

Social welfare as a topic of the German Islam Conference

Results of the German Islam Conference Steering Committee meeting in Berlin on 10 November 2015

1. General aims of the German Islam Conference and current work programme

In the German Islam Conference, the Federal Government has created a viable, long-term foundation for dialogue between government (federal, state and local) and Islamic organizations and religious groups in Germany.¹

The aim of this dialogue is to improve the religious and social participation of the Muslim population in Germany, to give greater recognition to existing contributions of Muslims and Islamic organizations to religious and cultural life and society in Germany, and to further develop the partnership between government and Islamic organizations.

The Conference has a significant impact on policy and society, as shown by its work on religion classes at schools, theology studies at universities and training and further education for clergy and government commissioners for religious issues.

In the current legislative term, the Conference is addressing two new issues: social welfare in the context of participation in society and chaplaincy in the context of religious participation. These issues are anchored in the Conference's work programme of 24 March 2014.

¹ The German Islam Conference also includes the Alevite Community in Germany.

2. Conference results on the issue of social welfare

Social welfare is a central issue for cooperation between government and religious communities. Muslims see Germany as their home. They are part of this country. For this reason, their increasing participation in society is both desirable and natural.

Subsidiarity and freedom of choice are fundamental principles of non-governmental welfare services. Like other religious groups, Muslims too have the right to organize social welfare services on a confessional basis. Government and society are called on to help establish Islamic non-profit social welfare organizations in Germany.

Islamic social welfare institutions are open to all and thus have an integrative effect, helping ensure social cohesion. The mostly voluntary engagement of Islamic providers of social welfare and especially of Islamic congregations deserves greater recognition.

Whether to found one or more Islamic charities as a central association at national level is still under discussion. This matter will have to be decided later by the individual Islamic providers or umbrella associations on their own. Founding one or more Islamic charities is a long-term goal of the Islamic umbrella associations. The Conference will help with this process.

Given the growing numbers of immigrants and refugees from predominantly Muslim countries, we can assume that the need for religiously sensitive social services for Muslims will continue to increase. Muslim providers of welfare institutions can play an important role in the integration of newly arrived Muslims. This potential should be used and expanded.

Based on the example of child and youth services as well as care and assistance for the elderly, which is especially relevant for Muslim life in Germany, the Conference has focused on how the culturally and religiously sensitive social welfare services specifically for Muslims can be improved.

Increasing the culturally and religiously sensitive services provided by non-governmental welfare organizations and establishing Islamic social welfare in Ger-

many are not mutually exclusive but complementary, offering many possibilities for cooperation.

2.1. Fields of action

The German Islam Conference has specified fields of action to support child and youth services as well as care and assistance for the elderly by Muslim providers and to increase the awareness and acceptance of existing services, for example in the context of intercultural outreach by the Federal Association of Non-statutory Welfare (BAGFW), to which six central associations of non-governmental social welfare belong.

These fields of action are as follows:

- **Recognizing accomplishments, reducing reservations**
Recognizing the mostly voluntary social work that Islamic umbrella associations and their congregations already do, and recognizing the importance of intercultural outreach by social services and institutions to all segments of society. Reducing reservations about Islamic social institutions and improving the image of social services provided by Islamic umbrella associations and their congregations.
- **Information and advising**
Improving information/advising within the Islamic umbrella associations and their congregations about funding, services and organization of social welfare and administration. Reviewing and if necessary improving information/advising at all levels on relevant programmes and projects (also for specific target groups) at European, federal, state and local level.
- **Cooperation and participation**
Reviewing and if necessary improving possibilities for participation by involving existing Islamic service providers in social welfare structures, such as child and youth organizations (*Kinder- und Jugendringe*), youth welfare committees, senior citizens' networks, etc. Improving cooperation between Islamic umbrella as-

sociations, those of BAGFW and of local governments to improve the acceptance of existing social welfare services among Muslims.

- **Volunteers, full-time staff, training**

Reviewing and if necessary supporting the training/professionalization of volunteer and full-time staff at Islamic institutions, in terms of subject matter and organization, for example in volunteer services and through coaching or mentoring projects.

- **Financing**

Reviewing possibilities to support civic engagement through programmes and projects at federal, state and local level. Reviewing possibilities for funding model projects in specific areas, also to have an immediate impact.

2.2. Recommendations and measures to implement the goals set in the fields of action

The goals set in the fields of action are already being implemented. The effort was initiated at a conference on social welfare as a topic for the German Islam Conference held in Berlin on 13–14 January 2015 and opened jointly by Federal Minister of the Interior Thomas de Maizière, Federal Minister of Family Affairs Manuela Schwesig and the Commissioner for Dialogue of the Association of Islamic Cultural Centres, Erol Pürlü, representing the Islamic umbrella associations participating in the German Islam Conference. This conference brought together socially engaged individuals and experts from Islamic organizations; charities; federal, state and local administration and the research community. The speakers and 150 invited guests discussed issues of services for children, youth and the elderly in the context of Muslim life in Germany.

Field of action: Recognizing accomplishments, reducing reservations

Reliable data for all of Germany are essential to be able to recognize how Islamic providers contribute to social services and to reduce reservations regarding them. However, no such data are yet available. The German Islam Conference is now gathering these data: With the active participation of the Islamic umbrella associations participating in the Conference, the Centre for Turkish Studies and Integration Research has surveyed roughly 900 Islamic congregations. The survey was intended

to provide reliable empirical information on the services and organization of social welfare provided by the religious organizations that belong to the Conference. In line with the Conference's priorities, the survey focused on services for children, youth and the elderly.

The survey results show that the congregations are significantly involved in providing social services, in particular by long-term volunteers. Overall, it is estimated that Muslim congregations and their associations in Germany provide at least 6,000 ongoing social services for children, young people and senior citizens. This number is probably even higher, as not all congregations participated in the survey. At least 10,000 volunteers and at least 900 full-time staff are involved in providing these services in congregations and associations. At least 150,000 persons use these services. There is still too little public awareness of the social engagement of Islamic congregations, typically by volunteers, which deserves greater recognition.

The results of the Conference survey also lay the groundwork for further developing non-profit social welfare by Islamic providers, whose current activities should be seen as offering significant potential for social welfare in Germany. This means, for example, that there is less need to start the relevant activities from scratch and that further staff training and professionalization in the congregations and associations should have priority.

In this context, the Conference is pleased that the Islamic associations participating in its social welfare working group plan to draft a publication by spring 2016 which will add to the survey information descriptions of the social services offered by Islamic providers. The Conference will continue to support this process.

The Conference also published the results of surveys conducted by the BAGFW member associations and at local level to get a picture of other social services provided by and for Muslims in Germany. In line with the Conference work programme, the focus was on social services for children and young people and for the elderly. The results of these surveys show that existing institutions have undertaken a variety of efforts at intercultural outreach to attract new users and target groups.

The scientific stock-taking and additional surveys are an important foundation but are only a start. The important thing is for the organizations belonging to the Conference and other actors, such as the media, to actively contribute to recognizing this existing

social engagement and to reduce reservations about establishing Islamic social welfare in Germany.

Field of Action: Information and advising

Discussions in the German Islam Conference have shown that the Islamic umbrella associations have a great need for information and advising on the system and services of non-governmental social welfare and to integrate their own services within this system. At the same time, the charities and responsible government agencies are hardly aware of the activities of the Islamic charities. As a result, both sides need to improve the information they offer.

This could be done by consulting Muslim organizations before producing information products. Muslims can make their needs clear especially when they are in regular contact with government agencies, for example in dialogue forums, or when Muslim providers are members of larger institutions. Staff training in social welfare institutions can also help improve awareness of Muslims' specific needs.

For charities, addressing the issue of Muslim social welfare is part of their intercultural outreach, a goal they have long pursued and will continue to pursue in a variety of ways. For example, the BAGFW member associations have a forum for culturally sensitive services for the elderly which is preparing a handbook on implementing such services throughout Germany. And the significance of interreligious aspects in social welfare is the subject of intensive discussion at many conferences.

The federal and state governments and the BAGFW member associations publish key brochures and flyers in a number of foreign languages, including Turkish and Arabic, to inform everyone in Germany of their services. The Federal Ministry of Health is currently preparing further foreign-language publications on long-term care insurance and is working with the Federal Centre for Health Education to create a website on migration and health. The ministry will organize special events to inform migrants about important new legislation, such as the Act to Strengthen Long-Term Care. The ministry is also supporting a model project on advising at long-term care support centres and developing the long-term care insurance. This project started 1 September 2015 and will last for 36 months. Ten "bridge-builders" in three Berlin districts will be trained to provide language and cultural assistance to nursing staff in working with patients and their families.

The government will implement or has already implemented the following projects suggested by the Conference:

Based on the results of the Conference survey, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth will fund a federal-level coordinating and advising centre sponsored by the Islamic associations belonging to the Conference. This centre will have the following tasks:

1. collecting, preparing and distributing information (best practices) on Islamic and intercultural social welfare (brochures, website);
2. organizing, preparing and following up on workshops on selected issues of social welfare;
3. coordinating a round table on social welfare to promote dialogue between Islamic associations and the central associations of non-governmental social welfare.
4. creating a nation-wide network for advising Muslim mosque congregations and social welfare institutions.

The BAGFW supports the founding of this centre sponsored by the Islamic associations belonging to the Conference and has declared its willingness to engage in subject-specific consultations on a regular basis.

With funding from the Conference, the Erlangen Centre for Islam and Law in Europe held a conference on 4–5 November on the topic of Islamic social ethics (“Islamische Sozialethik: Theologische Reflexionen, organisatorische Bedürfnisse und Praxisbeispiele”). In cooperation with the religious associations represented in the German Islam Conference, the two-day conference pursued the aim of establishing a theological foundation for an Islamic social ethics focused on youth, the elderly, poverty, family and justice. Speakers from the university centres for Islamic theology in Erlangen-Nuremberg, Frankfurt/Giessen, Münster, Osnabrück and Tübingen discussed with researchers in Catholic and Protestant charities, social work and social legislation, as well as members of the social welfare working group of the Islamic associations in the German Islam Conference.

The Conference agreed on the need for multipliers from Islamic congregations to discuss other areas of non-governmental social welfare, such as family services, not

addressed by the Conference. As a result, the Federal Ministry of the Interior, at the urging of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, held a workshop on family services in Berlin on 15 September 2015 for about 50 practitioners from Islamic associations represented in the Conference.

The workshop was not limited to providing an overview of the existing system of family services in Germany; it also offered practical approaches for multipliers, with reports on various best practices in services for Muslim families and experience-sharing on specific organizational development. The discussion once again showed the importance of existing volunteer engagement and the desire to take greater advantage of funding opportunities.

Field of action: Cooperation and participation

All participants strive to improve cooperation with and participation by Islamic providers, for example through involvement in child and youth organizations (*Kinder- und Jugendringe*), youth welfare committees and senior citizens' networks. Such cooperation already exists in a number of federal states, especially in youth services, and should be expanded. It is also important for Islamic representatives to be able to send representatives to the relevant existing committees. And bodies such as integration and migration councils and forums for interreligious dialogue should also be used to discuss social welfare issues.

Muslim actors are willing to adapt their structures and practices to the existing systems and providers of non-governmental social welfare, which is an important prerequisite for greater participation by Muslim organizations. Cooperation among equals is also necessary in which Islamic service providers are included not only to reach target groups but can also operate as active partners and are treated as such.

To deepen cooperation, the BAGFW hosted a meeting of the central associations of non-governmental social welfare and the Islamic umbrella associations represented in the German Islam Conference which took place in Berlin on 8 September 2015.

At the meeting, leaders were able to get to know each other and better understand each other's positions and concerns; they also explored areas where they would be interested in cooperation. In this context, the BAGFW has promised to forward more information on funding possibilities and to help Muslim organizations in building up their social welfare activities and structures.

The Islamic organizations emphasized their interest in cooperation. Specifically, a database of contacts in mosque congregations is to be created to provide a pool of speakers for the BAGFW organizations. Based on the insights gained at this meeting, the participants agreed to organize another meeting soon to explore specific forms of possible cooperation.

The need for more cooperation is greatest at local level, where tandem projects, such as collaboration between existing youth services organizations and Muslim youth organizations have proved useful and led to longer-term contacts.

With support from the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, the Deutsche Paritätische Wohlfahrtsverband, a central association of non-governmental social welfare organizations in Germany, is developing a model project to create Islamic social welfare structures in two cities, Cologne and Wuppertal. The project will run for two years and is intended to further develop social welfare services offered by mosque congregations and to train and if necessary professionalize their staff. Additional topics such as care and help in overcoming addiction will also be addressed as needed. In line with the conceptual approach of empowerment, the project will reinforce mosque congregations' existing resources and promote networking with local social services providers and intercultural outreach by all those involved.

Programmes aimed at the participation of Muslim associations can also play a productive role. Especially in regions with a small Muslim population, public administrations still lack awareness of the specific needs of Muslim citizens. It is recommended that federal or state social welfare programmes should pay greater attention to the needs and potential of Muslims and their organizations.

Field of action: Volunteers, full-time staff, training

The Islamic associations and members of their mosque congregations provide most of their social services through volunteers, leading to the challenge of optimal training for these volunteers in the subject matter and in organizational skills.

To further develop social services, it is essential to create additional full-time structures with subject qualifications.

On the other hand, social workers in training should also be taught how to deal appropriately with the circumstances of Muslim life in Germany. The German Islam

Conference agreed that such skills should be the subject not only of project-based training but also of social work courses at vocational schools and universities of applied sciences.

Many federal states were open to adding this aspect to occupational training, although the training institutions are free to set their own curriculum. In particular, the need for training to devote more attention to the interdisciplinary issues of intercultural relations/migration/integration and in this context Muslim life was described.

A number of universities of applied sciences and other higher-education institutions in various federal states already address Muslim life, migration and/or intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the relevant courses of study as an option and in some cases as a requirement. Other higher-education institutions are working to do so, also in consultation with Islamic theologians. They will teach future graduates how to deal with diversity and difference. And a three-year masters programme in interreligious dialogue will soon be available, the first of its kind to be offered at a Catholic institution of higher education. The Conference calls on educational institutions to consult the newly established university institutes for Islamic theology when drawing up new curriculum or revising existing curriculum to pay greater attention to Muslim life in Germany.

The Conference also calls for a project to professionalize Islamic youth associations. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) will host a conference organized in cooperation with young Muslims. Tentatively scheduled for 4–5 December 2015 and designed for about 100 participants, the conference is intended to identify the needs of organizations providing Muslim youth services and to offer suitable ideas for them. The conference will likely focus on working with clubs, fundraising, project management, civic education and participation in regional and interregional organizations. After the conference, participants will carry out appropriate measures for the specific needs, for example organizing network events and/or workshops and publishing calls for projects. Coaching and mentoring projects have also proved useful in the past, such as BAMF-supported coaching by the Protestant youth association for the Alevite youth organization, and new projects should be organized for the future. Apart from training, they offer participants longer-term contacts and the opportunity to build networks.

Field of action: Financing

Including Islamic providers of social welfare in regular financing and/or regular support is a central issue for establishing Islamic social welfare in Germany. Only in this way will it be possible for Islamic providers to participate equally in the social services over the long term.

However, including new and in this case Muslim providers in regular support means creating competition with existing providers unless the available funding increases. Providers of funding are called on to address the issue of ensuring that new service providers which meet the necessary conditions for funding can be considered for regular support when overall funding is limited, or what additional possibilities for transitional funding (such as special funding for migrant organizations) may exist.

In principle, organizations that meet the legal requirements are eligible for regular financing. Muslim organizations recognized as non-governmental providers of youth services, for example, can receive regular support, and some already do.

It is also helpful when existing bodies and networks inform Muslim organizations of available funding programmes early on. But training and professionalization is also necessary to enable Muslim organizations to participate in project proposals and be included in regular support.

Paying more attention to Muslim providers at local level should take place with reference to specific projects and with the persons and organizations locally. This process works better when Muslim organizations are already involved in existing (local) networks, which depends on good information-sharing on both sides.

3. Outlook

As a dialogue forum, the German Islam Conference promotes nationwide experience-sharing, based on which it draws up recommendations or initiates action. The results of the Conference are however not implemented by the Conference itself, but by its members or other actors.

With these results, the Conference provides an important boost to establishing Islamic social welfare in Germany, enabled by the constructive cooperation of the rele-

vant actors in the Conference bodies. These are the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and the Federal Ministry of Health at federal level, the responsible ministries and administrative units at state and local level, the Islamic umbrella associations participating in the German Islam Conference and the participating associations and organizations of non-governmental social welfare. They are also responsible for further implementing the Conference's recommendations and measures concerning social welfare.

The Conference itself will address new issues in a different configuration. The Conference will also seek information on the implementation status and continue to monitor the process, as it has with other issues it has addressed, such as establishing Islamic theology at universities and introducing Islamic religious instruction at schools.