

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

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The presentation(s) – and discussion(s)

Section 1: The task and conduct of the research:

- its researchers, process, respondents/participants, other evidence

Section 2: Respondent/participant reports/views on:

- unfair treatment on grounds of religion/belief and other evidence

Section 3: Respondent/participant reports/views on:

- what facilitates transformative change in relation to religion/belief

Section 4: What comes out of the research for others:

- recommendations for European Institutions/civil society groups

Section 5: What comes out of the research for others:

- reflections for European Institutions/civil society groups

Section 1:

The task and conduct of the research

researchers, process,
respondents/ participants,
other evidence

[6 minutes presentation – no discussion at this point, but later....]

The research task

The EU Grundvig-funded project tasked Belieforama with securing:

- “....*feedback gathered systematically from participants and trainers*”
- the aim being to derive “added value” for policy-making
- from Belieforama’s primary educational role
- by gathering data from Belieforama participants, trainers, other sources
- to identify reflections and recommendations for European policy-making

The researchers and their credentials

Professor Dr. Dr. Paul Weller

Dr. Sariya Contractor



University of Derby's (UK) Centre for Society, Religion and Belief

Professor Weller led the first UK Government commissioned research on Religious Discrimination in England and Wales (Home Office Research Study 220, Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate, London, 2001)

Professor Weller and Dr. Contractor are working on a 3 year UK Research Councils funded project on: *“Religion and Belief, Discrimination and Equality in England and Wales: Theory, Policy and Practice, 2000-2010”* <http://www.derby.ac.uk/religion-and-society>

Research design and process

research ethics reviewed via University of Derby's systems & processes

on-line survey of over 360 training participants (February-April 2012)
English, German, French, and Spanish options, 110 responses received

Skype interviews of 18 individuals (April-June 2012)
interviewees were survey respondents who had also delivered trainings

review of other Belieforama documentation and evaluations
such as trainer reports, trainee evaluations, external evaluations

review of relevant European research
especially Eurobarometer surveys and European Values Study

interim findings tested with Religion or Belief NGOs
consultation in Brussels in July 2012

The research: what it is and what it is not

Research results informing Policy Brief not more or less than they are

They are not:

based on stratified sample study of citizens/residents of EU

They are:

informed by Belieforama participant/trainers' experience/perspectives

This in some measure reflects:

the experience/perspectives of 2,000 people over the past eight years

Much of it resonates with:

other research on unfair treatment related to religion or belief

other research on psychology and groups, and pedagogy and change

Section 2: Respondent/participant reports/views on:

Unfair treatment

on grounds of religion/belief
and other evidence

[6 minutes presentation + 10 minutes discussion]

Unfair treatment: Muslims

I think that Muslims are the most discriminated against community in Europe or at least in the countries which I know best which are France, Belgium. [...] I sometimes imagine what it would be like to be a Muslim in France now and I think I wouldn't feel good about it.

[No religion (Agnostic) belief in background of life, white European, Luxembourg]

Unfair treatment: Jews

Not really facing the threats some Jewish people live with. The official part seem to hide behind the rescue of the Danish Jews during WW II not seeing today's problem.

[Spiritual beliefs but not aligned with one religion in foreground of life, Jewish ethnicity, Denmark]

Unfair treatment: Christians

Unlike most other religious groups, it has become quite acceptable to publicly express anti-Christian biases, even coming from public officials. Similar remarks made concerning Jews or Muslims would often be subject to quick sanctions.

[Christian (other) religion in foreground of life, white European, Belgium]

Unfair treatment: the “non-religious”

Last 21st of March 2012, on the basis of specific reports issued by Madrid’s Town Hall, the National Police Corps and the State Legal Profession, a Government Delegation refused a group of the “Asociación de Ateos y Libre Pensadores AMAL” (Freethinkers and Atheists Association) permission to demonstrate to because it coincided with a Catholic procession of Holy Thursday. AMAL advocates stopping Catholic Church tax privileges. Since we live in a secular state, the lack of protection for these citizens is itself a factor of discrimination.

[No religion (humanist), mixed heritage, Spain]

Unfair treatment: other religious groups

I think anyone Asian looking such as Sikhs and Hindus are affected by the mass media hatred campaign of Muslims. The ignorance is so bad that people don't know the difference and racially abuse any Asian looking person.

[No religion (Atheist), white European, UK]

We need to make more visible the invisible groups (Buddhist, Bahá'í, Sikh, Hindu, etc.) as a to ensure their inclusion and consideration of their rights and also as a way also to diffuse a disproportionate and perhaps unconstructive focus on Muslims in Europe.

[Christian (Eclectic), religion in background of life, Belgium]

Unfair treatment: structural issues

It may not be a discriminatory treatment but the Spanish Government funds the Church taxes from atheist and agnostic people, or simply non-Christian taxpayers. It has also funded the conference of Christian youth by taxes from citizens, some of whom are not Christians.

[Muslim religion in foreground of life, Arab, Spain]

I think that both the government and the Catholic Church are in an adaptation process to from a Catholic state to a non-confessional one. It is hard to find the balance and sometimes things are interpreted as discriminatory actions.

[Christian (Catholic) religion in foreground of life, Romany, Spain]

Analytical “spectrum” of unfair treatment on grounds of religion or belief (1)

- ***religion or belief prejudice***

stereotyping of particular religion or belief groups through attitudes that can wound individuals and form a basis for exclusionary unfair treatment, harassment or victimisation.

- ***religion or belief hatred***

when prejudice intensifies into a settled attitude of mind, emotion and will – and can result in intimidatory and/or violent behaviour towards the religion or belief ‘other’ .

- ***religion or belief disadvantage***

on the grounds of religion or belief is a more structural expression of unfair treatment experienced by all minority groups.

Analytical “spectrum” of unfair treatment on grounds of religion or belief (2)

- ***religion or belief direct discrimination***

occurs when there is deliberate exclusion of individuals from opportunities or services.

- ***religion or belief indirect discrimination***

can occur where effects of historical decisions, contemporary structures or patterns of behaviour have not been reconsidered in the light of current plurality so can unintentionally result in discrimination.

- ***religion or belief institutional discrimination***

by analogy with institutional racism – can develop when forms of unfair treatment become endemic and structurally embedded in organisations which can combine into the collective failure of an organisation in its provision of an appropriate environment and/or service.

Section 3: **Respondent/participant reports/views on:**

What facilitates transformative change **in relation to religion/belief**

[6 minutes presentation + 10 minutes discussion]

Recommended measures to tackle unfair treatment

Answer/Count	Own Country	EU
No new action	1%	0%
More teaching of comparative religion in schools	34%	7%
Policy reviews in each sector of society to promote equal treatment	8%	6%
Adapting social services to religio-cultural needs/limitations	3%	10%
Provision of training of the kind provided by Belieforama	20%	26%
More public education programmes	11%	20%
Creation of voluntary codes of practice	0%	5%
Introduction/development of new law	3%	2%
Reasonable accommodation religion/belief practice in work	4%	6%
Engaging religion or belief groups in community development	12%	6%
Negotiating the use of public space by religion/belief groups	3%	2%
Other	0%	0%

[Percentages do not necessarily total 100% due to “rounding” of fractions]

Actions positively influenced by training/learning

Answer in relation to:	Friendship	Neighbourhood	Rel/Belief	work	politics
very much	11%	6%	13%	31%	18%
quite a lot	42%	33%	38%	51%	30%
not very much	38%	46%	34%	14%	33%
not at all	9%	15%	15%	4%	19%

Therefore, mainly positively (in order) influencing:

Work

Friendship

Politics

Religion or Belief

Neighbourhood

Personal encounter in transformative learning

I used to say that the hijab is male oppression on women, they are discrimination against. Thanks to my work I met some Muslim women – one particularly – the first time I met her she was wearing the hijab and I was like poor woman she is obliged to wear the hijab, etc. We attend the training together and when I started to speak to her and know her, all my previous values about the hijab collapsed. And I was like, this woman is one of the most open-minded and feminist woman I had ever met. She told me she wore the hijab because she wants to wear it.”

[Interview participant - Jewish religion in background of life, white European, Belgium]

Broadening understanding in transformative learning

After the training, I have become generally more aware of religious diversity and how religion or belief influences people's thinking, attitude, daily routine, etc. Now I often look beyond, question and seek explanation for people's behaviour also through the prism of religion/belief.

[No religion (Agnostic) belief in background of life, white European, Bulgaria]

Individuality of religion or belief in transformative learning

Yes above all at the level of the uniqueness of each personal faith: in each religion, each believer understands and lives his/her faith differently.

[No religion (Agnostic) belief in background of life, white European, Belgium]

I am convinced that knowing and knowledge can help to reduce prejudice concerning other beliefs and ideologies. In the meantime it is very important to give one's opinion and to know about one's own roots and faith biography.

[Christian (Other) religion in background of life, mixed ethnicity, Germany]

Complexity and inclusion in transformative learning

The meaning of the religious diversity or spiritual diversity versus non-religious or non-spiritual diversity became clear to me in its whole explosiveness. For me the exchange with representatives of various beliefs and ideologies was really important and the practical approaches that were taught in the seminar are helping me a lot.

[No religion (Atheist), belief in background of life, Germany]

No simple answers with such complex challenges but the processes and consistency help move the dialogue forward - it is the process that makes the delivery of the training impactful. secondly the fact that humanists, atheists, agnostics are included and their views given equal weight makes a huge difference and helps mark the training out from other interventions

[Christian (Other) religion in foreground of my life, white European, UK]

Safe spaces to deal with fear in transformative learning

In educational trainings it is necessary to deal openly with existing fears. In order to have a common basis (and not just to achieve a mutual alienation between religious and non-religious people), it is important to separate the personal component from the components of beliefs and ideologies and to emphasise each one's own individual identity.

Our ignorance of one another is at the heart of violence. Discriminatory practices are part of that violence. The more we know the Other, the less we fear. This is an ongoing process. Especially in our globalised world, opportunities for this to happen must be a priority for government and civil society.

[Christian (Other) religion in foreground in life, white European, Belgium]

Transformative learning into wider action

1. In private life: willingness to immerse myself in the lives of “the others”. Creation of a Speakers’ Corner in my hometown. 2. In my work: less instruction and more fieldwork (i.e. intercultural and interdenominational police projects with minorities). The motto is: “We don’t have to like everything, the most important thing is that we are interested in the world of the others”. 3. Both in my work and in my private life: human rights as a common basis.

[Pagan religion does not feature in foreground of life, white European, Austria]

Section 4: What comes out of the research for others

Recommendations

for European Institutions/
civil society groups

[10 minutes presentation + 20 minutes discussion]

Recommendation 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.

Belieforama trainings, participants and trainers have identified the importance of international human rights standards and mechanisms in relation not only to religion or belief alone, but also in their intersection with other aspects of equalities and human rights. Discrimination can often be multiple and overlapping. In order that residents in the European Union can have the protection of the Convention and the possibility of review and intervention by the European Court of Human Rights in relation to the laws and actions of the European Union institutions as well as their own member states.

Recommendation 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.

Employment or the lack of it is a centrally important aspect of people’s lives. The EU’s 2020 long-term strategy includes the creation of a high employment economy. But in the Commission’s strategy document the word discrimination appears only once and, as identified by RELIGARE’s Policy Brief, implementation approaches taken by national authorities are often religion or belief “blind”.

Recommendation 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.

What is clearly reported from Belieforama participants and trainers is the importance, in effecting change leading into action, of educational and training processes that work with both personal and social experience; that allow space to confront fears and explore uncertainties; that enable an appreciation of complexity and individuality in matters of religion or belief, but that also equip individuals to transfer such learning more widely.

Recommendation 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.

Although, as noted, the EU has very little policy that is specifically focused on religion or belief, there are a whole range of policy areas in which matters of religion or belief either themselves form part of a broader policy area defined in a different primary way (for example in relation to cultural diversity and inter-cultural dialogue) or in which policy areas (such as security and immigration) can have a differential bearing on various religion or belief groups. Member states have much more policy, across a wider range of areas, that has a bearing on matters of religion or belief.

Recommendation 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.

Through the Lisbon Treaty, the EU is committed to establishing “open, transparent and regular dialogue” with religion or belief groups. Based on the collective experience of its trainers and participants, Belieforama is building a Community of Practice in which those engaged with religion or belief diversity and anti-discrimination practice and the creation of learning opportunities for transformational change can share their experience and contribute, alongside other relevant bodies, to the development of wider platforms for engagement with the European Institutions.

Section 5: What comes out of the research for others

Reflections

for European Institutions/
civil society groups

[10 minutes presentation + 20 minutes discussion]

Reflection 1

Given the range of different kinds of unfair treatment on the grounds of religion or belief identified by Belieforama participants and trainers:

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”?

Reflection 2

Given that member states of the EU must implement measures to prevent discrimination on grounds of religion or belief and Belieforama participants have argued that, in tackling such discrimination, the emphasis now needs to be more on education and training measures than on developing further law:

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?

Reflection 3

Religion or belief groups do not only themselves experience unfair treatment, but also have perpetrated it. This includes by some religious groups in relation to others (for example, dominant Christian traditions in relation to Jews) and/or the non-religious; and from some of the non-religious (for example, during the period of Marxist-Leninist power in parts of Europe) in relation to the religious.

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?

Reflection 4

Belieforama's trainings indicate that group identifications are often more important than many in liberal democratic societies appreciate. But the trainings also start from the lived experience of individuals. From this it is clear that, even where individuals identify with a specific and broader religion or belief group, the traditional identification categories of "believer", "non-believer", "humanist", "secularist" may not do justice to the complexity and fluidity of how individuals understand and live their lives.

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?

Reflection 5

A number of the aspects of “unfair treatment” identified by Belieforama participants relate to structural matters in the relationships between religion(s), state(s) and society. These include special financial arrangements and other legal privileges of some religions compared with others or with non-religious philosophical and ethical bodies. Because they pertain to “the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States” (Amsterdam Treaty), such matters go beyond the current competence for European Institutions. Despite this legal position:

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?

Reflection 6

The Belieforama trainings reveal a Europe that goes beyond a “one dimensional” historical dominance of the Christian tradition, or of a politically and/or philosophically secular reaction to it which, together, have produced the tension of a “two dimensional” Christian-secular cultural and socio-political heritage.

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?