



## **Forgotten women: the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women in Denmark**

### **Key findings**

There are no statistical data on the number of Muslim women in Denmark as there is no comprehensive equality data collection disaggregated by ethnicity or religion. The lack of data disaggregated along ethnic/religious lines and the use of different proxies, definitions and categories were an obstacle during the research. However, the research used proxies based on assumptions on the link between nationality, ethnicity and religion among immigrants from non-Western Muslim majority countries and their descendants. Moreover, cases of discrimination and hate crime remain highly under-reported.

Immigrants and their descendants form 11.1% of the population of Denmark. Of these, 58% of immigrants originate from non-Western countries, while 85% of descendants originate from non-Western countries. The estimated number of Muslims has increased significantly since 1980 - from about 0.6% of the population to about 4.2% (236,300 people) in 2012, according to a study by the Centre for Contemporary Religion at Aarhus University.

### **Situation and discrimination in employment: additional obstacles when a woman and a Muslim**

#### **Women**

**Men earn on average between 15 and 21% more than women.** The gender pay gap also grows with a higher education. Women with higher education earn 21.3% less than men with higher education.

There is an **over-representation of women in part-time positions** and in the lower paid public sector, where women make up as much as 75% of the workforce, while men are over-represented in the private sector with 60%.

Women's representation has been increasing steadily on most fronts in Denmark, but in top management positions and boards of directors there is still a low proportion of women - whereas men account for 70% of top executives.

**10% of the female population in Copenhagen have felt discriminated against.** Discrimination based on gender in the labour market is mainly related to equal pay and firing during maternity and is often caused by absence due to childcare.

#### **Women with a migration background**

Among immigrants from non-Western countries, **43% of the women and 51.9% of men are in employment.** There is only a slight difference between women and men from Iran and Somalia and the greatest differentiation is among Pakistanis (63.5% men and 32.8% women are employed).

There has been an increase of 15 percentage points in **employment rates among women from non-Western countries** in recent years. This should be seen in light of the relatively low starting point for this group, with only four out of ten women being in the workforce in 1998. In addition, increasing education levels among second and third generation migrants narrow the employment gap between ethnic minority men and women. Nevertheless, a survey shows that although female descendants are performing better in education than male descendants, the period between completing education and the first job is longer for women. The duration of the first job is also shorter for women than for men.

**Among immigrants who are unemployed, women are the biggest group**, particularly women who have come to Denmark through family reunification and do not have legal rights to receive public benefits ('transfer payments') and are facing an insecure economic situation. These women are at risk of becoming homeless if they divorce.

According to a study by the Institute for the Study of Labour (IZA), the largest predicted wage gaps (22-26%) are found for immigrants from Turkey, Africa and Pakistan. The median income of immigrant men is 301,600 kr. yearly. For immigrant women it is 263,300 kr. yearly. Accordingly, it appears that women are exposed to double discrimination, on the basis of their gender and ethnicity.

According to studies, the **primary barriers** in relation to immigrant women's access to the labour market are a lack of Danish language skills, lack of qualifications, lack of networks, poor health, traditional gender roles and discrimination.

### **Muslim women**

Muslim communities perceive that they are mainly discriminated on the basis of ethnicity (72%) and religion (38%). Ethnic minorities feel more vulnerable to discrimination than the majority of the population.

A study consisting of telephone interviews among 503 unemployed first generation immigrants from non-Western countries confirmed that the headscarf is a major cause for Muslim women to feel discriminated against: 55% of women in the study responded that they 'greatly' or 'somewhat' agree that wearing a headscarf is an obstacle to getting a job. This attitude is particularly true for women between 18-29 years old (6 out of 10 respondents believed that headscarves can cost a potential job). Furthermore 64% said that it is 'very important' for them to have a job, while only 8% replied that it is 'not important'.

A survey of 45 companies found that female religious employees are often highly visible in the workplace and that a large group of female employees wishes for or makes demands for religious symbols or clothing (in particular wearing a headscarf) matching the company brand. To the question on employees wishing to wear a headscarf, 58% of the business representatives replied that this happens 'often'. The study also found that 9 out of 10 of the surveyed companies meet Muslim women's needs to be covered. However, it is necessary to note that the study was conducted among large companies that employ many ethnic minorities.

In a poll conducted for the newspaper *metroXpress* in 2007, 47% of respondents answered that they either 'completely agree' or 'agree' that the parliament should be a zone free of headscarves.

## **Violence against women, hate crime and hate speech: Muslim women at the intersection of violence**

Somalis and Turks in Denmark are on the 'top 10' list of minority groups most targeted by assault or threat in the 27 EU Member States in 2008, according to a study by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency.

The Danish Security and Intelligence Agency's (PET) latest hate crime reports from 2013 to 2015 found that the majority of religiously motivated hate crimes are committed against Muslims.

Verbal and physical harassment, such as insults, spitting, physical contact (e.g. to shove or grab a headscarf), and written harassment (e.g. threatening letters) represent the highest amount of cases.

Research indicates that Muslim girls and women in particular experience discrimination in relation to the use of headscarves on public transport (36%) or being ignored in shops (28%), as well as because of their ethnicity.

In a survey on young people's experience of discrimination in Copenhagen, 60% of the women who responded to the survey have experienced being shouted at or similar experiences, and many of these incidents were based on their appearance and clothes. Ethnic minority women experience more incidents related to their ethnicity, religion, and religious symbols such as the headscarf.

### **Court cases**

In 2005, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of Dansk Supermarked [Danish Supermarket] that it was not illegal to prohibit employees from wearing religious headscarves during working hours. This has led to some debate in the media over the years. In 2013, the debate flared up again when Nada Fraije sought job training in the supermarket Netto, but was told that it was forbidden to wear a headscarf. She went to her local newspaper with the story. A lawyer wrote an opinion piece in the newspaper *Politiken*, which led to the creation of the group 'Boycott Føtex, Bilka and Netto'. The media debate that followed the boycott group resulted in the removal of the rule by Dansk Supermarked.

### **Legislation**

In 2009, the political party De Konservative [The Conservatives], as part of a policy initiative on integration, proposed a so-called 'burqa ban'. The ban would apply to public spaces and was presented as an attempt to liberate Muslim women who were oppressed and forced to veil. Initially the government supported the proposal. It set up an official working group in August 2009, with the aim to study the use of the burqa and niqab in Denmark. The group commissioned a 'burqa-report' from researchers at the University of Copenhagen to identify the number of women in Denmark wearing either the niqab or burqa. The research concluded that between 100 and 200 women in Denmark were wearing either a niqab or a burqa, and that half of these were 'ethnic' Danish converts. Given that the report concluded that there is a very limited use of the niqab and burqa in Danish society and that this is primarily a voluntary choice ethnic Danish women make, the issue turned into a major political dispute. In addition, according to legal experts in the Ministry of Justice, the proposal would contravene the Danish Constitution. Subsequently, the government decided that it would instead ensure that existing rules are used to prevent the use of the niqab or burqa as much as possible.

In 2009 the parliament passed a law (popularly called the Headscarf Act) forbidding judges to wear religious or political symbols which stated that: "judges must appear neutral and thus support the public's general respect and trust to the courts as the judicial power". The law has been widely

criticised, including by a number of lawyers who have threatened to sue. The lawyers' union DJØF also stated that the law would "encounter many legal difficulties", but the law remains unchanged.

## Good practice

Research centre KVINFO's mentor network matches women with refugee and immigrant backgrounds with women who are active in Danish society. The concept is very successful: more than 7,500 women have participated in the network since its inception in 2002, and more than 3,200 mentors were matched.

## Media

Journalist Deniz B. Serinci examined in his thesis the Danish media coverage of Muslim women, in 1,600 articles among six of the largest national newspapers in the years 1999 to 2013. He concluded that the media largely wrote negatively about Muslim women and mostly in relation to female oppression, social control, headscarves, forced marriages, honour killings and female genital mutilation. He concluded that the media in this way has contributed to an 'us' and 'them' division, with Muslim women represented as living under oppression and control while non-Muslim women are represented as the liberated counter-image. The few articles with positive angles on Muslim women are presented as rare exceptions.

## Main recommendations

- Disaggregate hate crime data by gender, religion and ethnicity to better address the issue of multiple discrimination
- The media and politicians should take a greater social responsibility to represent a more nuanced and critical view of the many different groups of Muslims in Denmark, rather than uncritically show radicals as representatives of one "homogeneous" Islamic group
- Promote and set-up initiatives between municipalities, NGOs and private companies to support the inclusion in the labour market of women with an ethnic background.
- Fund and support academic research on the experiences of Muslim women and the intersectional discrimination they might be affected by.

*This factsheet is based on findings from research undertaken by Nina Manojlovic-Karlshøj in Denmark in the frame of ENAR's project "Forgotten women: the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women". The research was conducted between December 2014 and January 2016.*

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