



## The Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency's research projects at a glance:

# Acceptance of religious and non-confessional diversity in Germany

## Results of a representative survey

### Overview of the survey

Against the background of increased religious and non-confessional diversity in Germany, it was the aim of this representative survey of the population to ascertain peoples' attitudes to persons belonging to different religious communities, as well as to those who belong to no confession. In particular, the survey sought to determine basic attitudes towards persons belonging to individual groups. Another focus was on the extent to which survey respondents accepted the right of all religious groups in Germany to exercise their religion.

The survey was conducted between 19<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> November 2015 in the form of a computer-assisted telephone interview. In total, some 1,500 persons in Germany, from the age of 14 upwards, were polled on their views.

### Implementing agency, title and year of publication of the study

Acceptance of religious and non-confessional diversity in Germany – Results of a representative survey commissioned by the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (2016). *forsa Politik- und Sozialforschung GmbH, Akzeptanz religiöser und weltanschaulicher Vielfalt in Deutschland – Ergebnisse einer repräsentativen Umfrage im Auftrag der Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes (2016).*

### Outcomes

#### Attitudes towards the members of different groups

- The general attitude towards the members of various religious groups in Germany is predominantly positive. For example, a total of 92% of those interviewed had a predominantly positive, or even very positive, attitude towards Christians. Eighty-four percent took a benevolent view of persons of the Jewish faith, 81 percent felt the same way about Buddhists and 73 percent about Hindus.
- By comparison, the attitude of interviewees towards persons of the Muslim faith was characterised by a relatively high degree of ambivalence. As many as one-third openly admitted to having a rather negative (25 percent) or a very negative image (8 percent) of persons of the Muslims faith.
- The great majority of those interviewed took a positive view (88 percent rather/very positive) of persons with no religious affiliation.

#### Opinions on the principle of equal treatment

- Three-thirds (75 percent) of all persons in Germany support the statement that all religious groups in Germany should basically have the same rights. However, when it comes to assenting to concrete measures to strengthen the rights of non-Christian religious communities, a more differentiated picture emerges.

- For example, the construction of burial places for non-Christian religious communities or the expansion of religious instruction for members of smaller religious communities is advocated by a majority (76 and 69 percent respectively).
- Other measures, however, are viewed much more critically. The demand that the construction of religious buildings and prayer rooms for non-Christian religious communities be facilitated meets with the acceptance of only just under half of those surveyed (48 percent). Merely four out of ten people (42 percent) support granting a day off to persons belonging to religious minorities on the holy days that are important for their religion.

#### **Attitude to the wearing of religious symbols in public schools**

- In response to the question of whether or not teachers at public schools should be allowed to wear religious symbols, there is disunity among persons living in Germany, to a major extent regardless of which religious symbol is under discussion.
- Approval and rejection are roughly balanced. This applies to the wearing of head scarves in the case of Muslim teachers (42 versus 57 percent) as well as to Christian teachers wearing a priest's habit in class (44 versus 56 percent).

#### **Additional survey findings**

- Sixty-seven percent of those surveyed consider it unjust that religious communities and/or their facilities are allowed, under specific conditions, to require a declaration of belief in their religion as a precondition for employment.
- At least one-third of those interviewed (33 percent) consider the strengthening of religious diversity through the influx of refugees into Germany as rather an enrichment for society. By contrast, 50 percent, or half of those interviewed, are more concerned that this diversity could lead to conflicts. One out of seven persons (15 percent) sees this situation as both an enrichment and as a potential cause of conflict.

## **Conclusion**

- The survey findings provide evidence that the majority of persons belonging to the various religious groups as well as those who have no religious affiliation treat one another with mutual respect and acceptance.
- However, at least one-third of the German population openly admit to a rather negative, or even very negative, image of Muslims. In this regard, it must be made quite clear that protection against discrimination applies equally to the members of all religions and that discrimination against Muslims will not be tolerated.
- Furthermore, the concern obtaining in parts of the population regarding an increase in social conflict as a result of increased religious diversity, in the wake of the influx of refugees, may not lead to a wholesale discrimination of specific religious groups.
- In order to do justice to the principle of equal treatment, the State must basically treat all religious communities equally. This would mean, for example, that in addition to religious classes for Christian pupils, schools would also need to offer classes by other religious communities more often than has hitherto been the case. Furthermore, the creation of more independent burial places for the various religious groups would be an important symbol of the recognition of the equality of all religions.
- Opinions among the population are divided when it comes to the question of whether teaching staff at public schools should be allowed to wear religious symbols in class. This also applies largely to the wearing of the religiously motivated headscarf by Muslim teachers. In its decision in the Spring of 2015, however, the Federal Administrative Court clarified that an across-the-board ban on headscarves for teachers at public schools is not in keeping with the Basic Law.
- A majority of respondents consider it unjust that, under specific conditions, religious communities are able to require a declaration of belief in their religion as a prerequisite for

employment. In the near future, the Court of Justice of the European Union will decide whether the corresponding regulations contained in the General Equal Treatment Act is in conformity with European Union legislation. In March 2016, the Federal Labour Court submitted a corresponding question to the Court of Justice of the European Union for clarification.

### **More information:**

The complete survey "Acceptance of religious and non-confessional diversity in Germany" can be accessed (in German language only) => [here](#) .

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