Islam is a worldwide religion. Below are statistics and information about the Muslim population in Europe.

According to the Pew Research Center, Muslims are projected to make up 8% of Europe’s population. The average age of Muslims in Europe is 32 compared to the average of 40 for all Europeans. Muslims are viewed favorable by 72% of the British, 76% of the French and 69% of the Germans while they are viewed unfavorable by 61% of Italians and 56% of the Polish.

What could explain difference between Eastern European and Western European stances on Muslims and migration? One influence is the difference in population growth. Countries with aging populations and generous welfare benefits, like Germany, may be exceedingly welcoming to refugees because they need new workers. Another influence is history. Unlike Western Europe, the Eastern bloc endured years of Muslim occupation. There is also the varying concern over reputation.

A way to increase the favorable view of Muslims is through education.

Based on recent events a common misconception is that there is a direct link between all Muslims and terrorism. To dispel that notion here are some key points about core Islamic values.

In Islam there are five pillars – the testimony of faith, performing five prayers a day, giving Zakat (charity), fasting during Ramadan and the hajj. There are two main sects of Islam. The majority of Muslims are Sunnis, which means they accept the succession of Muhammad’s elected successor. Shiites are concentrated in Iran, Iraq and Syria and believe that leaders must be descendants of Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali.

Sharia Law and the Jihad are two aspects of Islam that are often seen as directly related to violent actions. Sharia, or Islamic law, offers moral and legal guidance derived from the Quran for nearly all aspects of life – from marriage and divorce, to inheritance and contracts, to criminal punishments. Only 18 percent of Muslims in Europe believe Sharia Law should replace existing law. Jihad (struggle) is not the initiation of violence in the name of Islam. It is the religious precept that directs Muslims to study, preach and defend Islam.

The majority of Muslims worldwide reject violence in the name of Islam. In South-Eastern Europe 90 percent of Muslims say suicide bombing is never justified. The majority of refugees entering Europe are from Syria and Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, 39 percent of Muslims think violence of civilians is sometimes justified.

Conversation Starters: This set of questions is meant to provide a framework to how begin to understand the viewpoints managers and teams on Islam.

1. At times terrorism and Islam are used interchangeable, why do you believe that is? Why is it dangerous?
2. As you learn more about the tenets of Islam, are there similarities with other faiths? What are the key differences?
3. How should we be addressing blanket statements against Islam and Muslims in the workplace?
4. Do you think acts of terror in the name of Islam receive more media attention than acts of terror related to other religions? If so, why?
5. Are you aware of the religious preferences of the people on your team? Are there certain religious preferences you would like to know more about (please explain why)?
6. How do you view Muslims who were born in your native country verse Muslims that are seeking asylum?

Additional Reading

Pew Research Center – 5 Facts About the Muslim Population in Europe & Muslims and Islam: Key Findings in the U.S. and Around the World

Washington Post – Why Some European Countries Reject Refugees and Others Love Them

The Economist – Islam in Europe

The Telegraph - Amid Dystopic Visions of an Islamic Europe, Remember the Alhambra