

Belieforama

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE
LEADING TO ENGAGEMENT
For a Europe of
Religion and Belief Diversity

A Policy Brief Document
for the European Institutions
and Civil Society Groups

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Launched at a Seminar at
The European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium
18th October 2012

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An Executive Summary

Informed by analysis of what has been learned from Belieforama's Community of Practice (<http://www.belieforama.eu>) and trainings, the following Recommendations and Reflections have been identified for European Institutions, national authorities and civil society groups:

Recommendations

1. EU Accession to ECHR and strengthening of human rights in member states

The EU should as soon as possible accede to the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and, together with member states, conduct a systematic and critical review of the implementation of human rights measures in each member state.

2. More focused EU and member state support in tackling employment discrimination

The EU and member states should, in their understanding and application of equality measures, take more account of the personal characteristics of employees including their religion or belief identities, rather than relying on a formal equality of opportunity approach that tries to be "blind" to the personal characteristics that equality laws seek to address.

3. Further EU and member state support for transformational educational initiatives

The EU and member states should provide incentives to employers, public authorities and educational institutions to engage in religion or belief literacy training that supports the transformation of attitudes and behaviours in order to move towards substantive equality.

4. Transversal review of EU and member state policies bearing on religion or belief

The EU and member states should especially, but not only, in relation to the adequacy of national implementation of EU Directives, undertake reviews of their policy interfaces with matters of religion or belief to achieve a more consistent approach throughout the EU.

5. Implementing the Lisbon Treaty's consultation with religion or belief groups

The EU should develop a concrete action plan for implementation of the Lisbon Treaty's provisions for "open, transparent and regular dialogue" with religion and belief groups.

Reflections

1. Using a "spectrum" for understanding unfair treatment in religion or belief

How helpful might the model of a "spectrum" of unfair treatment on the basis of religion or belief (prejudice; hatred; disadvantage; direct discrimination; indirect discrimination; institutional discrimination) be for analysing the dynamics of this and for identifying which measures, either singly or in combination, might most appropriately be deployed for tackling unfair treatment along various parts of the "spectrum"?

2. Striking the balance between education, law and inclusion

Is the policy implementation balance right at EU and member state level between legal frameworks and requirements and educational and training initiatives that promote the empowerment and inclusion of religious and cultural minorities?

3. Taking of more responsibility by religion or belief groups in relation to unfair treatment

How far do religion or belief groups accept the responsibility to take initiatives and find mechanisms for addressing ways in which their own traditions, teaching and/or philosophy might lead to unfair treatment of other religion or belief groups – and/or others who see their identity partly or primarily in terms of ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation?

4. Promoting greater sophistication about individual and social forms of religion or belief

What opportunities could there be to enable civil society groups to work together with public bodies in order to try to help policy-makers understand and take better account of the complexity that can often characterise shared and individual religion or belief identifications?

5. Reflecting on structural issues in religion(s), state and society relationships

How far are civil society groups (including the religious groups) enabled to reflect and contribute to debate about the structural relationships between religion(s), state and society?

6. Moving beyond the Christian-secular tension for framing European social reality

Instead of framing the cultural, religious and political landscape of Europe in terms of what might be called a "two dimensional" Christian-secular tension, how far might thinking about the current European social reality as a "three dimensional" one, with contours that are Christian and secular – but also (and increasingly) religiously plural - help to open up the European future to a more inclusive participation for all?

Sources for these Recommendations and Reflections

The Belieforama Training, Trainers and Participants as Policy Resource

Since 2004, with European Union and charitable Foundation funding support, partner organisations from across Europe have developed the educational processes and training materials that now form part of the Belieforama (<http://www.belieforama.eu>) community of practice. Its award-winning and externally-evaluated approach has been to generate transformative learning from experience around the diversities of religion or belief, including the intersections of religion or belief with other diversities, such as culture, gender, and sexual orientation that contribute to the formation of individual and social identities. Its training includes generic modules on Religious Diversity and Anti-Discrimination; and specific ones on Overcoming Antisemitism; Overcoming Islamophobia; Reconciling Religion, Gender and Sexual orientation; and Confronting Discrimination: How to Facilitate and Take Action. Since 2004, over 2000 people have engaged with at least an aspect of Belieforama's training.

Belieforama: Generating Change and Informing Policy

Building on an interplay of commitment, action and reflection, the Belieforama community of practice aspires to contribute to lasting change in attitudes and behaviours and through its trainings to inform constructive policy development. The current phase of the EU Grundvig-funded project tasked Belieforama with securing "feedback gathered systematically from participants and trainers," the aim of which is to derive "added value" for policy-making from Belieforama's primary educational role. Professor Paul Weller and Dr. Sariya Contractor of the University of Derby's (UK) Centre for Society, Religion and Belief were commissioned to develop and implement research to gather data from Belieforama participants, trainers and other relevant sources, and from this to identify reflections and recommendations for European policy-making.

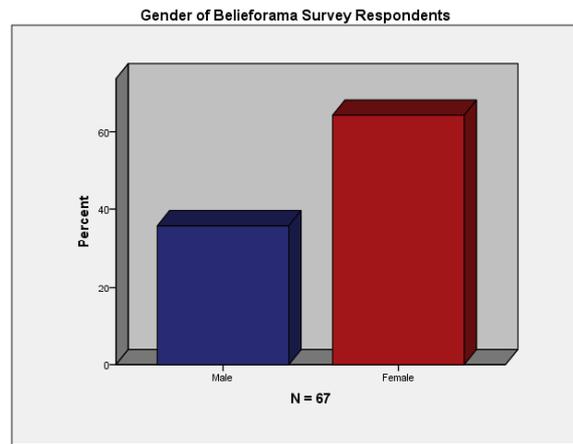
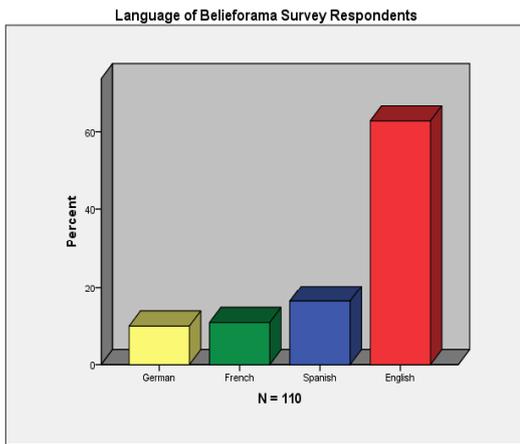
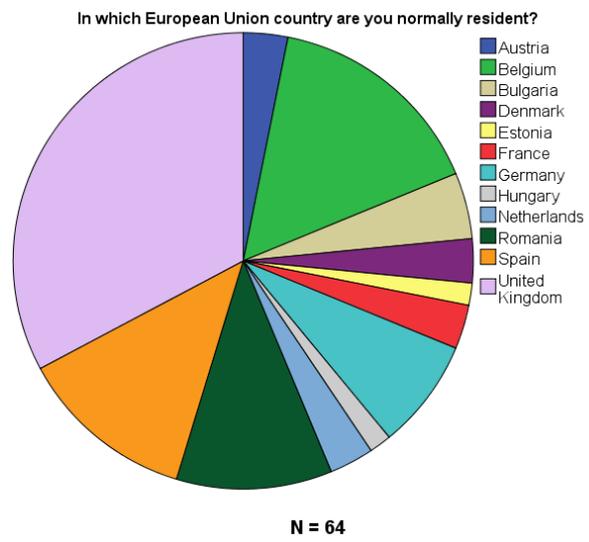
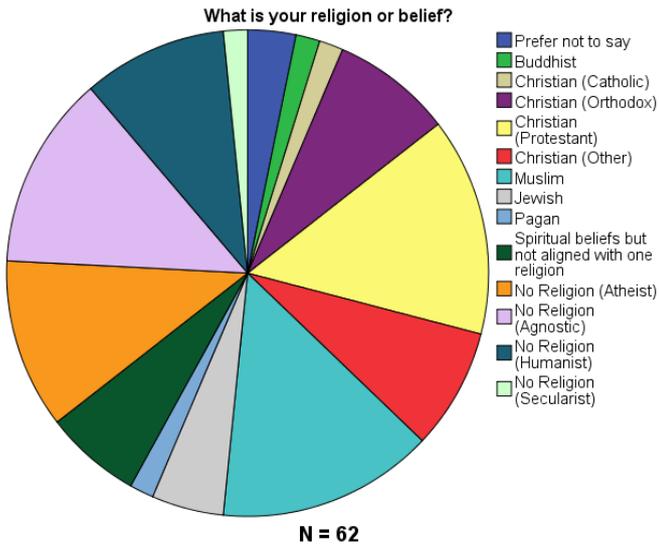
Policy Context for European Institutions and Civil Society Groups

It is often stated that the EU does not have competence in matters of religion or belief, and that relations with religion or belief groups are reserved to member states. But especially after the Amsterdam Treaty (1999); the Proclamation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000); and the Treaty of Lisbon (1999), European institutions have increasingly intersected with matters of religion or belief, especially when European Institutions deal with citizenship and fundamental rights, non-discrimination, immigration and integration, social inclusion, education and culture. Civil society (including religion or belief) groups have areas of extensive engagement with religion or belief that permeate wide areas of individual and social identity, life and organisation.

Key Themes from the Belieforama Research

The research that informs the full Policy Brief document gives vivid examples of the kind of data identified in broader European research such as the Eurobarometer special reports on discrimination in the EU and in the European Values Study. It also highlights examples of good practice and identifies the kinds of approaches that participants explain have led to transformational change for them and others in dealing with conflicts and in developing more inclusive approaches relating to religion or belief.

Gender, language, religion or belief, and country of normal residence characteristics of respondents to the on-line survey for respondents who chose to answer these questions are set out in the charts below. In addition, the table below gives the declared reasons of respondents for participating in the Belieforama trainings:



Main motivation for undertaking the training	1 st Ranked Choice Frequency	1 st Ranked Choice Valid Percent	2 nd Ranked Choice Frequency	2 nd Ranked Choice Valid Percent	3 rd Ranked Choice Frequency	3 rd Ranked Choice Valid Percent
My own self-interest	42	39.6	15	16.5	15	16.5
My religion or belief commitment	9	8.5	22	24.2	22	24.2
My educational commitment	7	6.6	32	35.2	32	35.2
My political commitment	2	1.9	5	5.5	5	5.5
My professional commitment	45	42.5	11	12.1	11	12.1
Other	1	.9	6	6.6	6	6.6
Total	106	100.0	91	100.00	91	100.00



BELIEFORAMA
<http://www.belieforama.eu>

Project coordinated by:



Project funded by:



This project (504667-LLP-1-2009-1-BE- GRUNDTVIG-GMP) has been funded with support from the European Commission. This communication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.