

Religious Plurality in Contemporary Societies

Intellectual Output 2 – Unit IV



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IERS Digital Modules on religious diversity and migrations

- [Religious diversity in contemporary Europe](#)
- [Religions, migrations and minorities](#)

Europe has switched from an **old regime of religious diversity** based upon the domination of a certain denomination, to a **new regime** where plurality is granted in law. Over the last three decades, religious plurality has increased in Europe in relationship with the recent migration flows. The major issue is the growing presence of Muslim and Protestant Evangelical faithful, particularly in Western European countries.

The traditional regime of plurality in Europe

Traditionally, most European countries have a preponderant Christian religious background. Thus before the present time, religious plurality was primarily internal to Christianity with the coexistence of its three major branches: **Orthodox Christianity**, inheritor of the Eastern Roman Empire and dominant in south-east Europe and Russia; **Roman Catholicism**, dominant in western and southern Europe; and **Protestantism** which appeared after the split of the Reformation (16th c.) and spread to Nordic countries, and to a lesser extent to western and central European countries.

Most European countries had a politically dominant denomination with a status of **state or established religion**. Other religions were either tolerated with some discrimination or prosecuted. **Jewish communities** were widespread, particularly in eastern Europe, while **Muslim communities** were located in the Balkan countries and in southern Russia.

The liberal democratic turn: from religious diversity to religious pluralism

After the French Revolution and throughout the 19th century, religious affiliation evolves from a **community mode** to an **individual mode**. In a first stage, the members of the main minorities (such as Protestants in Catholic countries or vice versa, and Jews) gradually gained **equality as citizens** of a modern State. In a second stage, all citizens, even non-Christians and atheists were granted equal religious rights. In this way, factual religious diversity became legally **recognized pluralism**. In the present, we can observe a convergence of democratic models of regulation of religion by the liberal states in Europe which guarantee the functioning of religious pluralism.

In addition, thanks to the growing **secularization** of European societies from the 19th century to the present, more and more people declare themselves as indifferent or **non-religious**.

New forms of diversity connected with ethnic plurality

Since the 1970s, a new European landscape regarding the place and diversity of religions has appeared. The new religious plurality is mostly an effect of **migrations** from Asian, African or South American countries, so its intensity and its progression follow the history of colonization (and **decolonization**) and the routes of economic or political migrations. For those reasons, new minorities appeared first in Western and Northern Europe, more recently in Southern European countries.

This unprecedented proliferation of multi-religious presence in European countries has been challenging the **management of the religious market**, particularly in countries like Italy or Spain which still had, in a very recent past, a single majority religion.

More information on:

- [Introduction about contemporary religious pluralism](#)

- [Religions and urban space in the context of super-diverse European cities](#)

Evangelical-Pentecostal churches

Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity is presently the most growing and salient form of Christianity in the world. **Evangelicalism** is a sensibility present in many Protestant Churches, principally among the Baptist family (it should not be confused with the Evangelical Church which is a name for the Lutheran Church in some countries, like Germany). **Pentecostalism** is a **charismatic and emotional religiosity** inside Protestantism. Born in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, it has largely spread in Latin America (Brazil), Africa and Asia. The largest Church is called Assemblies of God.

In Europe, most of Pentecostal Christians are migrants from other continents and their temples are mainly located in the suburbs.

In France, many Rom people have been converted to a Pentecostal Church called « Vie et Lumière » [Life and Light].

Muslim minorities

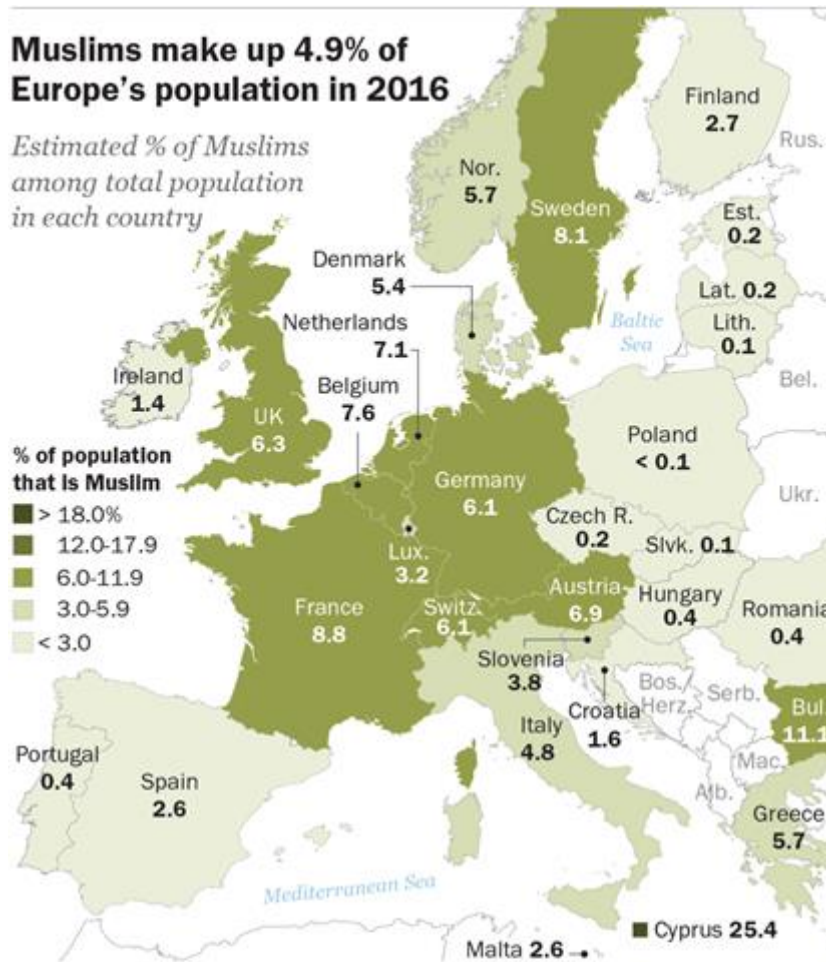
Among the « new » minorities, Muslims represent the largest community. Outside Eastern Europe where Muslim communities have subsisted from Mongol or Ottoman heritage, Muslim presence is the result of contemporary migration flows related to the **industrialization** of European countries. In France and the United Kingdom, Muslim migrants were already numerous in the 1950s-1960s thanks both to a higher level of industrialization and to a colonial history in the Muslim world (Arab countries for France, South Asia for the UK). In Germany migration routes are rather based on economic reasons.

In Southern countries like Italy and Spain, economic migrations were more recent: starting from the 1980s or 1990s. Northern countries, like Sweden, have traditionally implemented a welcoming policy toward political refugees.

France is the country with the highest level of people of Muslim descent (between 5 and 6 million), but Italy, where migrations are very recent, has now a significant Muslim population of around 3 million people. These estimations have political and societal stakes because migration flows are ascending and will probably continue in the close future, but it should be noted that they correspond only to the number of people from a **Muslim background**, which is larger number than that of the people who claim a **Muslim affiliation** in opinion polls.

Muslims make up 4.9% of Europe's population in 2016

Estimated % of Muslims among total population in each country



Estimated size of Muslim population in 2016

REGION	Estimated size of Muslim population in 2016	% of population that is Muslim
EUROPE	25,770,000	4.9%
France	5,720,000	8.8
Germany	4,950,000	6.1
United Kingdom	4,130,000	6.3
Italy	2,870,000	4.8
Netherlands	1,210,000	7.1
Spain	1,180,000	2.6

Note: Europe is defined here as the 28 nations of the EU plus Norway and Switzerland. "Estimated size of Muslim population in 2016" column lists only countries with at least 1 million Muslims. Estimates do not include those asylum seekers who are not expected to gain legal status to remain in Europe, including roughly 320,000 Muslims in Germany and 140,000 Muslims in France. Source: Pew Research Center estimates. See Methodology for details. "Europe's Growing Muslim Population"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Pew research center. Religion and public life

[http://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population/pf_11-29-17_muslims-update-20/]

1. Muslims made up 4.9% of Europe's population in 2016

Asian religion minorities

Other religious minorities from Asian countries are:

- Indian religions: Hindus, Sikhs, Jains coming mainly from India or Sri Lanka;
- Buddhists coming from South East Asia or China;
- Chinese cults from continental China, Taiwan or Vietnam.

Hindus are mainly present in Great Britain thanks to the British colonial past in South Asia. They represent around 2% of the population. **Traditional Hinduism** is practiced only by people of Hindu descent, while some Western converts adhere to **neo-Hindu movements** like the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), known colloquially as the Hare Krishna movement.

Buddhist people are around 1.3 million in Europe, principally settled in France, Great Britain and Germany. Most of them are migrants or from an Asian background. As in the case of Hinduism, there is a sharp distinction between **traditional Buddhism** practiced by Asian and **neo-Buddhism** which attracts Western people without a Buddhist background: Western converts favour a **psychospiritual approach** to Buddhism and practice diverse forms of **meditation** instead of rituals. The movements which are most influential among Westerners are Tibetan Buddhism, Zen Buddhism and mass movements for laity like Soka Gakkai.

« **Chinese religion** » mixes Daoist and Buddhist deities and rituals. Its manifestations have a generally discreet and inconspicuous form, even in Chinese neighbourhoods called « Chinatowns », except during the New Year festival in February.



[source : https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quartiers_asiatiques_de_Paris#/media/File:Paris_13e_-_Olympiades_-_temple_bouddhique_1.JPG]

2. Entrance of Chinese Buddhist temple in Paris's Chinatown in the 13th district of Paris.

More information on:

- [Modern and contemporary Hinduism](#)
- [Buddhism and modernity](#)
- [Chinese religions](#)