

Head count belies vision of 'Eurabia'

By Simon Kuper in Paris
Published: August 19 2007 22:22 | Last updated: August 19 2007 22:22

Muhammad is the second most popular name for newborn boys in Britain, if you add together the various spellings. In the Seine-St-Denis suburb of Paris, Mohamed is number one. In the four biggest Dutch cities in 2005, either Mohamed or Mohammed came top.

Facts like these have led some pundits to forecast the Islamicisation of Europe – a future "Eurabia". Bernard Lewis, a scholar of Islam, cited the immigration from Muslim countries and relatively high birth-rates of immigrants as trends that mean "Europe will have Muslim majorities in the population by the end of the twenty-first century at the latest."

Most academics who have analysed the demographics dismiss such predictions.

Jytte Klausen, a professor of politics at Brandeis University who studies European Muslims, says: "It's being advocated by people who don't consult the numbers. All these claims are really emotional claims." Sometimes they are made by Muslim or far-right groups, who share an interest in exaggerating the numbers.

Nominal Muslims – whether religious or not – account for 3-4 per cent of the European Union's total population of 493m. Their percentage should rise, but far more modestly than the extreme predictions. That is chiefly because Muslims, both in Europe and the main "emigrating countries" of Turkey and north Africa, are having fewer babies.

"Nobody knows how many Muslims there are in Europe," says Ms Klausen. Few European states ask citizens about religious beliefs. Estimates based on national origins suggest that 16m nominal Muslims live in the EU. There are about 5m in France, 3.3m in Germany and 1.5m-2m in the UK.

"Berlin is a Muslim city, Paris is a Muslim city, and even Madrid or Turin to some degree," Jocelyn Cesari, an expert on European Muslims at Harvard University, has said.

The EU's most Islamic country is Bulgaria, where 1m Muslims account for about one-seventh of the population.

But the birth-rates of Europe's Muslim immigrants, though still above the EU's average, are falling. The fertility rate of north African women in France has been dropping since 1981, say Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaisse in their book *Integrating Islam*. "The longer immigrant women live in France, the fewer children they have; their fertility rate approaches that of native-born French women."

At the last count Algerian women living in France averaged an estimated 2.57 children, against 1.94 for French women overall.

The decline in birth-rates is more dramatic in north Africa itself. Women there use contraceptives more and have babies later than they did. In Algeria and Morocco 35 years ago, the average woman had seven children. According to the United Nations, it is now 2.5 in Algeria (about the same as Turkey), 2.8 in Morocco, and falling in all of them. The US Central Intelligence Agency's World Factbook has even lower estimates of Algerian, Tunisian and Turkish birth-rates: below France's rate and below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman. Emigrating countries are no longer exporting high birth rates to Europe.

At the same time, northern Europe has seen a rebound in fertility. Several countries have introduced policies – such as more generous parental leave and better childcare – to encourage people to have babies.

France's birth-rate is near the replacement level of 2.1. The UK's fertility rate is at its highest since 1980, thanks largely to older or immigrant mothers – only a minority of whom were Muslims. The number of babies born in Germany has rebounded since the post-war low recorded in 2005. Cash incentives appear to have helped but birth-rates in southern and eastern Europe remain low.

The US National Intelligence Council predicts there will be between 23m and 38m Muslims in the EU in 2025 – 5-8 per cent of the population. But after 2025 the Muslim population should stop growing so quickly, given its falling birth-rate. In short, Islamicisation – let alone sharia law – is not a demographic prospect for Europe.

Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2007

[Print article](#) [Email article](#) [Order reprints](#)

TRACK THIS STORY

News alerts

Email - create a keyword alert on the subject of this topic



Email summaries

Email - start your day with daily email briefing on this topic



RSS feeds

RSS - Track this news topic using our feeds



EDITOR'S CHOICE

[Britons 'more suspicious' of Muslims](#) - Aug-19
[Religious fault line divides Europeans](#) - Aug-19

LATEST WORLD NEWS

[Fed action spurs Asia stocks rally](#)
[European central banks on stand-by](#)
[Kouchner visits Iraq in bid to ease crisis](#)
[Britons 'more suspicious' of Muslims](#)
[Oil slips as hurricane Dean shifts course](#)
[Mine rescue order underlines safety concerns](#)
[US military in dogfight over drones](#)
[Flights unaffected by Heathrow protest](#)
[Tougher rules urged to protect Arctic](#)
[US tax bill set to hit multinationals](#)

[Advertise with the FT](#) [Media inquiries](#) [Student offers](#) [FT Conferences](#) [FT Research Centre](#) [FT Syndication](#) [Corporate subscriptions](#) [FT Group](#)

Partner sites: [Chinese FT.com](#) [Les Echos](#) [FT Deutschland](#) [Expansion](#) [Investors Chronicle](#)

© Copyright [The Financial Times Ltd](#) 2007. "FT" and "Financial Times" are trademarks of [The Financial Times Ltd](#). [Privacy policy](#) [Terms](#)