

## Islam in Switzerland

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### The second largest religion in Switzerland

In 1990, the Muslim population was 152,200, or 2.2% of the Switzerland's resident population. A surprising development for those who know that in the early seventies, there were less than 20,000 Muslims living in Switzerland. Islam is now the second largest religion in Switzerland, after Christianity.

The Muslim community of Switzerland is comprised of several nationalities, within which there are different cultures, languages and ethno-cultural particularities. In 1990, the vast majority (4/5) of the Muslim community was represented by Turk nationals (65,000 people or 42.8%) and nationals of the former Yugoslavia (55,000 people or 30.4%). The Muslim community from North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia) represented 4% of the overall community, while the Lebanese community represented 3.3%.

The Muslim population is spread out evenly across Switzerland, and mainly in big urban centers (73% of all Muslims). The largest number is found in the cantons of Zurich, Aargau, St Gallen and Bern. It is interesting to note that 76% of the Muslims are settled in German-speaking Switzerland, and 14% in French-speaking Switzerland, which corresponds closely to the resident population distribution. The Turk community is more concentrated in German-speaking Switzerland, while the bulk of the North African community lives in French-speaking Switzerland. Nationals of the former Yugoslavia are spread here and there throughout the country.

It can be affirmed that the number of Muslims is surely underestimated, since, during the 1990 census, 3.1% of foreigners (an exceptionally high proportion) did not answer the question on religious affiliation. As for more recent figures, we have to resort to estimates of the non-governmental agencies, such as, for example, the Islamic associations or organizations in Switzerland. According to these sources, the number of Muslims in Switzerland is currently estimated between 200,000 and 250,000 people (from 2.8 to 3.5% of the resident population).

### A fragmented community...

Whereas twenty years ago there were only three mosques in Switzerland (two in Geneva and one in Zurich), there are now almost 90, generally referred to as "Islamic Cultural Centers", sometimes open for the five daily prayers, and

certainly open for Friday prayer. The increase in the number of Muslims is a phenomenon split between several communities and several attitudes.

Turks, Bosnians and Albanians are each organized round a mother house in Zurich, with branches spread throughout Switzerland. A particularity amongst the Turks reproduces the political divisions of the country: a portion of the centers are controlled by the Dyanet, the Turkish Ministry of Religious Affairs, through a representative at the consulate in Zurich. On the other hand, twenty or so of the other centers are run by the Milli G?rush, an off-shoot of Refah, the former Islamic opposition party.

In the face of these structured entities, the Arabist world is not only minority, but also organized in less of a hierarchy, more difficult to decipher: between the so-called "official" centers, partially financed by Saudi Arabia (such as the Fondation, in Geneva) or by the United Arab Emirates (such as the Stiftung islamische Gemeinschaft, in Zurich), and movements of the Tabligh are also present.

...that is trying to develop structure

For several years now, under the leadership of the very diplomatic Ismail Amin, who is of Egyptian origin and a former university professor of Arab philology, the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Zurich is attempting to structure the Muslim community: it brings together all the communities in the city, including the Dyanet and the Milli G?rush, including the Habache movement, including the centers that are connected with the Muslim Brothers or the Tabligh. Ismail Amin has also patiently developed contacts with the official Churches, Protestant and Catholic alike. The result is that the Muslims are given a better voice in the political issues that they hold dear.

All the same, there still exists a wide range of Muslim organizations in Switzerland, notably associations that run prayer locations and small local associations. .

Source: <http://switzerland.isyours.com/e/guide/religion/islam.html>