

## The Plight of Muslim Migrants in Europe: Close but Distant

by Mark Cannon

A photograph showing the back of a man and a woman sitting on a wooden bench. The man is wearing a light blue short-sleeved shirt and dark pants. The woman is wearing a blue headscarf, a light-colored top, and a brown leather backpack. They are both looking out over a cityscape with a river and greenery in the foreground. The sky is clear and blue.

The presence of Muslim migrants across Europe is both highly visible and widely misunderstood. Media outlets often depict overcrowded boats, groups attempting to cross borders, and asylum seekers living in camps. Public and private discourse frequently centers on political apprehensions and national security concerns. At the same time, many Europeans recognize the growing presence of Muslims in major urban centers and may feel unease or frustration about these developments (Pew 2017). Such incomplete portrayals often provoke a range of responses, yet many people may not fully understand migrants' realities or the intricacies of their circumstances due to a lack of personal interaction. Beyond the facts and figures, a significant gap frequently exists between our perceptions of the migrant situation in Europe and the actual experiences of Muslim migrants, which may affect our willingness to engage with them in our spatial environment. Although these Muslim migrants live near us, relationally, the distance between them and us is considerable.

My wife and I have worked among Muslim migrants in Spain since 2007, where we founded the Oasis Center. This work moved us beyond abstract images to personal relationships that revealed both their struggles and their resilience. The Oasis Center offers language classes for adults, homework help for children, and special events that provide helpful tools for many immigrants (most of whom are from Muslim backgrounds). This gives opportunities for students and staff to build trust. These interactions help us understand the human realities behind public opinion and see migrants not as categories but as neighbors (Cannon 2017). This is critical to recognizing their immediate and long-term felt needs, which can shape how we respond.

This article will examine the specific challenges faced by Muslim migrants in Europe. The missiological inquiry considers whether merely understanding their circumstances is sufficient. We will propose various strategies through which the Church may impact these communities across Europe.

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# Until All Have Heard

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

## Mark Brink

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Europe has undergone a cultural and religious revolution over the last 40 years. The decline of Christianity, the growth of a non-religious population, and the influx of Muslim immigrants have transformed the continent's religious landscape. As Judeo-Christian ethics have weakened among the native European population, secularization has increased, the nuclear family has declined, and many institutions have accommodated competing religious perspectives in the name of cultural diversity. Together, these trends have created a vacuum that secularism cannot fill. Islam has increasingly occupied that space while tensions surrounding immigration, religion, and identity have fueled protests and religiously motivated attacks.

In some of Europe's largest urban centers, minarets stand alongside the spires of cathedrals and churches. Muslim immigrants must navigate their religious identity within largely secular societies, and many first-generation immigrants struggle with integration and

social cohesion in majority-Christian, secular cultures. At the same time, anti-Christian hostility has increased. In 2023, Europe recorded 2,444 hate incidents targeting Christians, including 232 physical assaults. These steadily rising numbers reflect growing anti-Christian intolerance. Attacks, church desecrations, restrictions on prayer, and dismissals based on religious beliefs occur with increasing frequency, often without meaningful institutional response.

The Church must respond to these challenges not with fear or anger, but with both spiritual and practical action. Prayer and fasting remain essential, but believers also need training and encouragement to share the gospel effectively with Muslims in their communities. We must be prepared to give an answer spiritually, practically, and even politically.

We pray that this edition of *Intercede* will encourage and equip you as you reach Muslims in your context with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

## Muslim Unreached People Group

### Bosniaks of Bosnia-Herzegovina

**Population: 1,579,000 95% Islam (Sunni)**

Bosniaks are a South Slavic ethnic group who live primarily in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their history has been shaped by many civilizations, including the Illyrians, Romans, Slavs, and Ottomans. The Ottoman conquest in 1463 brought significant Islamic influence, and over time many Bosnians converted to Islam. Centuries of political upheaval, ethnic conflict, and migration have also created a large Bosniak diaspora throughout Europe, Turkey, Australia, and the United States. The total population of Bosniaks is approximately 3,139,000 scattered across 20 countries.

Today, Bosniaks blend Eastern and Western cultural influences and are considered one of Europe's most culturally integrated Muslim peoples. Most identify as Sunni Muslims, though for many Islam is as much a cultural identity as a religious one. They have a rich heritage of music, literature, and traditions, yet they remain one of the least evangelized people groups in Europe, with relatively few followers of Christ.

### Pray that...

- God would reveal himself to Bosniaks and open their hearts to the message of Jesus Christ.
- Global workers and ministries serving among Bosniaks would have wisdom, favor, and protection.
- Bosnian believers would be strengthened, encouraged, and equipped to share their faith.
- God would establish healthy, Christ-centered local churches throughout Bosniak communities.



Profile adapted from Joshua Project. For more information on the Bosniaks, visit: [https://joshuaproject.net/people\\_groups/10953/BK](https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/10953/BK)

## What We Know about Their Plight

An emphasis on migrants in Europe necessitates a comprehensive understanding of their identities and experiences. Muslim migrants constitute a heterogeneous group, with varied backgrounds and personal histories, and do not possess uniform experiences. They are individuals endowed with diverse cultural backgrounds, histories, and aspirations, presently residing in proximity across Europe. Nonetheless, Muslim migrants collectively encounter specific challenges in the European setting that stem from a range of factors.

### Crisis: Journey and New Realities in Europe

The subject of Muslim migrants in Europe remains an urgent issue due to the humanitarian realities at stake. Migrants depart from their home countries for various reasons, including economic hardship, civil conflict, religious persecution, or legal uncertainty (commonly referred to as push and pull factors).

Annually, a considerable number of individuals jeopardize their lives by crossing the Mediterranean or the Atlantic in pursuit of improved prospects (IOM 2023). In 2025 alone, it is estimated that between 2,100 and 3,000 migrants lost their lives while undertaking these perilous journeys (UNHCR 2025). Numerous migrants have entrusted their aspirations for a better future to traffickers, hoping to attain improved circumstances, only to encounter unforeseen hardships upon arrival in a new European environment.

Their difficulties do not cease upon arrival in Europe. They commonly undergo an extended adaptation period, which involves acquainting themselves with unfamiliar governmental and non-governmental systems, acquiring a new language, and adjusting to the implicit cultural norms of the host nation. Some asylum seekers possess professional qualifications from their countries of origin. However, within the European context, they may lack the technical vocabulary required for their professions, or agencies in their host country do not recognize the validity of their previous credentials. This ongoing predicament highlights the challenges faced by these individuals within European communities.

### Migration Factors

Migrants tend to concentrate on reaching specific destinations within Europe. For instance, they may select countries with robust economies, such as Germany and the United Kingdom, which attract migrants for perceived opportunities or stability. Alternatively, they may migrate to nations such as France, Italy, Greece, and Spain, which often attract migrants owing to their proximity to the Mediterranean or to other European countries, facilitating reunification with family members in different countries. However,

migrants often endure the new challenges longer than anticipated, and the realities encountered often diverge significantly from initial expectations.

In Madrid, many migrants report that their initial entry into Europe often does not lead to a permanent stay, due to high unemployment and housing shortages in their current location. Nonetheless, once children start school and families settle into routines, relocating becomes more challenging. For some, their residence might offer economic benefits, but for most, the larger social, cultural, and religious struggles persist.

The experiences of Muslim migrants can potentially intensify feelings of social isolation and reinforce societal distance from the broader European community. This phenomenon may, in part, be attributed to the situation where the Muslim migrant husband works extended hours while the children attend school, and the wife predominantly remains at home to care for the family, often facing difficulties in learning the language or managing daily activities. As Paul Scheffer (2011) observes, individuals from environments accustomed to extended-family networks may suddenly find themselves confined to isolated nuclear-family units in small, urban apartments. Although they may reside in close geographical proximity to other people, the internal and external challenges make life more complex within their new host environment.

## Historical Patterns

Since the 1960s and 1970s, Western Europe has experienced multiple waves of migration, beginning with guest worker programs. These movements intensified in the 1980s and 1990s due to conflicts in the Balkans and expanded further in the early twenty-first century with arrivals from Africa and Asia (Ther 2019). After 2015, conflicts in the Middle East accelerated large-scale refugee movements into Europe (UNHCR 2017). These cumulative patterns have shaped the present context and contributed to ongoing tensions surrounding demographic change. On the surface, media portrayals often isolate recent events, failing to recognize this longer history.

Historically, generational differences also shape how migrants experience life in Europe. First-generation migrants arrive as foreign-born individuals, while second- and third-generation migrants grow up in the host country. In Spain, a group of first-generation Moroccan children arrived as Middle East North African underaged, unaccompanied minors and stow-aways on various forms of transportation (ferries, trucks, buses). They turn themselves in to the police, who put them into the Spanish system rather than deporting them back to Morocco (Plann 2019). Another sub-generational group, often called Generation 1.5, arrives as children accompanied by their parents. All these generations of migrants attempt to navigate new

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identities across two cultural worlds: their country of origin and their new place of residence.

Due to decades of migration, some European countries, such as Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, have multiple generations of Muslim communities. In contrast, countries such as Spain, Italy, and parts of Scandinavia have newer populations of first- and second-generation migrants, due to more recent arrivals over the last decade. These historical and current realities shape not only where migrants live but also the generational roots within each of these countries.

## Demographic Realities

Demographic data provides valuable insights into Muslim migrants in Europe, but the data can also result in misleading perceptions. Public debates often highlight the rapid increase of Islam and the gradual decline of Christianity, which can foster cultural fears (Pew 2017; Hackett 2019). Although the interpretation of the data is correct, it may not capture the complete demographic reality and may skew how people understand and perceive Muslim migrants within Europe.

A closer look at the data within a European context uncovers a more complex reality. The majority of migrants in Europe identify broadly as Christian, representing approximately 56%, whereas Muslims constitute about 18% of the migrant population (Kramer and Tong 2024). In 2020, Europe remained predominantly Christian, with approximately two-thirds identifying as Christian, one quarter as unaffiliated, and roughly 6% as Muslim (Hackett et al. 2025). These statistics challenge the prevalent narrative that depicts Islam as already predominant throughout Europe and offer a more nuanced perspective.

Examining the decline of Christianity alongside the rapid growth of Islam reveals that the Muslim migrant situation differs across Europe. In parts of the Balkans, some Muslim communities constitute a strong majority of the population, with long histories (e.g., Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina), unlike in Western Europe, where Muslim populations are smaller and more recent. This difference reflects both the historical roots in the Balkans and the migrant-driven growth in Western Europe. Islamic communities in Europe remain distinct on both sides of the continent. The media coverage



often highlights only the most disturbing images of Muslim migrants, especially in Western contexts.

However, a more precise demographic reality transpires in many Western European cities. Some major urban centers (e.g., Brussels, London, and Paris) reflect deeper conflict due to higher Muslim populations. The Muslim concentration in these cities has multiplied dramatically in size, giving many of these neighborhoods a significant national political platform. Although many conflict zones are intensely problematic, most Muslim migrants live in other parts of the city, as part of the larger urban landscape.

The most critical long-term demographic reality is the decline of the Christian population. Europeans have fewer children than many Muslim migrants, and Muslims in Europe tend to be younger than Christians, which may contribute to the perception that their presence is growing rapidly and visibly (Hackett, et al. 2025). This age difference, combined with urban concentration, can amplify demographic change beyond what raw percentages alone would suggest.

can make up for some of Christianity's decline. Part of the solution to this decline is the Christian migrants who are also emigrating from regions with higher fertility rates, which adds another dimension to the demographic landscape.

Muslim and Christian migrants often face similar challenges in Europe. Like Muslims, followers of Jesus face marginalization, misunderstanding, or limited interactions across social boundaries as minority groups within the broader society. Many of these shared experiences offer them opportunities to deeply connect with Muslim migrants. Recognizing this commonality can help facilitate a shift from pity to genuine empathy. Many non-European Christian immigrants face similar struggles with language, employment, and integration. Sharing these common experiences with Muslim migrants can open doors for deeper understanding and relationships. However, without intentional effort to build relationships, residing in proximity can reinforce distance rather than serve as a bridge. Vibrant Christians must ask themselves, "How will I respond to Muslims in my specific European contexts?"

## A Relational Gap

The ongoing struggles faced by Muslim migrants in Europe can motivate Christians to go beyond mere proximity to meaningful engagement. Addressing Muslim migrants should focus not only on demographic challenges but also on improving relational connections. Although Muslims and Christians often live nearby, they rarely develop genuine friendships. Living in vicinity alone does not guarantee closeness. For example, in North America, which has a much smaller percentage of Muslims than Europe, 55% of Muslims say they know a Christian, but in Europe, only 18% of Muslims report personal interactions with Christians (Johnson and Zurlo 2020). This highlights a significant gap in Christian-Muslim relationships, despite shared social spaces. *If Christians do not personally connect with Muslim migrants, discussions about their plight will likely reduce them to victims, potential enemies, or abstract groups, diminishing the importance of reaching out.* These Muslim migrants represent real individuals with unique experiences and stories that merit our prayers and witness.

## Missional Response

This European context calls for both theological reflection and missiological application. From a missional standpoint, God is actively working among displaced populations. Migration opens new

## Is Knowing About Their Plight Enough?

Understanding the Muslim migrants' plight can help us to pray more effectively, but it does not necessarily indicate how these communities are impacted on the ground through Christian witness. On a global level, Christians and Muslims together make up a significant share of the world's population and an even larger portion within diaspora communities (Johnson 2012). This reality underscores the priority of interaction between these groups, especially in contexts where they live in close proximity. Yet, in many European settings, nearness does not translate into meaningful engagement; indeed, it can lead to further misunderstanding despite sharing space.

## Reinterpreting the Data

The demographic trends and rapid growth of Islam show part of the wider picture but may not convey the whole story. In Europe, the influx of energetic, young, and evangelistic Christian migrants to urban areas can also influence demographic shifts. This migrant movement challenges Islamic demographic trends and

opportunities for the gospel to take hold and grow among diaspora communities. In Acts 16, Paul’s journey from Troas to Europe marks a critical moment in the spread of the gospel. Romans 15:24, 28 demonstrates his desire to reach Spain, the furthest geographical point of his mission (Schnabel 2004). These instances fulfill Acts 1:8, which promises the gospel will reach the ends of the earth. Today, similar patterns continue in Europe, as a few larger diaspora migrant groups remain receptive to the gospel. For example, numerous Iranian migrants have not only questioned Islam but have also encountered Christ because of Christians sharing the gospel in Europe. A missional perspective recognizes that migration is part of a larger redemptive story (cf. Acts 11:19–26; 17: 24–28). What appears as displacement can also function as divine repositioning. God remains present and active in these movements.

Practical Response

A crucial step in addressing the situation of Muslim migrants in Europe goes beyond collecting demographic data; it involves understanding what their situation means for the future. Simply being aware of their challenges is not enough to bring about change. Christians must transition from mere observation to active engagement through deliberate action. This includes practicing faith in everyday life. Prayer provides a starting point. In Colossians 4:2-4, Paul urges believers to pray for opportunities to share their message boldly and for open doors to share the gospel. Prayer aligns our hearts with God’s plans and prepares us to participate in what He is already accomplishing.

Meeting practical needs offers a positive way to connect with Muslim migrants. Addressing issues such as housing, language learning, and social support opens doors to deeper connections (Pohl 2012). These efforts go beyond single transactions, becoming part of an ongoing process of relationship-building. Regular interaction remains essential to meaningful engagement. Spending time together, practicing hospitality, and exchanging knowledge help build trust and bonds. Over time, these activities transform superficial contact into authentic community.

When we gain insight into their struggles, we begin to recognize people by name and as individual personalities, rather than just viewing them as a generic group of people. This helps us to:

- Humanize their experiences and foster more genuine interactions;
- Realize that ignoring them is not neutral, but rather deepens the gap and fosters misunderstanding;
- Create opportunities to serve them and meet felt needs;

- Build meaningful witness through sustained interaction; and
- Develop a relationship, which can open a pathway toward deeper understanding.

Closing Thoughts

Examining the situation of Muslim migrants in Europe shifts our focus from mere information to meaningful interaction. Although they live close to us geographically, they often remain socially distant. This gap offers both challenges and opportunities. We can bridge this gap through prayer, presence, and ongoing engagement. As Christians make these efforts, we can develop genuine relationship with Muslim migrants. The key question is not *if* migrants are close to us, but *whether* we will reach out to them.☺

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for multi-lingual access to the weekly prayer requests  
and other resources in a secure environment.

Friday, September 4, 2026. Please pray that...

... *the people of Comoros will have access to food, education, and employment*. Pray that believers will be filled with God’s wisdom and courage as they share their faith despite persecution, and for the completion of a Bible translation in Comorian. Of the 900,000 people of Comoros, 98–99% are Muslim.

... *individuals drawn to violent religious extremism will meet the Prince of Peace* and experience freedom from legalism through the unearned grace of Jesus Christ. Pray for bold believers to reach Muslim Salafists with the love of Jesus.

... *Global Initiative team members and others teaching in Romania during the entire month of September* will effectively equip students to serve in Muslim contexts. Pray that Romanians already serving in Islamic nations will have spiritual breakthroughs that lead to church planting.

Friday, September 11, 2026. Please pray that...

... *members of the Muslim Brotherhood will be transformed by Jesus’ love and become devoted followers of Christ*. Pray that His peace will replace violence and terrorism and that those funding the Muslim Brotherhood will seek the Kingdom of God.

... *Jordanians will find hope and stability in Jesus* as believers demonstrate a united witness to the Muslim majority and refugees. Pray for Christ’s provision and peace amid economic hardship and regional conflict.

... *persecuted believers will know they are never abandoned*, because Jesus paid the price for them, enduring rejection so they could belong to God’s family forever. Pray that Christ’s finished sacrifice will strengthen and encourage them (John 19:30).

Friday, September 18, 2026. Please pray for...

... *God to provide food for the people in Nigeria* as 35 million people in the nation are facing severe food shortage. Many of these people are Christians who are also experiencing severe persecution for their faith in Jesus.

... *Muslim people in Iran, Iraq, UAE, Syria, Israel, and neighboring nations who are living in fear because of war*. Many lack food, water, and shelter, while others grieve the loss of family and friends. Pray that they will turn to the Lord and find both spiritual and physical peace.

... *The 2.1 million Christians in Saudi Arabia*, especially converts from Islam who face rejection, violence, and severe consequences for following Jesus. Pray for strength, protection, and perseverance.

Friday, September 25, 2026. Please pray that...

... *Mala, a believer in the Arab World who spent ten years without knowing another Christian in her area, will continue to grow in faith* through a new fellowship of women who meet to pray and study the Bible together.

... *church leaders in Iraq will boldly disciple Muslim-background believers and youth*. Pray for displaced people to find opportunities for resettlement and employment and for Iraqis to find hope in Christ amid the crisis.

... *Global Initiative training in Northeast India on September 28-October 2 will help prepare workers for the harvest fields of South Asia*. India has approximately 213 million Muslims, making it home to one of the largest Muslim populations in the world.

*\*All names used herein are pseudonyms unless otherwise stated. Pastor Pavel Schreider is not a pseudonym.*



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and other resources in a secure environment.

## Friday, October 2, 2026. Please pray that...

... *God will use the children and teens of a church in Togo* to lead many other children, teens, and their families to Jesus.  
... *new believers in Lebanon will grow in faith despite trials, hardship, threats, and persecution.* Pray that Islamic oppression and terror will cease.  
... *converts from Islam in Pakistan who face family rejection, physical abuse, and displacement will remain steadfast in their faith* and experience God's peace, protection, and provision.

## Friday, October 9, 2026. Please pray that...

... *the Church in Iran will continue to pray, worship, evangelize, and serve with courage during times of unrest, fear, persecution, and uncertainty.* Pray for Muslims who are more open to the gospel than ever before and for a spiritual awakening throughout the region.  
... *Christians in the Maldives will grow in faith,* stand firm in the face of Muslim opposition, and be empowered by the Holy Spirit to advance the gospel.  
... *God would heal Pastor Pavel Schreider,* who suffered a traumatic brain injury from torture while in prison in Kyrgyzstan. He was released in March, after 18 months in prison, but deported and banned from Kyrgyzstan. Pray for him and his family as they get re-established in a new country.

## Friday, October 16, 2026. Please pray that...

... *Global Initiative team members teaching at a Bible school in Bangladesh in October will effectively prepare students to serve among Muslims.* 91% of the 150 million people in Bangladesh are Muslims. Pray for the Church in Bangladesh as it reaches out to Muslim neighbors.  
... *the ongoing court cases of young Christians girls who have been abducted and forced to marry Muslim men against their will* would result in justice, favor, and freedom for these girls.  
... *the people of Mindanao, Philippines, who were affected by a recent earthquake,* would experience the love of Christ as Christians share the hope of the Gospel with their Muslim neighbors.

## Friday, October 23, 2026. Please pray that...

... *the people of Eritrea, who face poverty, drought, and food shortages,* will experience God's supernatural provision and that government leaders will care well for their people. Eritrea's population is 50.3% Muslim, 47.3% Christian, of which 2.1% are Evangelical.  
... *God will overturn the forces of evil seeking to destroy the nation of Mali* and provide supernatural protection over two Bible schools in the nation.  
... *as Muslim Turks in Romania study the Gospel of Luke each Friday, they will experience a spiritual breakthrough,* have the veil of unbelief removed, and come to know Jesus as their only Savior.

## Friday, October 30, 2026. Please pray that...

... *Syrian refugees attending weekly meetings in Detroit, Michigan, will understand the love of Jesus and embrace the truth of the gospel.* An estimated 15,000 Syrians now reside in the Detroit metro area.  
... *a new international church in a middle-class suburb of Cairo* will grow and develop a burden to reach Muslim neighbors with the gospel. The teeming city of Cairo is home to almost 20 million Muslims.  
... *Christians in China will boldly share their faith with the Chinese unreached Muslim peoples,* including the Uyghur, Kazak, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Tatar, Salar, Dongxiang, and Hui.

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