

BELGIUM

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Introduction²

During most of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on all religious activities, as these were suspended or limited due to safety measures taken at both federal and regional levels. Mosques were closed or had to limit their attendance; public religious events could not be organised, and celebrations could only take place within the close family circle. This impacted Muslim communities for both Ramadan and 'Id al-Fitr.

The other main development was at the federal governmental level. A new Government was installed, and the new Minister of Justice made known that fighting against radicalism was one of his key priorities. He also heavily criticised the Executive of Muslims in Belgium (*Executif des Musulmans de Belgique / Executief van de Moslims van België* – EMB) and some of its activities, sparking a new controversy.

Public Debates

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² In the areas covered by this report, the federal Government is responsible for the recognition of denominations and the regulation of philosophical communities (i.e. Humanists and Buddhists), as well as chaplaincies in the military, in prisons, and in hospitals. The Flemish, Walloon, and Brussels-Capital regions have responsibility for regulating local religious communities, burials, and animal welfare. Flemish, French, and German-speaking communities are responsible for education (including religious education), young offenders, and the media. Provinces (except for the Brussels-Capital region) and municipalities supervise and finance recognised local religious communities, including recognised mosques, and implement regulations coming from the federal and regional authorities.

Places of worship of all religions were hit by safety measures taken by the Belgian authorities against the COVID-19 pandemic. Successive measures saw restrictions on attendance or even total or limited closures of such places, leading some groupings and individuals from various religious backgrounds to express themselves in the media against such measures. These restrictions were challenged, albeit unsuccessfully, before the Council of State, it affirming that the safety measures were justified.³ The Executive of Muslims in Belgium,⁴ often jointly with other Muslim organisations, insisted communities respect the safety measures. All mosques and communities had to adapt to these restrictions for both Ramadan and 'Id al-Fitr.⁵ Like many associations, some mosques provided various kinds of support to institutions and staff involved in fighting the pandemic.⁶

Following the 2019 elections, the federal Government was only formed on 30 September 2020, with a seven-party coalition. The political agreement did not mention Islam,⁷ as the paragraph on “Religions” only mentioned the planned recognition of Buddhism. Therefore, in its political plans for the duration of the coalition, the Minister of Justice,⁸ Vincent Van Quickenborne,⁹ was more explicit. His main objectives were a more inclusive society, to counter hate speech and racism from all horizons (from far-right to “Islamist extremists”), to

³ www.raadvst-consetat.be/?page=news&lang=fr&newsitem=650, accessed 8 February 2021.

⁴ For its ca. 16 press releases, see the section on “Coronavirus” at www.embnet.be/fr/communiqués-de-presse, accessed 8 February 2021.

⁵ www.lavenir.net/cnt/dmf20200426_01470045/pas-de-particularite-luxembourgeoise; www.lavenir.net/cnt/dmf20200415_01466982/le-ramadan-aussi-sera-particulier; <https://plus.lesoir.be/316379/article/2020-07-30/fete-de-laid-les-mosquees-de-bruxelles-seront-fermees-ce-vendredi-annonce>. On problems for Ramadan related shopping: www.lavenir.net/cnt/dmf20200426_01470045/pas-de-particularite-luxembourgeoise, all accessed 14 February 2021.

⁶ www.lavenir.net/cnt/dmf20200430_01471166/coronavirus-l-union-des-mosquees-liegeoises-offre-50-000-euros-au-chr-de-la-citadelle or www.lavenir.net/cnt/dmf20200407_01464788/video-deux-jeunes-de-la-mosquee-assalam-ont-distribue-des-repas-au-personnel-soignant-et-aux-migrants, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁷ www.belgium.be/sites/default/files/accord_de_gouvernement_2020.pdf, accessed 7 February 2021.

⁸ www.dekamer.be/FLWB/PDF/55/1610/55K1610015.pdf, accessed 7 February 2021.

⁹ His party is Open-Vld, a right-wing liberal party that has had various positions favouring a greater separation of Church and State over the last few years, including the inclusion of the French concept of *laïcité* in the Belgian Constitution: www.lalibre.be/dernieres-depeches/belga/laicite-de-l-etat-patrick-dewael-lance-le-debat-a-la-chambre-5694df5d3570ed38950e81d6, accessed 7 February 2021.

counter foreign influences, and to have a new start for the Great Mosque of Brussels as a worship and meeting place in partnership with Muslim communities. These political priorities were further developed during the budgetary discussions.¹⁰ They included: fighting terrorism (including Islamic terrorism), extremism and hate speech; paying attention to radicalisation processes, lone wolves and radicalised detainees, especially those to be released;¹¹ and pursuing a dialogue with recognised religions, and reviewing the cooperation agreement with the regions. In the ensuing parliamentary debate,¹² MPs from the far-right party *Vlaams Belang* pleaded for a screening of all mosques, Muslim associations, imams, and teachers of Islamic religion, and challenged the concept of “Islamophobia” used by the Minister.

In early December, the Minister of Justice sparked controversy¹³ by declaring that the EMB was not representative enough, both of the Muslim population in Belgium and from a Flemish/French-speaking perspective, and that its plans for the Great Mosque could not go any further because of alleged Moroccan influence. He also targeted the vice-president, and former president, of the EMB, Salah Echallaoui, accusing him of being an agent of influence on behalf of Morocco. There were various reactions. On the one hand, the EMB and its partners, such as the Belgian *Diyanet* Religious Foundation (*Belçika Diyanet Vakfı*, the Belgian-based branch of the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı – Diyanet*)), reacted angrily at the minister’s comment, considering it an interference into the affairs of the Muslim community, especially as the minister had not met previously with the EMB leadership.¹⁴

¹⁰ www.dekamer.be/doc/FLWB/pdf/55/1580/55K1580016.pdf, accessed 7 February 2021.

¹¹ www.lachambre.be/doc/flwb/pdf/55/1501/55k1501001.pdf#search=%221501%20%2055k%20%3Cin%3E%20keywords%22, accessed 13 February 2021.

¹² www.lachambre.be/FLWB/PDF/55/1578/55K1578012.pdf, accessed 7 February 2021.

¹³ www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20201204_97931619?&articlehash=B95901E1707CE0C80BEA0ADB3C21B1543EF891F9C36BEB6BEBDA379102B5456AF2470A8DADEAF0A4E27EA09F517B8494027E1FD58B3494B879911C1FA678F280, accessed 12 February 2021.

¹⁴ www.embnet.be/fr/les-institutions-musulmanes-de-belgique-condamnent-les-declarations-infondees-du-ministre-de-la; www.embnet.be/fr/les-institutions-des-musulmans-de-belgique-denoncent-les-sorties-mediaticques-des-3-membres-desavoues; www.embnet.be/fr/les-institutions-des-musulmans-de-belgique-demandent-reparation-et-justice-0, accessed 7 February 2021.

Equally, some analysts were surprised to see Echallaoui at the centre of the controversy, as he had initiated or implemented most of the recent projects of the EMB and had previously received the total backing of the previous minister.¹⁵ The controversy led to the resignation of the vice-president (and former president) of the EMB, Salah Echallaoui, who denied all accusations by the minister.

Most debates on Islam—in the press and social media, often expanding into the political sphere—quickly became heated, such as those on *laïcité*,¹⁶ on the Islamic headscarf,¹⁷ on Charlie Hebdo caricatures,¹⁸ on reactions to the murder of a French teacher Samuel Paty,¹⁹ on mosques in Flanders,²⁰ or on different visions of Islam.²¹ Some of these debates were regularly accompanied by offensive comments and even threats to protagonists, leading to judiciary actions and condemnations.²²

As for Islamophobia, the 2020 report by *Unia*,²³ the intergovernmental centre for equal opportunities (with data up to 2019), described the situation more like the level seen before the 2016 attacks, with 290 claims of Islamophobia (down from 319 in 2017), the main concern being hate speech on the internet and in the streets, and problems around the Islamic

¹⁵ <https://lameuse.sudinfo.be/703007/article/2020-12-09/la-sortie-de-van-quickenborne-est-un-coup-darret-pour-un-islam-de-belgique>; www.lalibre.be/debats/opinions/executif-des-musulmans-de-belgique-surrealisme-a-la-belge-5fe19519d8ad5844d1cba008; www.levif.be/actualite/belgique/executif-des-musulmans-de-belgique-culte-et-espionnage-ne-font-pas-bon-menage/article-longread-1376697.html, accessed 7 February 2021.

¹⁶ www.lalibre.be/debats/opinions/pour-un-islam-de-belgique-au-diapason-des-droits-humains-5fdb65f79978e227df203081, accessed 15 February 2021.

¹⁷ <https://plus.lesoir.be/314021/article/2020-07-18/cachez-ce-foulard>; <https://plus.lesoir.be/314305/article/2020-07-20/le-hijab-et-les-errements-du-neo-feminisme>, both accessed 15 February 2021.

¹⁸ www.rtl.be/info/belgique/societe/caricature-de-mahomet-dans-une-ecole-a-molenbeek-l-enseignant-est-reintegre-mais-il-a-ete-demoli-dit-son-avocat-1266560.aspx, accessed 15 February 2021.

¹⁹ www.lecho.be/economie-politique/belgique/general/nadia-geerts-dire-je-suis-samuel-paty-n-est-pas-une-opinion-personnelle-c-est-une-valeur/10284393.html, accessed 15 February 2021.

²⁰ www.vrt.be/vrtnws/fr/2020/11/21/interpellation-dun-jeune-homme-qui-a-menace-la-ministre-zuhal-de/, accessed 15 February 2021.

²¹ Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique, *Renouvellement de l'Organe Représentatif du Culte Musulman en Belgique (ORCMB): Bilan et perspectives* (Brussels: unpublished, 2020); see also www.facebook.com/michael.privot.1/posts/10159595759996554, accessed 15 February 2021.

²² www.7sur7.be/belgique/il-avait-menace-zuhal-demir-150-heures-de-travail-a9d28da1/, accessed 15 February 2021.

²³ www.unia.be.

headscarf.²⁴ This represents 86% of all claims related to religious issues (down from 90% the year before).²⁵ Some of these claims come from the Muslim organisation Collective Against Islamophobia in Belgium (*Collectif contre l'islamophobie en Belgique* - CCIB).²⁶

Intolerance and hate speech from some radical groupings towards specific groups, most notably Shi'is and Jews, were again reported. The *Unia* report published in 2020 mentioned a decrease in antisemitic acts in 2019,²⁷ while it had reported an upwards trend previously.²⁸ The self-evaluation report of the EMB²⁹ mentioned antisemitism emanating from some radical groupings, and a report for the French Jean-Jaurès Foundation also reported some antisemitic stances among Muslim youth in Brussels.³⁰

Transnational Links

Despite a large proportion of Muslims in Belgium holding Belgian citizenship, links to the countries where their families came from remain strong, especially among Muslims of Moroccan or Turkish descent. The main umbrella organisation on the Moroccan side is the Union of Muslims in Belgium (*Rassemblement des musulmans de Belgique* - RMB), which receives some financial support from Morocco and usually welcomes imams, female religious

²⁴ Unia, *Rapport annuel 2019* (Brussels: Unia, 2020),

www.unia.be/files/Documenten/Jaarrapport/Rapport_annuel_2019_AS.pdf, accessed 7 February 2021.

²⁵ Unia, *Rapport chiffres 2019* (Brussels: Unia, 2020), www.unia.be/files/Documenten/Jaarrapport/2020_Rapport_chiffres_2019_DEF.pdf, accessed 7 February 2021.

²⁶ <https://ccib-ctib.be/index.php/2020/09/29/rapport-chiffres-2019-en-belgique-neuf-victimes-de-lislamophobie-sur-10-sont-des-femmes/>, accessed 7 February 2021.

²⁷ www.unia.be/files/Documenten/Jaarrapport/2020_Rapport_chiffres_2019_DEF.pdf, accessed 7 February 2021.

²⁸ www.unia.be/fr/articles/lantisemitisme-est-toujours-present, accessed 7 February 2021.

²⁹ Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique, *Renouvellement*.

³⁰ <https://jean-jaures.org/nos-productions/liberalisme-culturel-conservatisme-et-antisemitisme-en-immersion-chez-la-jeunesse>, accessed 8 February 2021.

guides, or *morchidates*, sent by the King Hassan II Foundation during Ramadan;³¹ none could come in 2020 due to the pandemic measures.

Their Turkish counterpart is the *Diyamet*; affiliated mosques usually benefit from imams sent by them (who usually hold four-year tenures), and prefer not to hire imams who would receive their salaries from the Belgian authorities.³² However, the *Diyamet* appeared to lift, at least partially, its previous opposition or reservation on imams paid by the Belgian authorities in its affiliated mosques, and on imam training or education to be developed in Belgium.³³

Despite the Belgian authorities having revoked the agreement with the Muslim World League in 2019,³⁴ it was considered—notably by the EMB itself—that some Saudi influence in 2020 was still exerted through Salafist groups and activists.³⁵

Some of these relationships, considered to be interferences in Belgian affairs, had been denounced by a parliamentary report in 2018.³⁶ In 2020, it was once again on the political agenda of both federal and Flemish ministers supervising religious organisations. The former mostly claimed that a Moroccan influence had replaced the Saudi one in the Great Mosque of Brussels,³⁷ while the latter—under some pressure from *Vlaams Belang* and the Flemish nationalist party, the New Flemish Alliance (*Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* - NVA)—focused

³¹ There were 81 in 2019; www.atlasinfo.fr/Des-imams-et-morchidates-en-Belgique-pour-l-encadrement-religieux-des-Marocains-durant-le-mois-de-Ramadan_a100416.html, accessed 13 February 2021.

³² When a local religious community is recognised by regional authorities, the federal State may pay salaries for up to three ministers. This is valid for all recognised religions in Belgium, including Islam, with another mechanism existing for Humanist delegates. The State does not require any specific training, the question being left to the representative bodies of the different denominations that designate their respective ministers.

³³ www.levif.be/actualite/belgique/salah-echallaoui-jamais-de-controles-d-identite-a-la-grande-mosquee/article-normal-1376731.html, accessed 12 February 2021.

³⁴ <https://plus.lesoir.be/203011/article/2019-01-26/quel-avenir-pour-la-grande-mosquee-apres-le-depart-de-la-ligue-islamique>, accessed 12 April 2021.

³⁵ Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique, *Renouveau*.

³⁶ www.lachambre.be/kvvcr/showpage.cfm?section=/publications/attentats&language=fr&story=attentats.xml&l ang=en, accessed 13 February 2021.

³⁷ www.vrt.be/vrtnws/fr/2020/12/04/soupcons-d-espionnage-marocain-a-la-grande-mosquee-de-bruxelles/, accessed 13 February 2021.

mainly on Turkish mosques.³⁸ Both insisted on security measures planned at their own level to counter such interference.

Law and Domestic Politics

The system of Belgian Church-State relations is based on the recognition of religious denominations and philosophical organisations.³⁹ After Belgium's independence (1830), the administrative and financial arrangements devised under the French regime (1795-1814) were maintained in favour of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish denominations despite the French Concordat being abolished and State control on religions dropped. The system was later extended to Islam in 1974 and to Orthodox churches in 1985, as well as to Humanist communities (from 1981) and Buddhism (from 2007).

As a recognised religion, Islam is entitled to the same support as other recognised religious communities. The recognition process is two-fold: once a religious community is recognised at the federal level, its representative body may ask the regions to recognise its local communities. Since 2002, each region defines its own conditions for such a recognition. Once a local community is recognised, it is entitled to 1 to 3 ministers, paid directly by the Federal Ministry of Justice (€6.5 million was budgeted in 2020 for Islam). Furthermore, if the faithful cannot cover all the costs of the place of worship, covering this deficit is a required item of expenditure for local authorities (provinces and/or municipalities according to the denomination). Housing for one minister per mosque is also provided by local authorities, as

³⁸ www.vlaamsparlement.be/commissies/commissievergaderingen/1441867/verslag/1442312, accessed 12 February 2021.

³⁹ For a more detailed explanation of the system and its historical context, see Husson, Jean-François, "Belgium", in Oliver Scharbrodt, Samin Akgönül, Ahmet Alibašić, Jørgen S. Nielsen, and Egdūnas Račius (eds.), *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, vol.7 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp.95-98.

well as repairs on mosques, as on other buildings of recognised religious or philosophical communities.

In 2020, two of the regional governments set up after the 2019 election were well under way with new decrees regulating the religious communities on their territory. The Flemish government in November adopted a new decree to be voted on by Parliament in the coming year.⁴⁰ In it, recognition of local religious communities would be based on stricter criteria, including foreign funding and influence, and a waiting period of four years would be introduced between the initial request and any recognition. A planned service by the Flemish administration is to set up a screening process for those communities applying for recognition, and enforce a strict application of the relevant criteria. The Government of the Brussels-Capital region draft decree⁴¹ went through a consultative phase in 2020;⁴² it implements the Government's intention to modernise the current legal framework for local religious communities, aiming at equality among life stances, administrative simplification, better knowledge of local communities, and better control of financial flows.

The recruitment procedures for Muslim counsellors (i.e. chaplains) in penitentiaries started in 2020, as a result of a 2019 Royal Decree that had created 26 posts.⁴³

In the French-speaking community, the Institute for the Promotion of Training on Islam (*Institut de promotion des formations sur l'islam*), established by a Decree of 14 December 2016,⁴⁴ continued funding courses and training organised by various institutions of higher education. The objective is to enhance the quality of religious and moral pastoral care to

⁴⁰<https://lokaalbestuur.vlaanderen.be/strategische-projecten/regelgeving-lokale-besturen/erkenning-lokale-geloofsgemeenschappen#:~:text=Op%2013%20november%202020%20gaf,werving%20van%20de%20erkende%20erendiensten>, accessed 17 May 2021

⁴¹ Regional decrees are called *ordonnances* in the Brussels-Capital region.

⁴²<https://plus.lesoir.be/282760/article/2020-02-26/la-region-bruxelloise-met-les-eglises-la-diete;www.lalibre.be/belgique/societe/la-region-bruxelloise-va-imposer-aux-cultes-un-minimum-de-financement-autonome-5e561a24d8ad58685c35f063>, both accessed 8 February 2021.

⁴³www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi_loi/change_lg.pl?language=fr&la=F&table_name=loi&cn=2019051728, accessed 15 February 2021.

⁴⁴ www.galillex.cfwb.be/document/pdf/43481_000.pdf, accessed 15 February 2021.

congregations, but it is also frequently considered a useful component in anti-radicalisation policies. As the institute cannot itself organise Islamic theology courses due to a need for neutrality in public institutions, these were complemented by initiatives from the Muslim community (see below section “Activities and Initiatives of Main Muslim Organisations”).

In line with current arrangements on religious broadcasting, Flemish public television broadcast two Muslim religious ceremonies in 2020.⁴⁵ Despite previous announcements, there was still no similar developments by French-speaking public television in 2020.

Although slaughtering without stunning is still authorised in the Brussels-Capital region, no specific venue for animal slaughter for 'Id al-Adha was organised, and it was left to individual families to find a solution while celebrating in compliance with the safety measures during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁶ Legislation forbidding slaughter without prior stunning had been adopted by both the Flemish and Walloon regions by 2019, but has been challenged before the Constitutional Court by both Jewish and Muslim organisations.⁴⁷ As a consequence, the court decided in 2019⁴⁸ to send some preliminary questions on this to the European Court of Justice.⁴⁹ The latter ruled in 2020 that such legislation was legitimate.⁵⁰

Activities and Initiatives of Main Muslim Organisations

⁴⁵ www.vrt.be/nl/over-de-vrt/nieuws/2020/12/15/waarom-zendt-de-vrt-erediensten-uit/, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁴⁶ www.saphirnews.com/Belgique-l-Aid-al-Adha-2020-a-l-epreuve-face-au-Covid-19-et-aux-interdictions-de-l-abattage-sans-etourdissement_a27285.html, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁴⁷ www.embnet.be/fr/communiquede-presse-du-5-avril-2019-abattage-rituel, accessed 20 February 2021.

⁴⁸ www.const-court.be/public/f/2019/2019-053f.pdf; www.const-court.be/public/f/2019/2019-115f.pdf, accessed 23 February 2021.

⁴⁹ It had previously been confirmed that ritual slaughter without stunning may take place only in an approved slaughterhouse, and that such an obligation does not infringe on freedom of religion. See <https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2018-05/cp180069en.pdf>, accessed 15 February 2021.

⁵⁰ <http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=abattage&docid=235734&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&mode=req&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=4909630>, accessed 15 February 2021.

With a renewal of its assembly planned in 2020, the EMB prepared a self-evaluation report,⁵¹ pointing out some concerns of radicalism (even among members of the assembly and the executive) as well as some progress in other domains, such as imam training, chaplaincies, and mosques management.

The recognition of local faith communities slowed down and mosques were impacted. In Flanders, in 2020, 25 out of the 37 places of worship that applied for recognition were mosques (with applications most often dating from 2015),⁵² while another source mentions 47.⁵³ A local Muslim association in Tielt planned to open a new mosque in 2020.⁵⁴ More generally, the far-right party *Vlaams Belang* and the Flemish nationalist party NVA regularly challenged existing or planned mosques through various channels, ranging from interpellations to local, provincial, and regional authorities⁵⁵ to staging demonstrations⁵⁶ that sometimes developed into violence.⁵⁷ Answering a question in the Brussels parliament, the president of the regional government acknowledged that only 21 mosques were recognised, and eight were on the waiting list out of around 100, blaming a lack of proactivity from some mosques and delays in the federal part of the recognition process.⁵⁸ Two recognised mosques in 2020 were allotted an imam paid for by the federal Government, as a consequence of their recognition.⁵⁹ In Wallonia, the new recognition process states that local communities have to register before gaining full recognition and some mosques did so: Al Mouhagirine in Hensies, El Feth in Liège,

⁵¹ Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique, *Renouvellement*.

⁵² www.vlaamsparlement.be/parlementaire-documenten/schriftelijke-vragen/1360162, accessed 8 February 2021.

⁵³ <https://docs.vlaamsparlement.be/pfile?id=1497572>, accessed 8 February 2021.

⁵⁴ www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20201113_93819914, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁵⁵ www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20201103_95800909, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁵⁶ See for instance the *Vlaams Belang* opposition to an Islamic centre in Berendrecht and a mosque in Halle: www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20201011_93815158; www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20200921_95204023, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁵⁷ In October 2019, a woman was condemned for hitting a Muslim woman after a protest against a new mosque in Harelbeke: www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20201013_94453575, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁵⁸ <http://weblex.brussels/data/crb/biq/2019-20/00058/images.pdf>, accessed 8 February 2021.

⁵⁹ El Azhar in Saint-Josse-ten-Node and Al Rajaa in Brussels: www.etaamb.be/fr/document_n2020021048.html, accessed 14 February 2021.

Eden Social and Cultural Association (*Association socioculturelle Eden*) in La Louvière), and the Bosniak Cultural and Islamic Centre (*Centre islamique et culturel bosniaque*) in Liège.⁶⁰

As in previous years, buildings or expansion projects faced different outcomes. In Wallonia, the projects for both the Moroccan Salam mosque and the Albanian mosque in Namur, faced urban regulation challenges before the Council of State.⁶¹ In Flanders, the extension of the Merkez mosque in Leopoldsborg was not accepted by provincial authorities;⁶² a building permit application was put in for the Moroccan Badr mosque in Hasselt;⁶³ the Turkish mosque in Aalst asked for permission to expand;⁶⁴ the Ayasofya mosque in Mol introduced sent in an application to move to another, larger, building;⁶⁵ and works at the Turkish mosque in Lokeren hope to begin next year.⁶⁶

Relations within local mosques sometimes turned sour; for example, in Verviers, a conflict between two antagonist factions ended up before a civil court.⁶⁷ The African Islamic Centre in Belgium (*Centre islamique africain en Belgique*) in Molenbeek-Saint-Jean went bankrupt.⁶⁸ Some mosques were targeted by vandalism, such as in Liège.⁶⁹

In 2020, a Royal Decree of 7 July 2019 provided a positive answer to a request expressed in 2017 and 2018⁷⁰ by the EMB to hire 18 female preachers and theologians.⁷¹

⁶⁰ www.parlement-wallonie.be/pwpages?p=interp-questions-voir&type=28&iddoc=98309, accessed 8 February 2021.

⁶¹ <https://lameuse-namur.sudinfo.be/661245/article/2020-10-07/deux-nouvelles-mosquees-namur-pas-pour-demain>, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁶² www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20201202_98276431, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁶³ www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20201120_98235740, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁶⁴ www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20201119_93622292, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁶⁵ www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20201015_94791472, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁶⁶ www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20201011_93815158, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁶⁷ <https://lameuse-verviers.sudinfo.be/703510/article/2020-12-09/une-querelle-en-justice-pour-le-controle-dune-mosquee-turque-verviers>, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁶⁸ *Moniteur belge*, 14 April 2020.

⁶⁹ www.sudinfo.be/id274816/article/2020-11-03/acte-de-vandalisme-la-grande-mosquee-de-liege-des-caricatures-de-mahomet?referer=%2Farchives%2Ffrecherche%2Fpaywall%3Fdatefilter%3Dlastyear%26sort%3Ddate%2520desc%26start%3D40%26word%3Dmosqu%25C3%25A9e, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁷⁰ A letter dated 15 November 2017 from the president of the EMB to the Minister of Justice, and some interviews in the press, e.g. www.lacapitale.be/196043/article/2018-02-23/islam-de-belgique-des-femmes-au-sein-du-conseil-des-theologiens, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁷¹ www.middleeasteye.net/fr/reportages/belgique-mosquees-femmes-musulmanes-theologiennes-predicatrices-imamat, accessed 14 February 2021.

The Academy of Training and Research in Islamic Studies (*Académie de formations et de recherches en études islamiques* - AFOR) was launched in 2019 by members of the Coordination Council of Islamic Institutions (*Conseil de coordination des institutions islamiques de Belgique* – CIB) in order to promote education, training, and research for imams and other Muslim executives, mainly in theological and religious studies, in cooperation with two universities: KULeuven and UCLouvain.⁷² AFOR, housed in the Great Mosque of Brussels and run under the auspices of the EMB,⁷³ is to provide the more theological aspects of the training.⁷⁴ The EMB was allotted a federal grant of €192,000 in 2020 for developing such training.⁷⁵ The first students have started the programme, but some dropped out after a few months.

The application by the Islamic Federation of Belgium (*Fédération islamique de Belgique / Belçika İslam Federasyonu* – FIB/BIF) for recognition of its first school (that includes secondary education), *Selam*, in Genk (Flanders), was turned down by the Flemish Minister for Education in 2020, who considered the school to be too close to the *Milli Görüş* Movement.⁷⁶ This was its second rejection; the first attempt for recognition was refused in 2019.⁷⁷ Another FIB project in Charleroi was stopped because of a land planning problem; an appeal before the regional government was rejected, and the project has to be thoroughly revised.⁷⁸

⁷² www.koengeens.be/fr/news/2020/01/31/la-formation-civile-d-imams-prevue-a-l-uclouvain-en-septembre-2020; www.embnet.be/fr/la-formation-des-imams-un-grand-pas-dans-le-parcours-d-institutionnalisation-de-l-islam-en-belgique, accessed 15 February 2021.

⁷³ Constitution published in the *Annexes du Moniteur Belge*, 25 April 2019, www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/tsv_pdf/2019/04/25/19057801.pdf, accessed 15 February 2021.

⁷⁴ www.lesoir.be/269172/article/2019-12-26/le-premier-cursus-de-formation-dimams-en-belgique-debutera-en-fevrier, accessed 15 February 2021.

⁷⁵ *Moniteur belge*, 31 March 2020.

⁷⁶ www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20200917_97745269, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁷⁷ www.vrt.be/vrtnws/fr/2019/08/30/l-ecole-islamique-de-genk-nobtient-pas-sa-reconnaissance-les/, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁷⁸ www.lavenir.net/cnt/dmf20200228_01450465/ecole-islamique-a-marcinelle-le-projet-doit-etre-modifie, accessed 14 February 2021.

Medina Expo (previously known as Muslim Expo, launched by the commercial company Emdeo in 2012) focuses mainly on business, fashion, and halal products. A tenth edition was planned in Antwerp on 30-31 April 2020, but had to be cancelled because of COVID-19 measures.

Some secularist Muslims organised themselves in 2020 into a group called *Collectif Laïcité Yallah*.⁷⁹ They received support from the Belgian French-speaking secularist movement (*Centre d'Action laïque*) and published several opinion articles⁸⁰ and books,⁸¹ notably on the tensions between a secular society and some conservative views of Islam.

Muslim Population: History and Demographics

As Belgium did not own colonies with a significant Muslim population, the presence of Muslims in the country remained marginal until the signing of labour agreements with some Muslim majority countries in 1964, notably Turkey and Morocco.

Estimating religious affiliation is difficult in the absence of a census or the registration of religious or philosophical affiliations; there are only estimates, surveys and “proxies”, such as consistent religious education attendance. The issue is also very sensitive when dealing with Islam. On the one hand, there is a general overestimation of numbers, as illustrated by a video from the think tank *This is Not a Crisis (Ceci n'est pas une crise)*,⁸² and by a 2015 Ipsos survey that showed that the number of Muslims in Belgium was estimated by respondents to be 29%

⁷⁹ <https://bx1.be/news/le-collectif-yallah-presente-un-manifeste-pour-une-citoyennete-de-la-diversite/>; www.cclj.be/actu/politique-societe/collectif-laicite-yallah-pour-federer-musulmans-laiques, accessed 14 February 2021.

⁸⁰ See, notably, www.lalibre.be/debats/opinions/pour-un-islam-de-belgique-au-diapason-des-droits-humains-5fdb65f79978e227df203081; www.lalibre.be/debats/opinions/le-voile-islamique-n-est-pas-un-detail-vestimentaire-5f08262ad8ad5801ea5cdb57, both accessed 14 February 2021.

⁸¹ E.g. Ettalhaoui, Fikri and Fouad Benyekhlef, *Dépasser la condition sociale musulmane* (Brussels: Adam Lumen Editions, 2019).

⁸² www.cecinestpasunecrise.org/pourcentage-de-musulmans-belgique-stop-aux-prejuges/, accessed 2 April 2021.

of the population, 23 points higher than the range of statistical estimates at the time.⁸³ On the other hand, some other researchers consider that producing such statistics may contribute to a sense of a “Muslim invasion”, especially when used in controversial media coverage. Therefore, attempts to put forward some estimates lead to fiery debates among academics, centred on the methodology behind, and the media coverage of, such data.⁸⁴ Detailed estimates are regularly produced by the independent researcher (formerly University of Gent) Jan Hertogen,⁸⁵ based on countries of origin.⁸⁶ His latest estimates (for 2019) were 936,674 Muslims out of 11,405,130 residents, or 8.2% of the population; this is up from 6.3% in 2011, 6.5% in 2013, and 7.0% in 2015 and 7.6% in 2017.⁸⁷

This appears in line with data that looks at the attendance of Islamic religious education classes in primary and secondary education, which is on the rise: 7.95% of pupils in Flemish-speaking schools in 2019-20 (from 7.4% in 2017-18⁸⁸ and 4.1% in 2008-09).⁸⁹ Such attendance

⁸³ www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/3466/Perceptions-are-not-reality-Things-the-world-gets-wrong.aspx. The Pew Research Center therefore raised the question about the choice of interviewees: www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/17/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe, both accessed 2 April 2021.

⁸⁴ For a summary, see Husson, “Belgium”, *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, vol.7, p.106. For more views, see El Battiui, Mohamed, Meryem Kanmaz, and Firouzeh Nahavandi (eds.), *Mosquées, imams et professeurs de religion islamique en Belgique: état de la question et enjeux* (Brussels: Fondation Roi Baudouin, 2004), pp.7-8, www.kbs-frb.be/~media/Files/Bib/Publications/Older/PUB-1448-Mosques-imams-prof-islam.pdf, accessed 2 April 2018; Dassetto, Felice, *L’iris et le croissant: Bruxelles et l’islam au défi de la co-inclusion* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 2011), pp.21-26; Fadil, Nadia, “Belgium”, in Jørgen S. Nielsen, Samim Akönül, Ahmet Alibašić, and Egdūnas Račius (eds.), *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, vol.6 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 84-107 (84-85); Husson, Jean-François, “Le financement des cultes, de la laïcité et des cours philosophiques”, *Courrier hebdomadaire du Centre de recherche et d’information socio-politiques* vols.1703-1704 (2000), pp.3-90 (84-89); see also <http://unia.be/fr/articles/781887-musulmans-en-belgique>; www.o-re-la.org/index.php/analyses/item/2183-combien-de-musulmans-en-belgique; www.cecinestpasunecrise.org/pourcentage-de-musulmans-belgique-stop-aux-prejuges/, all accessed 2 April 2021.

⁸⁵ www.npdata.be/BuG/448-Moslims/; www.npdata.be/Data/Vreemdelingen/NIS/Moslims/Moslims-2011-2019.xlsx, both accessed 15 February 2021. These estimates will be used in the absence of other more detailed data.

⁸⁶ Such estimates tend to neglect people from Muslim majority countries who are not Muslims (e.g. Middle Eastern Christians), an aspect considered by Hertogen; converts are also overlooked. See Dassetto, *L’iris et le croissant*, pp.21-26.

⁸⁷ www.npdata.be/BuG/448-Moslims/; www.npdata.be/Data/Vreemdelingen/NIS/Moslims/Moslims-2011-2019.xlsx, both accessed 15 February 2021.

⁸⁸ 8.6% in primary education and 6% in secondary education.

⁸⁹ It is 0.2% for primary education. A number of Muslim pupils attend Catholic secondary schools, where no Islamic religious education is provided. Own calculations, based on <https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/documenten/bestand.ashx?nr=12702>, accessed 15 February 2021.

was 10.6%⁹⁰ of pupils in the French community in 2019-20 (up from 9.4% in 2015-16 and 5.0% in 1996-97.)⁹¹ These are averages, as percentages are much higher in the Brussels Capital region. These can be considered as low estimates, as Muslim pupils attending Catholic schools (especially for secondary education) are not considered.⁹² All indicators show a regular increase in both the number and percentage of the Muslim population in Belgium.

Muslim Population

Estimates on 1 January 2019 were 936,674 Muslims out of a population of 11,405,130 (8.2% of population in comparison with 7.2% on 1 January 2016).⁹³

Ethnic/National Backgrounds

In 2014, Hertogen estimated that Muslims of a Moroccan background constituted 46.4% of the Muslim population, those from a Turkish background 25.8%, and others 27.8%.⁹⁴ Based on data on 1 January 2017,

⁹⁰ 13.2% in primary education and 8.4% in secondary education. Own calculations based on data obtained from the French-speaking Community (*Direction Générale de l'enseignement obligatoire*).

⁹¹ For a regional approach, see Sägeser, Caroline, "La fréquentation des cours de religion et de morale Après l'introduction du cours de philosophie et de citoyenneté", *Crisp*, 8 April 2019, www.crisp.be/crisp/wp-content/uploads/analyses/2019-04-23_ACL-SageserC-2019-Orela-frequentation_cours_religion_morale-introduction_cours_philosophie_citoyennete.pdf, accessed 15 February 2021.

⁹² This does not take into account Muslim pupils attending Catholic schools (mainly secondary), which can be estimated to be around 14,000 for Belgium in 2012 (author's own calculations based on Sägeser, Caroline, "Les cours de religion et de morale dans l'enseignement obligatoire", *Courrier hebdomadaire du Centre de recherche et d'information socio-politiques*, vols.2140-2141 (2012), pp.3-59). The Catholic schools network has produced a document on how to teach the Catholic religion in classes with a majority of Muslim pupils: SeGeC, *Entre enracinement et ouverture: le cours de religion catholique dans les classes du secondaire à forte présence musulmane* (Brussels, 2014), available at: http://lenseignement.catholique.be/secec/fileadmin/DocsFede/FESeC/religion/enracinement_ouverture.pdf; for the Flemish-speaking community, see www.npdata.be/BuG/327-Godsdienskeuze/, all accessed 15 February 2021.

⁹³ www.npdata.be/Data/Vreemdelingen/NIS/Moslims/Moslims-2011-2019.xlsx, accessed 15 May 2021.

⁹⁴ Hertogen, "Moslims in België van 6.3% naar 6.5% van de Bevolking", <https://www.dewereldmorgen.be/artikel/2014/10/08/moslims-in-belgie-van-63-naar-65-van-de-bevolking/>, accessed 18 May 2021.

he estimated the percentage of residents with a Moroccan and Turkish background in Belgium at, respectively, 4.5% and 2.4% (based on national background only, not on religious affiliation).⁹⁵

More than 91% and 93%, respectively, of Muslim Belgian residents of Moroccan or Turkish background now have Belgian citizenship; a large majority of them have dual citizenship.⁹⁶ Estimates of converts are between 30,000 and 100,000.⁹⁷ A website dedicated to the promotion of conversions mentions 56,000 converts in Belgium.⁹⁸

Inner-Islamic Groups

There is no official data available on inner-Islamic groups. The vast majority are Sunnis, especially from Moroccan and of Turkish descent. Among other groups, Shi'is are estimated to be around 30,000 (among whom 10,000 are of Moroccan descent and 10,000

⁹⁵ Data provided by Jan Hertogen.

⁹⁶ Torrekens, Corinne, and Ilke Adam, *Belgo-Marocains, Belgo-Turcs: (auto)portrait de nos concitoyens* (Brussels: Fondation Roi Baudouin, 2015), pp.33-34, available at www.kbs-frb.be/fr/Activities/Publications/2015/316648, accessed 15 February 2021.

⁹⁷ www.levif.be/actualite/belgique/pourquoi-certaines-flamandes-se-convertissent-elles-a-l-islam/article-normal-455191.html, accessed 15 February 2021.

⁹⁸ www.stichtingbekeerling.nl/aantal-bekeerlingen-in-nederland-en-belgie/, accessed 15 February 2021.

of Iranian origin).⁹⁹ There are 20,000 to 40,000 Alevis also present and they have various organisations.¹⁰⁰ There are two Tablighi places of worship,¹⁰¹ as well as a number of Sufi associations. There are various Hizmet groups, including a few schools. Ahmadiyya communities gather around 2,000 members.¹⁰² Estimates suggest, there are a few thousand Salafis.¹⁰³

Geographical Spread

The Muslim population is unevenly spread in the country, concentrating mainly in some parts of Brussels and in (former) industrial and mining areas around Antwerp, Ghent, Liège, Charleroi, and in the province of Limburg.

In 2019, 32.9% of the Muslim population lived in the Brussels Capital region, where it represented 25.5% of the entire population.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Orban, Anne-Claire, “Un quotidien oublié: les chiites bruxellois”, *Pax Christi Wallonie Bruxelles Analyse* (May 2016), available at www.bepax.org/files/files/2016-analyse-un-quotidien-oublie-les-chiites-bruxellois.pdf, accessed 2 April 2021.

¹⁰⁰ www.catho-bruxelles.be/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/alevis.pdf, accessed 15 February 2021.

¹⁰¹ Dassetto, *L'iris et le croissant*, pp. 236-237.

¹⁰² www.ahmadiyya-islam.org/be-nl/ahmadiyya/, accessed 15 February 2021.

¹⁰³ According to State Security: www.vsse.be/sites/default/files/2018-01_brochure_salafisme_fr.pdf, accessed 15 February 2021.

¹⁰⁴ Reaching 47.6% in Saint-Josse and 42.9% in Molenbeek, and being between 30-40% in four of the other Brussels Capital region's 19 municipalities: www.npdata.be/Data/Vreemdelingen/NIS/Moslims/Moslims-2011-2019.xlsx, accessed 15 February 2021.

44.2% lived in the Flemish region (6.3% of the population, but 8.9% in the Province of Antwerp and 7.4% in the Province of Limburg). The Walloon region hosts 22.9% of Belgian Muslims, and these represent 5.9% of the population (8.1% in the Province of Liège and 6.8% in the Province of Hainaut).¹⁰⁵

Number of Mosques

There are around 300 mosques; 292 decided to participate in the election of the Executive of Muslims in Belgium (EMB) in 2014, but only 284 sent delegates. Mosques recognised by the Belgian regions are: 21 in the Brussels Capital region; 39 in Wallonia; and 27 in Flanders.

Muslim Burial Sites¹⁰⁶

Most Muslims of immigrant background (especially Moroccans) prefer to be buried in their country of origin, and sometimes purchase insurance that covers transportation costs. Places of burial in Belgium are

¹⁰⁵ www.npdata.be/Data/Vreemdelingen/NIS/Moslims/Moslims-2011-2019.xlsx, accessed 15 February 2021.

¹⁰⁶ www.embnet.be/fr/annuaire-des-cimetieres; www.embnet.be/nl/lijst-van-de-begraafplaatsen, accessed 15 February 2021.

segments within local cemeteries, and are in the following places:

Brussels Capital region:

- Anderlecht, Etterbeek, Forest, Jette, plus interfaith sections in Schaerbeek¹⁰⁷ cemetery (based in the Evere and Zaventem territories), run by an inter-municipal organisation.

Flemish region:

- Province of Antwerp: Antwerp, Mol, and Turnhout

- Province of West-Flanders: Brugge, Kortrijk, Oostende, and Roeselare

- Province of East-Flanders: Ghent/Zwijnaarde, Ronse, and Sint-Niklaas

- Province of Flemish-Brabant: Leuven, and Tienen

- Province of Limburg: Beringen, Borgloon, Genk, Heuden-Zolder, Houthalen-Helchteren, Leopoldsburg, Lommel, Maaseik, Maasmechelen, Overpelt, Neerpelt, and Sint-Truiden.

Walloon region:

¹⁰⁷ www.pouvoirslocaux.irisnet.be/fr/acteurs/les-intercommunales/intercommunale-dinhumation, accessed 15 February 2021.

- Province of Liège: Fleron, Huy, Jupille, Robermont, Visé (Cheratte-Bas), Verviers
- Province of Hainaut: Charleroi (Soleilmont), Farciennes, La Louvière, Manage, Mons, Tournai; some extensions are planned¹⁰⁸
- Province of Namur: Andenne, Namur,¹⁰⁹ and Sambreville
- Province of Luxembourg: Arlon, Marche-en-Famenne.

“Chaplaincy” in State Institutions

Muslim chaplaincies exist in institutions for young offenders (less than a dozen chaplains), hospitals (although rarely permanently employed by the institutions), and penitentiaries¹¹⁰ (27 chaplains including a chaplain-in-chief, according to the latest regulations¹¹¹). A Muslim military chaplain and his assistant are now part of the integrated religious and moral assistance

¹⁰⁸<https://laprovince.sudinfo.be/631476/article/2020-09-01/bientot-de-nouveaux-carres-musulmans-dans-plusieurs-cimetieres-de-mons-borinage>, accessed 15 February 2021.

¹⁰⁹ See *Article 24* in www.namur.be/fr/ma-ville/administration/services-communiaux/population-etat-civil/reglements/reglement-general-relatif-aux-funeraillies-et-sepultures, accessed 15 February 2021.

¹¹⁰ On their mission and recruitment, see: www.embnet.be/fr/conseillers-islamiques, accessed 15 February 2021.

¹¹¹ *Arrêté royal du 17 mai 2019 relatif aux aumôniers, aux conseillers des cultes et aux conseillers moraux auprès des prisons (Royal Decree of 17 May 2019 on Chaplains, Religious Advisers, and Moral Counselors in Prisons)*, www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi_loi/change_lg.pl?language=fr&la=F&table_name=loi&cn=2019051728, accessed 15 February 2021.

service (*Service d'assistance religieuse et morale intégré*).

Halal Products

Halal food is largely available in small halal shops and in supermarkets, especially in Muslim-populated areas. *Medina Expo* estimates the halal market in Belgium to be worth €1.7 billion.¹¹² There are debates around halal certification as no common labelling exists.¹¹³ Halal meals are available in prisons; some prisons serve no-pork meals to cater for Muslim inmates.¹¹⁴

Slaughtering without stunning is forbidden in both the Flemish and Walloon regions (since 2019), while it is still permitted in the Brussels-Capital region; Jewish and Muslim organisations have appealed to the Constitutional Court to overturn the 2019 decision but with no success.

¹¹² www.facebook.com/medinaexpo.be/photos/a.489078054532156/1686625078110775/?type=3&theater, accessed 15 February 2021.

¹¹³ www.vrt.be/vrtnws/fr/2019/02/12/certificats-halal-lexecutif-des-musulmans-de-belgique-deploire/, accessed 15 February 2021.

¹¹⁴ See the answer in Parliament by the Minister of Justice, Stefaan De Clerck (CD&V), on 23 April 2010: *Chambre des Représentants, Questions et réponses écrites QRVA*, vol.52, no.104, pp.318-319, www.dekamer.be/QRVA/pdf/52/52K0104.pdf, accessed 15 February 2021.

Dress Code

The niqab has been banned since 2011 in any place accessible to the public (but permitted in places of worship). As with other religious symbols, wearing the headscarf is forbidden in some public sector institutions; there is no general rule and the situation differs from one institution to another. There is no ban by federal and regional public authorities despite several announcements,¹¹⁵ and each entity of local government establishes its own rule (some local authorities reversed their initial bans). Such a ban may be quite broad or limited to employees providing frontline services. Some restrictions have been challenged in the courts, most of the time successfully.

In primary and secondary education, the ban on headscarves is quasi-general in public schools, rather extensive in Catholic schools, but the headscarf is permissible in State-funded Muslim schools. A ban has been established in Flemish public educational

¹¹⁵ The Flemish government installed in 2019, announced that it will forbid religious symbols (including the “Muslim veil”) for civil servants that are in contact with the public: www.crisp.be/crisp/wp-content/uploads/analyses/2019-12-10_ACL-Sagesser_C-2019-Orela-Cultes_et_laicite_dans_les_accords_de_gouvernement_des_entites_federees.pdf, accessed 15 February 2021.

establishments;¹¹⁶ it has been dismissed in the courts,¹¹⁷ but Flemish authorities intend to maintain the interdiction. Other regulations are usually determined at school level, with possible variations according to age. Restrictions in higher education are rather limited, especially at some public institutions of higher education in the Brussels-Capital region; a demonstration was organised against such prohibition.¹¹⁸ Wearing a headscarf is forbidden for teachers in public education, except for teachers of Islamic religious education.

As for private employers, developments validated by the European Court of Justice say that private companies that include a policy of religious neutrality may restrict or even forbid all religious, philosophical, and political symbols; the issue of discrimination is analysed on a case-by-case basis by the

¹¹⁶ Argued on the basis of freedom of religion, legal decisions have sometimes brought some limitations to such bans; for example, an appeal court has stated that such a ban is legitimate in a context of tension and trouble, www.lalibre.be/belgique/judiciaire/le-port-du-voile-interdit-dans-deux-ecoles-d-anvers-par-la-cour-d-appel-5e0218daf20d5a0c4620c07a?fbclid=IwAR1nsnmdr6_u_KLn6yLlazzYQUiW-jc07BU6ScJaQz5ry0k9faSot02JDN8, accessed 2 April 2021.

¹¹⁷ www.tijd.be/politiek-economie/belgie/vlaanderen/rechtbank-vernietigt-hoofdhoekenverbod-in-go-school/10156805.html, accessed 15 February 2021.

¹¹⁸ www.rtb.be/info/belgique/detail_un-millier-de-personnes-contre-l-interdiction-du-foulard-dans-l-enseignement-superieur?id=10536612, accessed 15 February 2021.

courts.¹¹⁹

Places of Islamic Learning and Education Muslim institutions recognised by the

(language-based) communities:

- ECIB Association (*Enseignement confessionnel islamique de Belgique*) has opened three nurseries and primary schools in the Brussels-Capital region: *Al Ghazali* (Etterbeek), *La Plume* (Molenbeek), *La Vertu* (Schaerbeek). A secondary school, *La Vertu*, opened for the 2015-16 school year.
- Another primary school, *Institut El Hikma la Sagesse*, opened in 2017, run by the mosque in Forest (Brussels) of the same name.

These five schools total around 1,200 pupils, with a few hundred on waiting lists.¹²⁰ Once being recognised, these schools receive the same funding as Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish institutions, and their diplomas/certificates are recognised by all Belgian authorities. Some other schools are

¹¹⁹ E.g., www.justiceinitiative.org/uploads/dffdb416-5d63-4001-911b-d3f46e159acc/restrictions-on-muslim-womens-dress-in-28-eu-member-states-20180709.pdf, pp.18-27; and for a summary of the legal situation, see www.securex.eu/lex-go.nsf/PrintReferences?OpenAgent&Cat2=49~9&Lang=FR, both accessed 15 February 2021.

¹²⁰ www.lalibre.be/actu/belgique/les-ecoles-islamiques-sont-depassees-par-leur-succes-analyse-59c7cd15cd70129e4188f43c, accessed 15 February 2021.

planned (see section above “Activities and Initiatives of Main Muslim Organisations”).

Other Muslim institutions:

The only institution recognised by public authorities and the EMB is the *Académie de formations et de recherches en études islamiques* (AFOR), housed in the Great Mosque of Brussels; it participates in a curriculum with two universities (KULeuven and UCLouvain).

Despite considering themselves institutions of higher education, some other institutions are not recognised by the State as such: their diplomas and certificates are not valid in Belgium and they receive no public funding. Their self-designation as academic institutions could be questioned under Belgian law. All are based in the Brussels Capital region.

- *Almizan* or *Académie islamique de Bruxelles* (Brussels Islamic Academy), formerly *Alkhayria Belgica*, runs regular conferences and courses in the Islamic sciences: <http://aibxl.org/>.

Muslim Media and Publications

Two programmes during Islamic holidays are broadcast annually on the Flemish public television channel. Plans for such broadcasts on the French-speaking side have not yet been finalised.

Main Muslim Organisations

- Executive of Muslims in Belgium (*Exécutif des musulmans de Belgique / Executieve van de moslims van België* - EMB, Quai au Bois de Construction 9, 1000 Brussels, tel.: ++32 22100230, Facebook page: www.facebook.com/Ex%C3%A9cutif-des-Musulmans-de-BelgiqueExecutief-van-de-Moslims-van-Belgi%C3%AB-476351699186357/, www.embnet.be). As the representative body to the Belgian authorities, it is recognised and financed by the federal Government. In 2014, its members were elected in a General Assembly, chosen by representatives of the 292 mosques that subscribed to a charter on the renewal procedure for the executive. There is no such representation for the main organisations listed below; this takes place through their respective mosques.¹²¹
- Council of Theologians (*Conseil des théologiens*, same address as EMB). In connection with the EMB, the Council of Theologians provides answers to questions submitted by the EMB, local mosques, or other national or international religious organisations, and reflects on religious and theological questions relevant to Muslims in Belgium. Any

¹²¹ Husson, "Belgium", *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, vol.7.

imam hired by a recognised mosque is submitted to the council for approval. The council determines the start date of Ramadan and intervenes in public debates.¹²²

- Coordinating Council of Islamic Institutions (*Conseil de coordination des institutions islamiques de Belgique* - CIB, Quai au Bois de Construction 9, 1000 Brussels, Facebook page: www.facebook.com/Conseil-de-Coordination-des-Institutions-Islamiques-de-Belgique-CIB-1656825377913457/). Set up in the context of the 2014 formation of the EMB, its role is to intervene in public debates on behalf of Muslim communities, whereas the EMB's role is in principle limited to Church-State relations.
- *Diyanet* of Belgium (*Belçika Diyanet Vakfi / Diyanet de Belgique / Diyanet van België*, Chaussée de Haecht 67, 1210 Brussels, tel.: ++32 22185755, www.diyamet.be (in Turkish only)). This organisation coordinates all mosques linked to the Turkish government.
- Union of Muslims in Belgium (*Rassemblement des musulmans de Belgique* - RMB, Boulevard Baudouin 18, 1000 Brussels, Facebook page: www.facebook.com/pages/Rassemblement-des-Musulmans-de-Belgique/541296152619233?fref=ts). This organisation is characterised by its links to Morocco, and its commitment to dialogue with other religions.
- Islamic Federation of Belgium (*Fédération islamique de Belgique / Belçika İslam Federasyonu* – FIB/BIF, Rue Kessels 28-30, Brussels, tel.: ++32 22198079, Facebook group: www.facebook.com/groups/bifasbl, www.fibif.be (both in Turkish only)). This organisation coordinates the Turkish *Milli Görüş* mosques.
- Union of Islamic Cultural Centres in Belgium (*Union des centres culturels islamiques de Belgique* - UCCIB, Rue Charles Demeer 1-3, 1020 Brussels, www.selimiye.be (site not working)). This organisation coordinates Turkish Süleymancı mosques.

¹²² www.embnet.be/fr/le-conseil-des-theologiens, accessed 15 February 2021.

- There are various local/provincial/regional mosque federations, such as the *Union des mosquées de Liège*, *Union des mosquées de Bruxelles*, *Union des mosquées du Hainaut*, *Union des mosquées de Charleroi*, and the *Unie van Moskeeën en Islamitische Verenigingen in de Provincie Antwerpen* (UMIVPA).
- European Council of Moroccan Oulemas (*Conseil Européen des Oulémas marocains* - CEOM, Avenue Louise 275B, 1000 Brussels, tel.: ++32 26444493, www.ceomeurope.eu (in Arabic only)). The council considers itself a source of intellectual and religious reference for Moroccans living in Europe, and a contributor to dialogue among cultures and religions in European societies.
- Emdeo (formerly Muslim Expo, Jan van Rijswijklaan 191, 2020 Antwerp, tel.: ++32 488313842, Facebook page: www.facebook.com/medinaexpo.be, www.medinaexpo.be). Emdeo organises the *Media Expo* in Antwerp and Brussels.
- League of Imams in Belgium (*Ligue des imams de Belgique*, Rue Albert Vanderkindere 19, 1080 Brussels, Facebook page: www.facebook.com/ligue.desimams – no posts since October 2017, no website).
- League of Muslims in Belgium (*Ligue des musulmans de Belgique* - LMB, Rue Joseph Claes 68, 1060, Brussels, Facebook page: www.facebook.com/lmbelgique/, no working website). Established in 2005, it has branches in Brussels, Liège, Verviers, Ghent, and Antwerp, and a youth scout section. It was the co-organiser of the Brussels Muslim Fair.
- Islamic Relief Belgium (26 Rue Ulens, 1080 Brussels, tel.: ++32 22198184, Facebook page: www.facebook.com/IRBelgium/, www.karama-solidarity.be/fr/). Established around 1990 in Belgium, and part of Islamic Relief Worldwide, it provides humanitarian support to various causes, such as fighting hunger, providing access to clean water in developing countries, and assisting orphans.

- Islamic Assistance League (*Ligue d'entraide islamique* - LEI, 9 Rue Vanderstraeten, 1080, Brussels, tel.: ++32 24115679, Facebook page: www.facebook.com/mosquee.alkhalil/, <http://alkhalil.be>). Established in the 2000s, it is a large network of organisations including the *Al Khalil* mosque, *Al Khalil* and *La Plume* schools, the Islamic Studies Institute (*Institut des études islamiques* - IEI), and the Wisdom Institute for Languages (*Institut la sagesse pour les langues* - ISL).
- Ahmadiyya Muslim Community (*Ahmadiyya Moslim Gemeenschap*, 445 Brusselstraat, 1700 Sint-Ulriks-Kapelle, tel.: ++32 24666856, www.ahmadiyya-islam.org/be-nl/). Established in 1982, it has 15 local branches.
- Dialogue Platform (Rue Montoyer 31, 1000 Brussels, tel.: ++32 25138116, www.dialogueplatform.eu/pages/about-dialogue-platform/). It is the official representative of the Gülen Movement in Belgium. Among related organisations, there is: Fedactio (27 Rue des Palais, 1030 Schaerbeek, tel.: ++32 22121900, <https://fr.fedactio.be>), and Hizmet (Trapstraat 3A, 2600 Antwerp).
- LEAD (Entrepreneurs active in diversity - *Les Entrepreneurs Actifs de la Diversité*, formerly *Association belge des professionnels musulmans* - Belgian Association of Muslim Professionals - ABPM, Rue de la Loi 42, 1040 Brussels, www.leadbelgium.be). The association develops contacts among Muslim professionals.
- Collective against Islamophobia in Belgium (*Collectif contre l'islamophobie en Belgique* - CCIB, 50 Rue Archimède, 1000 Brussels, tel.: ++32 484057977, Facebook page: www.facebook.com/islamophobia.ccib.be, <http://ccib-ctib.be>). Established in September 2014, it publishes a report and collaborates with Unia on Islamophobia; it has launched public awareness campaigns around specific themes.
- Islamic Denominational Education in Belgium (*Enseignement confessionnel islamique de Belgique* - ECIB, 138 Chaussée de Haecht, 1030 Brussels, tel.: ++32 22412038, no

website). Since 1989, it has established several Muslim schools that are recognised and financed by public authorities.

- Collective Secularism Yallah (*Collectif Laïcité Yallah*– Facebook page: www.facebook.com/Collectif-La%C3%AFcit%C3%A9-Yallah-109670467311698/ - no other details). A secularist Muslim organisation that gets support from the Belgian French-speaking secularist/free-thinkers movement.
- Belgian-Muslim Citizen Centre (*Centre Citoyen Belge-Musulman* - no known address, Facebook page: www.facebook.com/Centre-Citoyen-Belge-Musulman-La%C3%AFque-CCBML-1654789681461563/). An informal organisation active on Facebook and in the media, promoting a secular view of Islam.

Husson, J.-F. (2021), Belgium, *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, 13, p. 84-106.