of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative to a lack of dialogue with the general Belgian population and felt that the lack of dialogue resulted in a limited awareness of Muslims in Belgium. Therefore, based on the interview responses, it is apparent that young Muslims in Belgium note the need for promotion of a positive image of Muslims, and see this as a means of overcoming the far-right anti-Muslim narrative.

In addition to a perceived lack of awareness of Muslim populations in Belgium and lack of dialogue, interviewees also see the French far-right anti-Muslim narrative as influential in Belgian debate:

**“I feel like the narrative in France has a big influence in Belgium, and we are also inheriting the French public debates.**

Whilst existing literature highlights the influence of French secularism on francophone Belgium (Mielants, 2006), the responses by interviewees in this

report suggest a wider French political influence on Belgium, specifically in this case with the French anti-Muslim narrative influencing Belgium.

Like the young Muslims interviewed in France and the UK, young Belgian Muslims also noted an increasing normalisation of the anti-Muslim narrative across the wider political spectrum in Belgium. They felt it was not uncommon for politicians from liberal political parties to participate in the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. An interviewee also suggests that left wing politicians who express anti-Muslim statements are less likely to be subject to the same degree of scrutiny experienced by the far-right, and therefore liberal politicians are able to voice the anti-Muslim narrative with relative impunity.

Similarly to British respondents, Belgian interviewees note the pivotal role played by the media in conveying the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. Interviewees describe the media as sensationalist, and therefore see this portrayal of Muslims as fuelling the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. The normalisation of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative within the political sphere and media was seen as influencing the perception of Muslims in the wider Belgian society. Muslims felt that the normalisation of the anti-Muslim narrative more generally in Belgian society was very concerning:

**“What I think is worrying is the fact that their ideas are more and more widespread and considered to be acceptable.**

Belgian respondents also noted the far-right denial of Islamophobia:

**“...there’s a politician from the far-right in Belgium who says that we can’t consider Islamophobia as a form of racism because Islam isn’t a race...this shows how the political class react to it.**

Through the far-right denial of Islamophobia, young Belgian Muslims felt less able to tackle the far-right anti-Muslim narrative and other forms of discrimination. In response to the far-right position on Islamophobia, young Belgian Muslims interviewed stress the importance of defining and taking measures against Islamophobia so that subsequent anti-Muslim incidences can be dealt with effectively.

In addition to a framework for the definition of Islamophobia, like respondents in the UK and France interviewees also stress the importance of political participation by Muslims. They felt that Muslim political participation should extend across the political spectrum. In addition to Muslim political participation, respondents also suggest that any anti-Muslim narrative should be condemned by politicians on the whole. Along with condemnation by politicians, respondents pointed out the role of influential figures in Belgian society in speaking out against discrimination. For example, an interviewee cites how a rugby team came forward to condemn homophobia and that this has been effective in combatting homophobic attitudes in Belgian society.

Similarly, young Belgian Muslims highlight the value of collaboration with other marginalised groups in Belgian society. Respondents felt that working with other groups that face prejudice

would allow for a mutual exchange of effective strategies and the creation of support networks. The promotion of collaborative working echoes the suggestions put forward by the British Muslim youth sample.

In summary, Belgian respondents demonstrate an awareness of the far-right, its general policies and increasing electoral popularity. Moreover, participants are also aware of the anti-Muslim narrative presented by VB; in addition they cite an increasing normalisation and acceptance of this narrative. However, as was demonstrated in the French and British cases, respondents do not feel that the anti-Muslim narrative is confined to the far-right alone and observe that the anti-Muslim narrative is often promoted and fuelled by the media, and expressed by politicians across the political spectrum.

Interviewees stress the importance of political engagement by Belgian Muslims as an effective means of combatting the anti-Muslim narrative. Young Muslims interviewed also note that condemnation of the anti-Muslim narrative by Muslims, politicians and influential figures would help to tackle the anti-Muslim narrative. In addition, interviewees also suggest the efficacy of collaboration with other marginalised groups in the fight against the anti-Muslim narrative and other forms of discrimination.



# Germany

## The German Far-Right

The German far-right is noted as being the least successful in Western Europe, given its generally limited electoral success (Backes and Mudde, 2000). The limited political success of the far-right in Germany is attributed to the Nazi association with the far-right, mainstream rejection of the far-right and state surveillance of far-right organisations (Backes and Mudde, 2000). Typically, far-right voters in Germany express greatest levels of political dissatisfaction, nostalgia for the past, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and ethnocentrism (Ignazi, 2003). Traditionally, far-right voters in Germany were usually blue collar, older males, however more recently far-right voters are identified as being younger and non-religious (Ignazi, 2003).

Far-right organisations in Germany include Pro-NRW, and Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD). However, the German far-right is recognised as being non-unified (Backes and Mudde, 2000), thus highlighting that there are many far-right organisations active in Germany.

The NPD was established in the 1960s and has had fluctuating electoral success over the years. It has been subject to several attempts to ban the organisation (Backes and Mudde, 2000). More recently, in addition to its more general extreme right policies, the NPD argues the Turkish Muslim and Arab Muslim presence in Germany poses a threat to Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, 2013). The NPD cite an

unstoppable Islamisation of Germany due to a perceived Muslim inability to integrate (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, 2013). The NPD also make links between crime rates and Muslim presence in Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, 2013).

In addition to the NPD, the Cologne-based far-right movement Pro NRW was established in 1996, specifically against the construction of a mosque in Cologne. The Pro NRW explicitly campaign against the Islamisation of Germany (NRW, 2013, Pro NRW, 2013). The Pro NRW has enjoyed some electoral success. Currently the Pro NRW are campaigning against the establishment of a 'Moroccan Mosque' in Leverkusen (NRW, 2013, Pro NRW, 2013) and invite visitors to their website to sign the petition against the mosque, thus suggesting that the Pro NRW opposes the visible presence of Islam in Germany.

Like other national far-right movements cited in this report, Pro NRW show signs of the European far-right unification around an anti-Muslim stance. Specifically the Pro NRW website carries the logos of the Swedish far-right party, the Swedish Democrats, the European movement Cities against Islamisation, and the Belgian VB (NRW, 2013, Pro NRW, 2013).

## German Muslim Youth and the Far-Right Anti-Muslim Narrative

Interviewees in the German context cite numerous far-right organisations, including Pro-NRW and NPD. However, respondents feel given its non-unified nature and the legal restrictions it is subject to, the German far-right differs to that seen within the wider European context:

**“In my opinion there is a different type of far-right in Germany.”**

Nonetheless, respondents discuss the general far-right policy as promoting xenophobia and racism in Germany. Young German Muslims interviewed also note the increasing popularity of the far-right on the whole, with an interviewee pointing out that in her local area, 12% of the population voted for the NPD.

German Muslims interviewed suggest that the far-right frames Muslims as constituting an economic burden on German society. Muslim youth interviewed also feel that the far-right in Germany argue that Muslims pose a socio-cultural threat and want to Islamise German society. Interviewees also feel that the far-right portrays Muslims as violent, unwilling to integrate, retrogressive and gender biased:

**“They say Muslims are a burden for the German economic system; they are lazy and want to Islamise German society. They don't want to integrate, they are old fashioned, they suppress women and exploit German people.”**

Interestingly, the respondent also suggests that the far-right anti-Muslim narrative in Germany is centred on an argument of Muslims exploiting the indigenous German population. Thus the interviewee perceives that the far-right in Germany creates the image of native German victimhood, which in turn legitimises their anti-Muslim

narrative. This narrative is reminiscent of that of UK far-right organisations.

Interviewees also note that they feel that the German far-right is willing to engage in violence to prevent the Islamisation of Germany. This recalls Goodwin and Evans' (2012) findings relating to the BNP's willingness to engage in violence to protect their ideas.

Unlike respondents in the French and Belgian case studies included in this report, and to a lesser extent the UK, young Muslims in Germany do not report feeling that the wider political spectrum is active in promoting the anti-Muslim narrative. Therefore, it is apparent for German Muslim youth that the anti-Muslim narrative in politics emanates predominantly from the far-right. The notion of the anti-Muslim narrative as being confined to the far-right is not surprising in the German case, since the German far-right is seen as being largely rejected by the wider political sphere (Wilson and Hainsworth, 2012).

As was observed in the aforementioned national cases, young Muslims also felt that the media played a pivotal role in the dissemination of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. In addition to traditional media outlets, such as newspapers and television, German Muslim youth note the use of posters and billboards as a means of promotion of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative.

For the German young Muslims interviewed, the German far-right anti-Muslim narrative provokes feelings of sadness, anger and fear. Respondents point out they feel misunderstood, that they are treated with suspicion by the wider German population and that they therefore feel pushed away. Thus,

as discussed in the French and British cases, the far-right anti-Muslim narrative generates a feeling of ostracization for young Muslims. Again, this arguably demonstrates the role played by the far-right anti-Muslim narrative in otherizing and alienating the Muslim community.

In addition to the emotional response felt by young German Muslims, a respondent also discusses how a Muslim acquaintance was directly threatened by a far-right group. The respondent felt that the police and state response was largely successful, but that more should be done to monitor the activities of the far-right in Germany.

In spite of the negative emotional experiences of the German far-right anti-Muslim narrative, respondents also suggest that the negative portrayal of Muslims in Germany inspires them to counter the negative perceptions held by people.

German Muslim youth respond to the far-right anti-Muslim narrative through their community engagement in both secular German associations and Islamic organisations in Germany. A respondent discusses how in his local mosques the khutbah or sermon that takes place after the Friday prayer addresses the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, whilst also discussing Muslim teachings of racial equality and tolerance, thus urging support for anti-discrimination and tolerance from worshippers. The mosque also organised a competition for its followers to design a creative poster to promote anti-racist messages.

In addition to the response within Islamic organisations, the young German Muslims surveyed also highlight their engagement in German anti-racist

movements where they take part in activities such as poetry recitals and volunteering to help new immigrants to Germany. They suggest that their engagement in such organisations is effective given the already strong tradition of anti-racist organisations in Germany.

With regards to future action to combat the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, young German Muslim interviewees suggest the importance of political engagement by Muslims. For the respondents it was important that young German Muslims were able to pressure and lobby their local politicians to deal with the problems caused by the anti-Muslim narrative, on behalf of young Muslims and Muslims in general.

In addition to political engagement by Muslims, respondents also suggest the need to highlight the positive action taken by anti-discrimination networks across Germany in combatting the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, so that Muslims can engage with and learn from the best practices within such organisations.

To summarise, German Muslim youth are aware of the numerous far-right organisations and the increasing electoral success enjoyed by the far-right. Respondents also discuss the general anti-Muslim narrative promoted by the far-right. Young German Muslims surveyed see the media as an influential outlet in the portrayal of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. However, unlike the aforementioned national cases cited within the report, German Muslim youth see the anti-Muslim narrative as emanating largely

from the far-right rather than from the wider political spectrum.

German Muslim youth experience a range of negative emotional responses to the far-right anti-Muslim narrative including fear, sadness and ostracization. Nonetheless, for the interviewees the far-right anti-Muslim narrative spurred them to become involved in numerous initiatives aimed at promoting tolerance and anti-discrimination. Engagement by young Muslims in Germany was creative and took place within Islamic and secular German organisations. Furthermore, German Muslim youth felt that the existing anti-discrimination networks present in Germany offered an effective means of combatting the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. In addition to the current engagement by interviewees, young German Muslims highlight the importance of political participation by Muslims in the fight against the far-right anti-Muslim narrative.

# Sweden

## The Swedish Far-Right

The Swedish far-right movement, the Sverigedemokraterna or Swedish Democrats (SD), was founded in 1988. The SD claims to have more than 9000 members at present, and currently occupies 20 parliamentary seats, having secured 5.7% of the vote in 2010 (Swedish Democrats, 2013). The Swedish Muslims in Cooperation report published in February 2013 highlights that since elected politicians appoint judges in Sweden, the current significant political presence of the Swedish Democrats may compromise justice in legal cases where Muslims are involved (Sabuni, 2013).

The SD seeks to prohibit Muslim customs, for example the SD would like to ban male circumcision, as it is seen to constitute genital mutilation (Swedish Democrats, 2013). Given that male circumcision is practiced in the Muslim community, the imposition of such limitations would directly impact the Swedish Muslim community.

Similarly, the SD opposes the Islamic practice of halal slaughter. The Swedish Democrat policy towards Islamic ritual slaughter would also significantly impact the lives of Swedish Muslims. The SD also state:

“Our position is that slaughter methods should be based on what is best for the animal. Allowing religious edict control how animals are to be slaughtered is basically absurd. Principally with respect to slaughter must be that the method should be as well fast as painless. All slaughter without stunning should therefore be

prohibited.” (Swedish Democrats, 2013).

In 2006, the SD held a drawing contest in response to the Danish cartoon affairs, involving inflammatory anti-Muslim cartoons. The contest was framed as being in support of freedom of speech (Swedish Democrats, 2013) and show the SD’s support for the anti-Muslim cartoons in Denmark.

More directly, as seen with the Dutch PVV and French FN, the SD conflates Islam with Nazism (Petterson -Normak and Zachariasson, 2012). The SD party leader Jimmy Akesson argued “Muslims are Sweden’s greatest foreign threat since the Second World War” (Eliassi, 2011).

The SD’s policy towards religion calls for the protection of Swedish Christian cultural heritage in the face of the perceived threat posed by Islam:

“The Swedish Democrats see Islam and most particularly its strong political and fundamentalist religious beliefs as the most difficult to harmoniously coexist with the Swedish and Western culture. Islamism’s influence on Swedish society should be counteracted to the greatest possible extent, and immigration from Muslim countries with strong elements of fundamentalism should be very severely limited.”

Therefore, it is apparent that the Swedish far-right anti-Muslim narrative operates both directly and indirectly. Directly the SD link Muslims in Sweden with extremism and fundamentalism, Islam is seen as incompatible with Swedish and Western culture, and Islam is considered to be taking over Swedish society. Furthermore, the SD seeks to



limit immigration from predominantly Muslim countries, particularly from countries where there is alleged Islamic fundamentalism. Similarly, indirectly Swedish far-right policies also have the potential to limit Islamic practices such as male circumcision and halal slaughter. Eliassi (2011) argues that it is the Swedish Democrats' national mission to define Muslims in Sweden as a threat. Eliassi (2011) notes that the SD's policy for dealing with the alleged Muslim problem in Sweden is repressive, with calls for assimilation, ethnic and religious discrimination, or expatriation of Muslims.

On the European level, the SD is argued to have strong links with the English socio-political far-right movement the EDL (Pettersen -Normak and Zachariasson, 2012). The Swedish Democrat logo is also carried on the German Pro NRW movement website. As noted above, although there are differences in far-right trajectories between each of the countries, it would appear that there is an emergence of general shared themes towards Muslim groups in each of the six countries. Furthermore, there appears to be a coming together of individual far-right organisations in their fight against the Muslim presence in Western Europe.

### Swedish Muslim Youth and the Far-Right Anti-Muslim Narrative

Respondents in Sweden cite the SD as the main far-right group in Sweden, and as with aforementioned cases, Swedish respondents see the electoral popularity of the far-right as increasing. Respondents cite the SD as the fourth most popular political organisation in Sweden.

Muslim youth respondents see the SD's general policy as predominantly comprising racism and xenophobia. Generally interviewees do not discuss the SD's general policy in as much depth as they discuss the SD anti-Muslim narrative. For an interviewee, the SD is solely about the promotion of the anti-Muslim narrative and as a result has scaled back other discriminatory policies:

“**...basically they are very active in spreading the anti-Muslim narrative...since 2009 they have strategically taken back their anti-Semitic rhetoric to focus on the anti-Muslim one.**

Another participant recalls a video commercial as an example of the SD's strong anti-Muslim narrative, within which he recalls how veiled women are shown taking money belonging to an elderly Swedish woman. Thus, the respondent feels that video creates an image of Muslims as constituting an economic threat to Sweden, Muslims as delinquents and opposed to Swedish values. The advertisement also frames visibly Muslim women as a threat to society, and also constructs the native Swedish population as victimised by Muslims in Sweden, therefore the respondent feels that the SD use their victim status as a means of justifying and legitimising their anti-Muslim stance.

Like respondents in other countries examined in this report, young Swedish Muslims note the central role played by the media in conveying the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. Respondents discuss the media as playing a key role in the normalisation of the far-right



anti-Muslim narrative within the larger Swedish society. In addition, young Swedish Muslims interviewed felt that when the Swedish media discussed the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, the media rarely sought to engage with secular Muslims, thus some interviewees felt excluded from the larger media debate.

Similarly, young Swedish Muslims strongly felt that the far-right anti-Muslim narrative was increasingly normalised within the general political spectrum, and thus respondents noted that the anti-Muslim narrative was not confined to the far-right:

**“ Again I want to add that the real problem isn't far-right parties themselves, because they are just the consequences of the deeper issues...the real problem and the real racism is in the government and well known politicians and their parties.**

Therefore the Swedish response highlights a perceived political acceptance and rightward shift to incorporate the anti-Muslim narrative. For young Swedish Muslims interviewed, the far-right anti-Muslim narrative evokes feelings of confusion, hurt and makes respondents feel threatened. Again, in addition to the negative emotions brought about by the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, the discourse also creates feelings of isolation and ostracization for young Muslims. Thus, as with the aforementioned case studies, such feelings highlight how the far-right anti-Muslim may serve to alienate young Muslims across Europe.

Some of the Swedish Muslims interviewed had had direct encounters with the far-right and felt that the experiences were caused by the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. A respondent pointed out that she had been physically and verbally attacked on three separate occasions. She highlights that each of the attacks was unprovoked. A second respondent from Sweden was subject to a slanderous allegation made by the SD.

On both occasions the interviewees reported the incidents to the police. Both respondents felt that the state and police responded effectively to the far-right attacks that they had faced. In addition to reporting incidents young Swedish Muslims suggest that political participation by Swedish Muslims is central to combatting the far-right and more widespread anti-Muslim narrative in politics.

Interviewees also note the need for support for Muslims in Sweden in light of the increasingly prevalent anti-Muslim narrative. A respondent felt that social support and solidarity would be particularly beneficial for Muslim women as it would enable them to cope with any attacks that they may face and the wider anti-Muslim narrative.

In summary, Swedish Muslim youth respondents demonstrate an awareness of the far-right in Sweden, its increasing electoral success, general policy and its anti-Muslim narrative. Young Muslims interviewed feel that the media is influential in conveying the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. Similarly, interviewees feel the anti-Muslim narrative in Swedish politics is not confined to the far-right and

transcends the wider political sphere. Respondents have direct experience of attack by the Swedish far-right and its supporters, but interviewees felt that when they reported cases to the police their concerns were taken seriously. Finally, young Muslim respondents in Sweden point out the importance of political participation by Muslims and collaboration with anti-discrimination groups in the fight against the anti-Muslim narrative.

# The Netherlands

## The Dutch Far-Right

Historically, Ignazi (2003) notes that the far-right in the Netherlands has usually mobilised on anti-immigration issues, but in the past has always faced a strong response from Dutch anti-fascist movements.

The Netherlands is home to the far-right party Partij Voor de Vrijheid (PVV), or Freedom Party. Like other contemporary far-right movements in Western Europe, the PVV mobilises on the perceived threat of Islamisation of the Netherlands (Vellenga and Wiegers, 2013). The Netherlands has a significant Turkish and Moroccan Muslim presence (Ignazi, 2003), with Muslims constituting an estimated 6% of the overall Dutch population (Vellenga and Wiegers, 2013).

Fekete (2012) posits that in spite of the PVV anti-Muslim narrative, Islamophobia is now very much part of everyday Dutch life. Nonetheless, the PVV leader Geert Wilders has been particularly active in campaigning against Islam. Although the Netherlands does not have a burqa ban, Wilders proposed the imposition of a burqa ban in the Netherlands, the proposal was subsequently abandoned in April 2012 (Afshar, 2012). Geert Wilders has also called for the banning of the Islamic holy book, the Qur'an in the Netherlands, likening it to Mein Kampf (Betz and Menet, 2009). Thus, it is apparent that the PVV view Islam and its beliefs as inherently problematic and opposed to Dutch values.

In 2008 Wilders wrote the controversial and inflammatory short film 'Fitna'. The film was subsequently commissioned

and funded by the PVV. Reminiscent of the BNP's 2002 leaflet 'The Truth about Islam', the film 'Fitna' takes selected excerpts from the Qur'an to justify the PVV's arguments of Muslims as being anti-Semitic, and promoting terrorism, violence against women, violence against non-Muslims and homophobia (Wilders, 2011). In a study comprising Muslim organisations, Muslims from the Netherlands see the film 'Fitna' as being deliberately offensive, pushing the limits of decency, and made with the aim of creating inter-community tensions (Vellenga and Wiegers, 2013). Muslim organisations surveyed within the study issued press statements in the wake of the release of the film, with some even bringing legal proceedings against Wilders and the PVV (Vellenga and Wiegers, 2013).

## Dutch Muslim Youth and the Far-Right Anti-Muslim Narrative

When discussing the Dutch far-right, respondents in the Netherlands highlight the increasing popularity and electoral success of the PVV. Interviewees felt that the general Dutch population is more inclined to sympathise with the far-right and to openly admit to supporting far-right ideas than they would have done 15 to 20 years ago. This perception reflects the suggestion that the anti-Muslim narrative has become part of everyday life in the Netherlands (Fekete, 2012). Interviewees felt that the acceptability of publically declaring support for the PVV was detrimental to general Dutch society.

Interviewees felt that the PVV is well known across Europe, whilst other national far-right organisations are less

well known by others across Europe. This suggests young Dutch Muslims perceive the PVV as being particularly influential across Europe.

Young Dutch Muslims interviewed felt that the PVV focused on the anti-Muslim narrative, rather than promoting a wider political agenda. Those interviewed felt that the far-right presents an image of Islam and Muslims as intolerant and opposed to Dutch normative values:

“**They say Islam is a religion that doesn't tolerate us, doesn't tolerate the Dutch culture. It is against them, Muslims want to conquer the country and Islamise the country.**

Respondents also felt that the far-right in the Netherlands put forward claims that Muslims want to impose an Islamic culture on the wider Dutch public. Similarly respondents highlight the way in which the PVV justify their anti-Muslim stance by framing Muslims as aggressors who seek to limit the freedoms and victimise the native Dutch population. The Muslim youth understanding of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative is comparable to that seen in the other case studies in this report.

It is notable that young Dutch Muslims felt that the far-right anti-Muslim narrative was highly influential in Dutch society and was subsequently changing the way that people in the Netherlands talk about and behave towards Muslims. Similarly to the findings in other countries, interviewees in the Netherlands felt the media was central to the dissemination of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. In addition to

conveying the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, young Muslims in the Netherlands also felt that the Dutch media fuelled the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, given the sensationalist reporting of incidences believed to be perpetrated by Muslims. In addition, young Dutch Muslims felt that the media reporting focused on argued dangers posed by Muslims, whilst the danger posed by the far-right in the Netherlands remained understated. In addition to traditional media outlets such as the press and televised news reports, young Muslim respondents also point out that far-right in the Netherlands is using social media effectively as a platform to voice its anti-Muslim narrative, which is reminiscent of the British far-right use of social media platforms (Allen, 2011).

Given the perceived role of the media in fuelling and disseminating the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, respondents highlight instances whereby their acquaintances have sought to boycott national media. However, an interviewee discusses how he has tried to engage and speak out against the far-right anti-Muslim narrative by writing media articles.

Young Dutch Muslims interviewed felt that in order to tackle the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, the role of the media must be addressed. In addition to the media, respondents also felt that Dutch Muslims need to be more engaged in national politics. Respondents felt that by engaging in politics, Muslims would be able to work with politicians to overcome fear of Muslims and construct effective policies to tackle the far-right.

To summarise, young Muslims

interviewed in the Netherlands discuss the increasing electoral success and public acceptability of the far-right. Whilst respondents did not mention the general policies of the PVV, the interviewees were aware of the anti-Muslim narrative promoted by the far-right, including framing Islam as intolerant and antithetical to Dutch culture and that this narrative enabled Dutch far-right politicians to justify and legitimise their anti-Muslim stance. Young Muslims interviewed in the Netherlands felt that the media was central in conveying and fuelling the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. However, interviewees also note the use of social media by the far-right to voice the anti-Muslim narrative. Young Muslims in the Netherlands also discuss their media and community engagement as a means of combatting the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. Young Dutch Muslims interviewed stress the importance of political participation and media engagement by Muslims as a means of countering the anti-Muslim narrative.

## Europe

Across the six cases considered within this report, young Muslims are generally less aware of other far-right organisations in other European countries than in their own countries. No one national far-right movement emerged as a being known by all respondents. Instead, respondents cited numerous countries as those they felt that had the worst national far-right organisations - countries and far-right organisations mentioned include Switzerland, France and the FN, the UK and the EDL, the Netherlands, Greece, Belgium, Italy and Denmark.

Respondents commonly linked countries with geographical proximity and shared language as having similar far-right organisations to that seen in their own respective national cases. For example, Swedish respondents saw Germany and Denmark as having similar far-right organisations to the SD in Sweden. Also French respondents cited the Swiss far-right party the Scwiezerische Volkspartei (SVP) as being similar to the far-right in France. One French interviewee noted that this perception may be due to the francophone similarities between France and some Swiss regions, meaning that it would be more likely for him as a French respondent to hear about other French speaking cases.

A British respondent suggested that the limited knowledge of other political far-right organisations in the UK can be attributed to the general political culture in the UK:

**“ I don't think I know that much about the far-right across Europe. I think that is one of the problems here in the UK, here it is less common for the general population to engage in national politics, especially when compared with those in Europe. It seems to me that British people would be less bothered about things happening on the continent.**

Whilst none of the young Muslim respondents mentioned the CAI movement, interviewees in Sweden and France highlight the coming together of European far-right organisations across Europe:

**“ The far-right is actually very good at connecting with other groups in Europe, this is quite ironic because they are very nationalist and they don't like other countries, but they are very active in working with other European groups. One of the SD leaders is very active in organizing different far-right organisations in Europe to create an umbrella organization. That's quite interesting actually.**

In addition to the identification of calls for the unification of far-right organisations across Europe, a French respondent also highlights the institutional coming together of far-right organisations in Europe:



“**They have a parliamentary group in the EU parliament and they believe in national supremacy, they are eurosceptics and believe that integration in Europe is threatening their national heritage. They are nostalgic for the past and think all problems, both economic and social, are due to the changes that Europe is facing in terms of minority visibility. Their hatred is crystalized around Islam and Muslims because they are...they think, the furthest and the most different from them and their historical heritage.**

As mentioned above, young Muslim respondents who commented on the far-right across Europe felt that the common far-right anti-Muslim narrative allowed for the unification of far-right movements. As a French respondent pointed out:

“**It means that their main target is Islam. Muslim presence, today, enables them to unite and gather.**

For respondents the far-right anti-Muslim narrative's presence across Europe meant that European Muslims on the whole were subject to threat of physical violence. Furthermore, Swedish respondents felt that the threat of violence was not specific to Muslims, but that the far-right represented a threat of violence for wider Swedish society.

Interestingly only respondents in Belgium felt that the far-right anti-Muslim narrative in another country, in this case France, was influential on the

national debate that they experienced. Nonetheless, interviewees in Sweden felt that the Europe wide far-right anti-Muslim narrative contributed to increasing violence against Muslims in Sweden.

Across the six cases, Muslim respondents attributed the increasing far-right anti-Muslim narrative to the economic crisis and, like in the national contexts, the lack of awareness or understanding of Muslims in Europe. Similarly, respondents felt that the European far-right anti-Muslim narrative was built upon and was successful due to the way in which it is centred on the notion of Muslims as the 'other':

“**They build on the fear of the other, so it's very easy to gain popular credibility by showing that they are the more able to conserve the national identity by regularly attacking the Muslims - the "other".**

Therefore young Muslims suggest that the far-right anti-Muslim narrative across Europe can be tackled, in part, by increasing positive awareness and understanding of Muslims in Europe.

In addition, whilst young Muslim respondents had often not been engaged in combatting the far-right anti-Muslim narrative across Europe, young Muslims highlight that the pan-European far-right anti-Muslim narrative must be officially recognised by authorities as dangerous and seriously tackled.

Furthermore, respondents felt that collaboration by anti-discrimination organisations across Europe would enable young Muslims to better deal

with the anti-Muslim narrative and its consequences. In addition to Muslim collaboration and engagement with anti-discrimination organisations, interviewees suggest the value of looking at other marginalised communities across Europe in order to draw on their positive experiences and best practice.

In summary, respondents' awareness of specific far-right organisations across Europe was sparse, and influenced by geographic proximity and linguistic similarity.

Furthermore, whilst respondents did not specifically cite CAI or other far-right organisations that enable the far-right across Europe to come together, respondents felt that the shared anti-Muslim narrative was a common theme for far-right organisations to unite around. As with national cases, respondents felt that the rise of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative could be traced to the current economic crisis experienced across Europe, and a Europe-wide lack of knowledge of Islam or Muslims. It was felt that the lack of understanding of Islam and Muslims across Europe enabled European far-right organisations to demonise and 'otherise' Muslim communities.

Interviewees felt that the unified far-right represented a source of physical danger for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Thus, a response was deemed necessary. Interviewees felt that the European far-right anti-Muslim narrative could be tackled by increasing the awareness of Muslims across Europe, and engaging with anti-discrimination organisations. Unlike in the national cases, the role of the media and political participation was not stressed on the European level.

# Conclusion

Derived from the common themes that emerge as a result of the qualitative interviews conducted with young Muslims in France, the UK, Belgium, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands, the report establishes the following conclusions:

- **Awareness of the Far-right:** The report notes that generally European Muslim youth across the six countries have high levels of awareness and understanding of the far-right in their respective countries. Moreover, interviewees had a significantly higher awareness of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative than of the far-right's general policies. Respondents were less aware of the far-right across Europe although some interviewees pointed to the convergence of far-right movement across Europe around the anti-Muslim narrative.
- **Emotional response:** The report concludes that the far-right anti-Muslim narrative evokes a strong emotional response among respondents across the six countries. Interviewees reported that the far-right anti-Muslim narrative makes them feel fear, shock, upset, hurt, rejection by society, revulsion, ostracization, frustration, anxiety, concern and worry. This highlights the negative emotional and psychological impact of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative on the European Muslim youth population. Further research is needed to examine the impact this may have on the ability and willingness of young European Muslims to participate in all spheres of society, and its role in creating feelings of isolation and alienation. Emotional responses to the far-right anti-Muslim narrative were highest in relation to the respective national contexts. This can be attributed to the increased knowledge of the local case, and more limited knowledge of other European or unified European far-right organisations.

However, the report highlights that the young people interviewed within this report are keen to cast off an attitude of victimhood, by moving from reactivity to proactive engagement. Interviewees suggest that the anti-Muslim narrative serves a catalyst for young European Muslims to increase their already high levels of community engagement and challenge the public negative perception of Muslims in Europe.

- **Media:** Young Muslims interviewed within this report discussed the central role played by the media in both conveying and fuelling the hostile far-right anti-Muslim narrative. Across the board interviewees felt that national media outlets sensationalised stories relating to acts committed by individuals perceived as Muslim, thus contributing to the far-right anti-Muslim narrative. In addition, the media are seen as conveying the anti-Muslim narrative through affording far-right activists time to air their divisive anti-Muslim view

- **Normalising Muslim Presence:** Through the course of the report, respondents in each of the six case studies attributed the increasing popularity of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative to a general lack of awareness of Muslims in each of the national cases, and Europe on the whole. For the young Muslims interviewed within the report, engaging in dialogue with the wider community is vital, and enables them to proactively combat the negative image of Muslims brought about by the far-right anti-Muslim narrative.

Young Muslims interviewed within this report also stressed the importance of emphasising the normalness of the European Muslim population and their contribution to European society.

- **Islamophobia:** Participants within this report also felt that the concept of Islamophobia was commonly negated by influential figures, such as politicians. Respondents felt that denying the existence of discrimination of Muslim communities in Europe silences any discussion, and allows the far-right anti-Muslim narrative to persist unchallenged.

Therefore, young European Muslims call on European and national authorities to effectively define, condemn and take action against Islamophobia in Europe. Allen (2010) notes varying national definitions and understandings of Islamophobia. Nonetheless based on interview responses, a European working definition of Islamophobia may enable young Muslims to effectively tackle the anti-Muslim narrative and discrimination of Muslims in general.

- **Political Participation:** In order to tackle the issues raised by the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, young European Muslims interviewed within this report stress the need for political participation by Muslims. The nature of political participation cited ranged from lobbying local politicians to respond to and condemn the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, to calling for political representation of Muslims, and political representation by Muslims.
- **Anti-Muslim Narrative in Politics:** A common observation among participants within this report, particularly those in France and Sweden, is that the anti-Muslim narrative is not confined to the far-right and instead permeates the wider political sphere. This sentiment reflects notions of a rightward shift in politics (Savage, 2010), and suggestions of a political convergence on an anti-Muslim narrative (Allen, 2010).

- **Cooperation and Collaboration:** Young Muslims interviewed within the report also discuss the need to tackle the anti-Muslim narrative by collaborating with other local and national anti-discrimination and minority networks. Respondents believed that collaboration and cooperation with anti-discrimination organisations would enable Muslims subject to the anti-Muslim narrative to draw on positive experiences and best practice of other organisations. Furthermore, collaboration with anti-discrimination organisations was believed to be a useful tool in legitimising and giving credibility to the fight against the far-right anti-Muslim narrative, and would also enable Muslims to combat all forms of discrimination that exist within society.

# Glossary

- BNP – British National Party (UK)
- CCIF – Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie en France (France)
- EDL – English Defence League (UK)
- ENAR – European Network Against Racism (Europe)
- FEMYSO – Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisation (Europe)
- FN – Front National (France)
- NPD - Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Germany)
- PVV – Partij Voor Vrijheid (Netherlands)
- SD – Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden)
- SV – Schweizerische Volkspartei (Sweden)
- UKIP – UK Independence Party (UK)
- VB – Vlaams Belang (Belgium)

# Useful Contacts

Below is a brief list of organisations active within the UK, France, Belgium, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands that may be useful for those suffering the consequences of the far-right anti-Muslim narrative.

- **UK:** Engage: <http://www.iengage.org/contact-us>  
Tell Mama: <http://tellmamauk.org/submit-a-report/>  
FOSIS: Federation of Student Islamic Societies: [www.fosis.org.uk/contact](http://www.fosis.org.uk/contact)
- **France:** CCIF: [contact@islamophobie.net](mailto:contact@islamophobie.net) +33 9 54 80 25 93
- **Germany:** Reach Out: <http://www.reachoutberlin.de>  
Inssan: [Antidiskriminierung@inssan.de](mailto:Antidiskriminierung@inssan.de)  
IGMG: <http://www.igmg.org/>
- **Belgium:** Kif Kif: [info@kifkif.be](mailto:info@kifkif.be)  
Muslim Rights Belgium: <http://www.mrb-online.be/>
- **Netherlands:** Spior: <http://www.spior.nl/contacts/>  
Euro-mediterraan Centrum voor Migratie en Ontwikkeling: <http://www.emcemo.nl/>
- **Sweden:** Sveriges Unga Muslimer: [info@ungamuslimer.se](mailto:info@ungamuslimer.se)  
Muslimer Forfred: [info@muslimerforfred.org](mailto:info@muslimerforfred.org)



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